

The A+ Schools Program as a School Reform Model

The A+ Schools Program of the North Carolina Arts Council is a research-based, nationally recognized model for ongoing professional development and support in arts-based school reform.

- **Approach to Learning.** The A+ Schools Program is a whole-school reform model that views the arts as fundamental to teaching and learning in all subjects. A+ Schools combine interdisciplinary teaching and daily arts instruction, offering children opportunities to develop creative, innovative ways of thinking, learning and showing what they know.
- **Professional Development.** On-going, high-quality A+ professional development and the development of strong community partnerships help each school to maintain their unique A+ identity, while continuing to grow and change as shifts in the educational landscape take place.
- **Comprehensive School Reform.** The evaluators stated that A+ is a successful comprehensive education reform because it begins with a vision of arts-integrated instruction creating enhanced learning opportunities for all students, and that “other changes in school practice, in areas ranging from assessment to scheduling to parent involvement, radiate out as necessary to achieve that central vision.”
- **Sustainable Reform.** The report further states that the A+ approach to school reform used lessons from the arts and focused on the process (learning), not the product (test scores), thus the product emerged as both student achievement and sustainable school reform that supports learning for all students. The arts were key to the sustained changes in teaching approach and in the organizational structure of the schools. (<http://aplus-schools.ncdcr.gov/>)

Comprehensive Arts Education

The A+ Schools Program of the North Carolina Arts Council was recognized by the North Carolina Senate Bill 66 Task Force as a model for a Comprehensive Arts Education. SB 66 recognized a Comprehensive Arts Education Plan to include three components.

- **Arts Education** relates to the arts as core, academic subjects and the importance of school-based instruction to develop proficiency in the arts. Arts Education is a collective term referring to a comprehensive and sequential education in four separate and distinct disciplines: dance, music, theatre arts, and visual arts. Arts Education is defined in North Carolina in the Basic Education Program (115-C-81), and the arts are also defined as core, academic subjects in the federal Elementary **and Secondary Education** Act (ESEA).
- **Arts Integration** refers to using the arts as a catalyst for learning across the curriculum and in all areas of learning. In addition to offering a **rigorous course** of study in their distinct disciplines (dance, music, theatre arts, and visual arts), the arts are a powerful tool for learning throughout the curriculum.
- **Arts Exposure** provides real world context to students. By experiencing the arts, either as a creator, participant, or audience member, students learn about themselves and the complex world around them. The interface between the arts sector and a school is an essential component of a comprehensive arts education and sustains a community culture of well-rounded citizens who value creativity.

The three components identified in NC Senate Bill 66 reflect similar recommendations in a May 2011 report by the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities titled *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America’s Future Through Creative Schools*. The report recommended “efforts that demonstrate how teams of classroom teachers, arts specialists and teaching artists can work together on building curricula, delivering instruction, and learning from each other.”

Research Supporting the Arts in School Reform

There is a growing body of research supporting the benefits of a Comprehensive Arts Education in terms of Outcomes for Students (Academic, Cognitive, Personal, and Social & Civic) and Outcomes for Educators (Professional and Personal). *ArtsEdSearch*, an online clearinghouse hosted by the Arts Education Partnership, collects and summarizes high quality arts education research studies and analyzes their implications for educational policy and practice. (<http://www.artsedsearch.org/>)

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Title I Funds for Arts Education

Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Federal funds are currently allocated through four statutory formulas that are based primarily on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state.
<http://www2.ed.gov>

Under the ESEA, states and local school districts have the flexibility to support the arts using Title I funds. U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, addressed this issue in a Letter to School and Education Community Leaders dated August 2009.

Title I Schoolwide Components

Implementing an arts-based school reform model addresses many **Title I** schoolwide components.

- **Effective Instructional Strategies.** Arts integration is a **proven**, effective **instructional strategy** for students. See ArtsEdSearch for summaries and lists of research studies that support a Comprehensive Arts Education, including arts integration as an effective instructional strategy for increasing student achievement.
- **Innovative Instructional Strategies.** Quality arts integration programs include partnerships between general classroom teachers, arts education teachers, and **community-based arts** partners. Consider the North Carolina Senate Bill 66 vision for a Comprehensive Arts Education that includes Arts Education, Arts Integration, and Arts Exposure.
- **Professional Development.** The A+ Schools Program of the North Carolina Arts Council is a research-based, nationally recognized model for ongoing professional development and support in arts-based school reform.
- **Parental Involvement.** An arts integration approach to learning lends itself to parental involvement through student and family engagement in artistic process and performance.
- **Comprehensive Needs Assessment.** Studies find that students from low socio-economic backgrounds, English language learners, and students with special needs—often underserved in public schools—show the greatest relative improvement in academic achievement when **participating in** the arts. Research also finds that English language learners are significantly more likely to pursue a college degree if they attend an arts-rich high school (Catterall, 2009). See ArtsEdSearch for additional information.

Use of Title I Funds

Title I Schoolwide (SW) funds for arts-based school reform may be allocated to support these areas:

- **Consulting & Contracting.** Schools may use funds to contract arts teachers and partners to collaborate with classroom teachers in the delivery of an arts integrated curriculum.
 - **Arts Educators.** Licensed arts educators are essential to providing consecutive and sequential arts education in dance, music, theatre arts, and visual arts. They are essential for collaborating with classroom teachers to provide high quality arts integration.
 - **Teaching Artists.** Teaching artists provide access to high quality, authentic arts experiences (Arts Exposure as identified in SB 66). They also offer specialized knowledge and are invaluable for collaborating with classroom teachers to provide high quality arts integration.
- **Arts Materials.** Schools may use funding to purchase instruments, artistic equipment, etc., as needed for the types of arts integration projects they intend to undertake as addressed in the schoolwide plan.
- **Professional Development.** The A+ Schools Program of the North Carolina Arts Council is a research-based, nationally recognized program that provides ongoing professional development in arts-based school reform.

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