



Board of Education-Summer 2017 Public Comments

Graduation Credit Requirement in the Fine Arts

The Virginia Music Educators Association recommends that, in the new Virginia diploma requirements, the fine arts be assigned one full credit for graduation, not to be shared with Career and Technical Education, foreign language, or any other discipline.

As defined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a well-rounded education is not complete without the arts. Study and practice in the visual and performing arts prepare students for the twenty-first century and facilitate growth directly aligned with the 5C's: critical thinking; creativity; collaboration; communication; and civic and community engagement. In the arts students learn, develop, and exercise these skills, which have been identified as critical for all Virginia high school graduates. The arts also provide opportunities for students to hone literacy skills which in their expanded form require students to critically examine and communicate through images and sound as well as text. VMEA recommends that in the Commonwealth of Virginia's state ESSA plan that arts assessment(s) be required and that arts education be required for state accreditation. (see snapshot of state policies for Arts Education)

Full Funding for Elementary Art and Music Teachers

The Virginia Music Educators Association is requesting a change in the funding formula used for elementary arts, music, and PE. We request that the state provide full funding of licensed elementary art and elementary music teachers sufficient to provide a minimum of 60 minutes each of art and music instruction per week for kindergarten-fifth grade students.

- Full implementation of the kindergarten through fifth grade Music and Visual Art Standards of Learning requires sufficient instructional time at each grade level.
- Currently, the amount of art and music instruction an elementary student receives depends upon which school division the student attends. Moreover, in some cases, students at one school within a district may receive 40 minutes per week more than students attending a second school. Full funding would support equity of access to art and music instruction for all kindergarten through fifth grade students across the Commonwealth.

STEM to STEAM

VMEA believes that the addition of the arts to transform STEM to STEAM education, as defined by science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics, when implemented with fidelity, will enhance learning and will benefit all students. Arts and design education bring flexible thinking, design thinking, risk-taking, and creative problem-solving to STEAM education with the overarching goal of fostering innovation that comes by combining the mind of a scientist or technologist with that of an artist or designer. Again, at the federal level, STEAM is supported in the Every Student Succeeds Act legislation. We are requesting that the Virginia Board of Education take into consideration the range of the 5C skills necessary for the acquisition of 21st century skills and success of our high school graduates and include the arts in STEAM education.

Impact of Career Investigations Course

VMEA continues to have concerns regarding the requirement of the Board approved career investigation course. Even with the flexibility that the Board provides school divisions regarding course implementation, we expect that this will have a negative impact on fine arts courses. Although some fine arts courses operate with nine-week elective offerings, the impact will be felt most negatively and be most disruptive to semester and year-long courses, particularly in music where most courses are year-long and where sequenced and continuous instruction, especially in instrumental music, is critical. To fulfill the career investigation requirement, we fear that many music students will be forced to interrupt their sequential music study by dropping a class.

The unintended consequences of this mandate from DOE have far-reaching implications that will leave the students of the Commonwealth with little time to explore personal interests and the careers those may lead to. This mandate will negatively impact articulated sequential elective course offerings, especially in the arts.

Supporting Information

R. Benjamin Knapp Director of the Institute for Creativity, Arts, And Technology (ICAT) at Virginia Tech, maintains that, "Creativity is essential in everything we do. Cultivating creativity, on all kinds of levels, flexes our thinking, opens us up to growth, and motivates us." In addition to the inherent benefits of the skills, knowledge, and understandings gained through participation in dance, music, theater, and the visual arts, students involved in the arts develop creative problem solving skills, exercise perseverance and persistence, work collaboratively, and take responsibility for learning independently, all of which are necessary for college and career readiness. As rapid change in the twenty-first century work force and career opportunities is a constant, these skills become ever more critical and enable future workers to adapt to ever-shifting circumstances.

Research shows that when instruction provides opportunities for students to experience learning through the fine arts in deep and meaningful ways, they make seamless curricular connections with other disciplines such as English, mathematics, science, social science and foreign language. Students are more engaged in the learning process when the arts are used. Further, similar skills practiced across disciplines are more likely to be used to solve new problems in new contexts.

College Board data demonstrate that the more students are engaged in fine arts coursework and activities the higher the SAT scores are, not only in Virginia but nationwide. Research also strongly suggests that students who participate in quality fine arts programs are more engaged, attend school on a more regular basis, develop leadership capacity and, ultimately in high school, graduate on time and at a higher rate.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. For additional information, please contact me at: [Add name, contact info] or John Brewington, President - Virginia Music Educators Association, Jbrewington4@gmail.com