

The Impact of Declining Arts Education Funding

Mark Steven Molchany
North Catasauqua, Pennsylvania

BA Theatre, Alvernia University, 2011

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Drama Department

University of Virginia
May, 2015

Table of Contents

<u>Title Page</u>	Page 1
<u>Table of Contents</u>	Page 2
<u>Introduction</u>	Page 3
Importance of the Arts.....	Page 4
Funding Issues.....	Page 7
Impact of Decreased Funding on Society and Arts Education.....	Page 13
Solutions.....	Page 18
Future Considerations.....	Page 28
Conclusion.....	Page 31
Works Cited.....	Page 34

Introduction

A theatre arts education is very important for our youth. However, within the last decade there has been a decrease in funding to support arts education from kindergarten through high school. This decrease negatively impacts the entire education system and subsequently it also has the potential to impact our society. A successful theatre arts education program teaches creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, discipline, and a strong work ethic. It is the binding agent that brings all the elements of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics together. What happens when these programs are no longer funded and disappear? What can today's theatre artists and educators do to support a continuation of arts education while in the midst of budget cuts in our schools? This thesis, *The Impact of Declining Arts Education Funding*, will investigate these questions and will look into the cause of these budget cuts in order to find different solutions to combat this growing problem which will support a more productive society.

Importance of the Arts

In order to assess the impact of declining arts funding and education we must examine the importance of the arts in our society. The arts clearly benefit students and our society as learning about the arts and participating in theatrical programs motivates a child beyond the formal classroom setting, allows students to engage with others in a non-judgmental manner, encourages creativity, and provides a safe place to be an individual. It assists in the development of social skills and builds confidence. Theatre arts have the potential to take an awkward student beyond himself and foster his growth in directions he may not have considered. In an article entitled *State of the Arts* for the National Education Association (NEA) Sabrina Holcomb examines the theatre arts life in a middle school in California. She states that theatre benefits the students by cultivating the whole child, by building literacy while developing intuition, reasoning, imagination, and dexterity into different forms of expression and communication. There is a growing body of evidence that shows a powerful link between arts education, student achievement, and teacher performance (Holcomb). As maturing young adults in middle school and high school, theatre helps to bring students out of their proverbial shell and encourages them to socialize and take safe risks in the confines of a theatre class or curriculum. For students who struggle with the traditional core curriculum i.e., mathematics and science, an arts approach may be necessary. Holcomb explains that a child's education relies on the skills of language and mathematics and through these they learn that the "normal" way of thinking is linear and sequential, that the pathway of learning moves from beginning to end, from cause to effect. The arts teach a different and equally important lesson. They sometimes move in the same direction, as outlined

above, but often start from a different place (Holcomb). This different place could mean incorporating the arts into your standard core classes.

Goals 2000: Educate America Act was a law that set goals for all students to achieve in basic subjects including the arts and should have been met by the year 2000. This law forced many other federal agencies such as the NAEA to release a report called *The National Visual Arts Standards*. These standards include that the arts are as important to education as English, mathematics, history, civics, science etc. “The arts cultivate the direct experience of the senses... Their goal is to connect person and experience directly” (The National Visual Arts Standards 2). Having the arts integrated in all aspects of education teaches students valuable tools for; understanding human experiences, learning to adapt to and respect others’ ways of thinking and expressing themselves, making decisions in situations where there is not a standard answer. Lastly, it gives them the ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings in a range of modes (The National Visual Arts Standards 2).

Arts integration for students in schools is very important for our society as well. Take for example the working professionals in our society; if you agree with the above statement about the arts aiding in understanding human experiences, then you will have a more productive company who enjoys what they do. For individuals and companies who never had this education, Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania has just the answer. They host a seminar in which they educate working professional’s theatre classes. This seminar is set up where they can either go to the business or invite the business to their theatre and give classes in acting, where they might focus on partner and

team building. This kind of thinking expounds upon how the arts can be used in our society.

Now more than ever we must stress upon the importance the arts and arts education are to our society. George Righter serves as the Technical Director at York County School of the Arts in Williamsburg, Virginia and he states that the arts are important to our society because they bring everything together. He agrees with Holcomb's earlier statements. In our society and in a world post No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, there has been a push of the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) curriculum. The arts need STEM to succeed, but then on top of it, Mr. Righter says "we're working with a sense of aesthetics. We're sensitive to the world; we have an audience that we have to appeal too" (Righter).

York County School of the Arts is a private performing arts high school magnet program and it is attached to Bruton High School in the York County school division. The arts are seen as being separate from the STEM curriculum when in actuality the arts are used as a catalyst to fully grasp and understand the STEM curriculum. The utility of the arts in our society will be strengthened if students are exposed to and participate in them in some way during their basic education.

Funding Issues

In the past, publicly funded programs with major support from foundations accelerated the growth of arts organizations. Unfortunately the support for arts education did not increase; as a matter of fact it has declined. Starting in the 70s school districts across the country reduced education spending and as result of decreased federal dollars, much of this has never been restored (Zakaras and Lowell xiii). Specifically, on the federal level, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was established in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government. Its mission is to offer grants to non-profit and musical theatre fields and it provides large sums earmarked for education. It has awarded more than five billion dollars to support artistic excellence, creativity, and innovation for the benefits of the individuals and communities. It also partners with State Arts Agencies (SAAs) like the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. These public funded programs, along with major support from foundations and individuals, accelerated the growth of arts organizations. Unfortunately, with the decline in dollars available to the NEA in the past decade, arts education funding in the schools has significantly been affected and largely curtailed (See table 1).

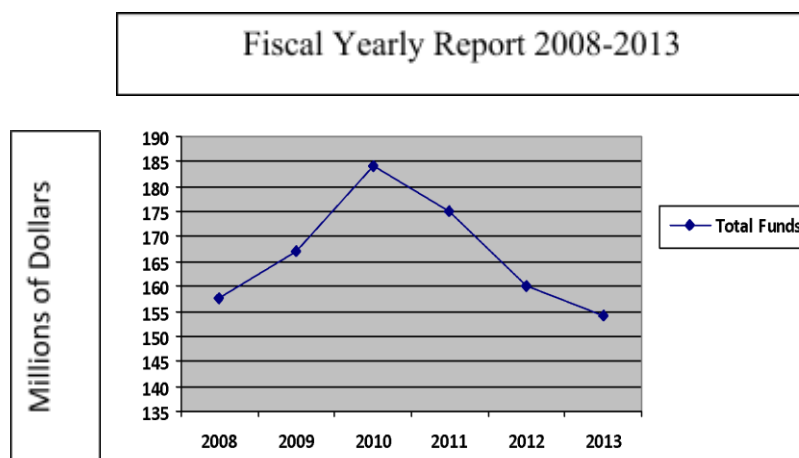


Table 1 The National Endowment for the Arts Yearly Report.

The Fiscal Yearly Report from 2008-2013, of which is given to the President of the United States at the end of each Fiscal Year, the FY08 budget for the NEA was \$157 million and it increased to \$184 million in two years. Between the FY10 and FY11, however, there was a decrease in funding as per congressional appropriation to about \$175 million and it continued to decrease to \$154 million during FY13. Why was there such a huge increase in the budget in 2008-2010 and then such a huge decrease from 2011-2013? To answer this question we must look at the 2009 yearly progress report. In 2009 the NEA participated in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) that was enacted by the Congress. The NEA distributed \$50 million from ARRA that preserved the not-for-profit art sector jobs that were lost during the economic recession of 2008. 40% was given to the SAAs and regional arts organizations, and 60% went to competitively selected arts projects and activities (The National Endowment for the Arts).¹ After that, Congress did not see a conceivable reason to continue this stimulus which is why there was a \$30 million decrease in budgets from FY10 to FY13.

If President Obama didn't restore federal funding for arts organizations, many groups would have been eliminated. Luckily for the NEA, the Kennedy Center, and many more art organizations, President Obama restored the funding even after sequestration threatened to eliminate it. Arts education, however, was not as fortunate at that time as funding was not fully restored and programs were affected. For example, the Arts in Education program which awards grants for teacher training was combined into a program which broadly covers other components such as health education, foreign language, and physical education. This ultimately dilutes whatever funding is available

¹ See the National Endowment for the Arts Yearly Reports from 2008-2013.

because theatre education is lumped in with other fields. From 2008-2013 art education has certainly seen its fair share of budget highs and budget lows. What is important now is to focus our attention on growing the arts education economy state wide.

State Arts Agencies (SAAs) influence state funding as they are influenced by federal agencies and federal budget cuts affect the states, subsequently causing state budgets to be strapped. This translates into the fact that budget cuts have been common in every state since the Great Recession of 2008 and Arts education in our schools continues to be curtailed. In Virginia, the Virginia Commission for the Arts is the state agency that supports the arts and art organizations through funding from the General Assembly and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Commission's main purpose is to financially support the arts as well as distribute grant awards to artists, arts, and other not-for-profit organizations, educational institutions, educators, and local governments. What does this mean for grant recipients? In 2014, Governor McAuliffe directed every state agency, including the Virginia Commission for the Arts, to cut 5% for the FY15 budget and 7% for the FY16 budget, this means a total of \$195,000 and \$273,000 respectively, will be cut out of its budget as a direct response to the Virginia state budget crisis. Every year the Commission awards approximately 85% of all grant funds at the start of each fiscal year. As a result some key grants will not be awarded ("The Virginia Commission for the Arts"). By cutting the Commissions award money many students of the arts will not have the networking and educational opportunities to advance their careers in the arts. By cutting these awards, school districts clearly do not benefit.

In addition, the NCLB Act has played a role in arts education funding. No Child Left Behind was an act of Congress passed in 2001 and signed into law in 2002 by

President George W. Bush. Its sole purpose was to standardize the education in public schools that received federal funding to give an incentive for greater achievement. The emphasis is on math, reading, and writing and schools must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in test scores each year. That means each grade level must score better than the grade level of the previous year. If the grade does not improve then the school has to take steps of accountability to make up the test scores. What was a valiant effort by President George W. Bush to combat the failing education system in America ultimately has significantly changed arts education in this country because of how the funds have been used. The emphasis on math, reading and writing has caused a shift in how much is left over in a school day for arts education as it clearly is deemed unimportant in this climate.

After the implementation of the NCLB Act, school districts have been more concerned about passing the standardized tests to improve their standing in the state and country and continue to get federal dollars. Take, for example, Adams Middle School in West Contra Costa school district in California. Visual arts and band are only offered 60% of the time, while classes in drama, dance, piano keyboarding, photography, and television have been cut from the curriculum entirely. This school had fallen under the California's Academic Performance Indicator because of the pressure indicated by their inability to make an AYP. As a result a significant portion of their student body is now enrolled in double English and math classes. The electives such as dance, television, and crafts were relegated to after school programs run by educators and community artists. Unique to Adams Middle School is that it is situated in a transient population of English-language learners, meaning that a good number of the students are minority, the very

group that NCLB is affecting the most. A 2004 study commissioned by the Council for Basic Education states that research “Lends support...that poor and minority students are bearing the brunt of...a waning commitment to the arts” (Holcomb1).

There is added pressure for school districts to meet AYP. As mentioned earlier, NCLB affects teachers in their classroom. Many teachers have stepped up and said that teaching to the tests have taken valuable instruction time away from the students “...because AYP only measures math and reading skills, schools have no incentive to test any other subjects” (Beveridge 4). The achievements in these non-tested areas would not affect funding and therefore, schools have no reason to fund them properly. In order to fully grasp the effect of NCLB, we must go to the source of those who deal with it on a daily basis, the art educators. NCLB most certainly affects all teachers but the report deals with how it affects art educators. In a study done in 2010 titled *No Child Left Behind: A Study of its Impact on Arts Education*, of the 3,412 participants ranging in all areas of arts education, 67% reported that their art schedules had been affected by NCLB, although their teaching loads had not been affected because they were teaching in other disciplines, “such as language arts and math, provide remediation, or conduct test preparation in subjects” (Sabol). Based on the study’s findings, most teachers have not responded positively to the NCLB act. However, art educators expressed negative attitudes about the impact of NCLB on their art classes. 67% of subjects felt NCLB had not helped students in their programs become better learners and 75% of subjects felt that the quality of their students’ work has not improved because of NCLB. 89% of the subjects have felt that the NCLB negatively impacted faculty morale while 73% of subjects felt that NCLB had a negative impact on their effect as art educators.

Furthermore, 70% felt that the status of art education had not improved by the NCLB act (Sabol, "*No Child Left Behind: A Study of its Impact of Art Education*"). It is clear that teachers and art educators do not like the NCLB act as the study clearly finds, but despite this we must find creative solutions to ensure our students success.

There should be no doubt, that the NCLB has impacted arts education. In research of this particular topic, there were high school and middle school teachers that spoke openly about the ineffectiveness of NCLB. The common thread has been that the NCLB act needs some work. Administering tests to students in order to see if they are worthy enough for funding is a good idea in theory but it affects less fortunate school districts and the students they serve and in terms of arts education, it is driving it out of prominence.

Impact of Decreased Funding on Society and Arts Education

The substance of our culture, quality of life and maintenance of our society will be impacted if creative solutions are not found soon related to the budgetary slashing of arts education. High dropout rates need to be reduced and adequate skill sets need to be in place for a vibrant workforce and these are factors directly linked to reduced arts education. Post-NCLB, President Obama and education leaders have embarked on a public education evaluation as noted in *The Education System in Crisis*, one of the sections of a report titled *Reinvesting in Arts Education* given to President Obama from the President's Committee on Arts and Humanities (PCAH). "It is widely agreed that the US. Public education system is not adequately serving a significant portion of our nation's children (*Reinvesting in Arts Education* 27)..." The President understands that use of the arts can combat the growing problem of education in this country and he urges lawmakers to fund the arts. There is a correlation between the lack of funds and a less productive society. If the funds aren't acquired there will be economic repercussions as the arts will continue to be downgraded if the perception of demand does not keep pace with the supply. In order to be successful, the supply and the demand need to equal each other or demand needs to exceed supply.

Museums, theatre organizations, concert halls, and dance troupes depend highly on the public's continued interest and support for these art forms. If interest or demand continues to diminish, these organizations become threatened. The role of arts learning as a factor in stimulating interest must therefore be emphasized if increased arts participation for all Americans is ultimately the goal (Zakaras and Lowell xiv).

The PCAH released their five recommendations that are meant to clarify the position of the arts in education. They are: build collaborations among different approaches to arts education, develop the field of arts integration, expand in-school opportunities for teaching artists, utilize federal and state policies to reinforce the place of arts in K-12 education, and widen the focus of evidence gathering about arts education. If these recommendations are implemented, PCAH's goal to support a climate in American schools where all students are active and productive in an engaged community that provides for high quality arts educational experiences has been met (*Reinvesting in Art Education... 27*).

The arts keep students off the street and out of gangs. It provides something for students to do that is productive, creative and distracting. It provides a place for students to go to after school. If we get students involved in the arts they will be less likely to get in trouble and will be more likely to become active productive citizens of the United States. There is a growing disparity between those who actively participate in the arts and those with the exposure to basic arts education. Art participants have become predominantly white, educated, and affluent, in comparison to the minority groups of the country. Marina Fang is a guest contributor to *Think Progress*, an online newspaper, and she agrees that the decline of arts in schools, and an inequity in arts opportunities have all contributed to an ever growing public education crisis (Fang). A recent NEA report titled *The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth* underscores the importance of the arts to our society. Those students who have access to the arts in or out of school have better academic records, have better workforce opportunities, and are more active in civic engagements (Caterall, Dumais, and Hampden-Thompson 8). The arts provide students a

way to express themselves that doesn't involve guns or gangs. Young adults of low socioeconomic status (SES) who had an in-depth arts education earn better grades, are more likely to earn a bachelor's degree, are more likely to enroll in a four year college, and are more likely to participate in intramural and interscholastic sports. These students also participate in the honor society and school yearbook or newspaper. They choose a major that aligned with a professional career and were more likely to read the newspaper, volunteer, and vote in a national election (Caterall, Dumais, and Hampden-Thompson 12-21).

Those who participate in the arts are growing older and young Americans are increasingly uninterested (Zakaras and Lowell xiii). If this trend is allowed to continue, it can have repercussions related to the quality of life and the strength of our society. The mission statement of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities (PCAH) clearly identifies the importance using the power of the arts to contribute to the "vibrancy of our society, the education of our children, the creativity of our citizens, and the strength of our democracy" (Reinvesting in Arts Education). This means that the strength of our democracy depends upon the arts and its ability to form the citizens into creative and educated beings. All this especially points to the importance that arts education plays in our society.

At the present time, and based on all this, can a case be fully made that decreased arts education funding is negatively impacting our society? In evaluating the state of the world today, there is no doubt that the national and international community could benefit by an improved understanding of multiple cultures by increasing arts exposure for all regardless of economic status or education. This leads to fostering a more tolerant

civilized person and the current state of the world today could certainly use more of these. In addition, the arts cultivate a stronger economy. As we have addressed, even though the arts are core subjects they are in jeopardy due to diminished funding and programs being eliminated. How many students are not participating in the arts economy because they were not exposed to basic education and subsequently do not value it? How is this impacting museum, theatres and music halls now, and what will this mean to the future culturally and economically? How many theatre workers or artists are unemployed or underemployed as a direct result of diminished interest in their art as a result of decreased education funding? As interest in the arts dwindles what will that mean to the business that provide the theatres, music venues and art museums in the country? Interest in the arts needs to be cultivated and nourished through basic education to alleviate this. Without interest, the arts businesses will not be valued and will be at risk in the future. As a theatre educated member of society and a fan, it is hard not to notice empty seats at performance venues or empty halls in museums. These are becoming more common place because of the lack of interest. As a direct result, some theatres and museums do not have enough money to support artists and theatre groups. Consider a report issued by the Rand Education research unit commissioned by the Wallace Foundation called *Cultivating Demand for the Arts*, which supports the premise that the demand for the arts is dwindling in the county, despite the fact that it is a core subject written in federal law. That federal law is No Child Left Behind.

Decreased funding in arts education is clearly impacting the present education system in other ways which affect the economy. Teachers are losing their jobs. Programs, classes, and courses are no longer being offered in the public sector. Nearly

10% of US secondary schools have no music program; 11% do not teach art; More than half have cut theatre; Nine in ten have cut dance (Dewey 3). This shows that doing what has always been done in arts education is not going to be the full answer. Clearly, there is legitimate concern, based on the presented evidence that adverse effects will occur if creative actions are not taken. If society clearly supports the importance of the arts, and contributes financially to the arts the public will see the benefits of their hard work in terms of a productive culture, economy, and the world's perspective of our nation, then actions need to be taken to insure that at least basic education is provided for all citizens, not just for the lucky few.

As traditional arts education is clearly at risk, there is a growing need for creative solutions to ensure it continues in some fashion. The arts must continue to be valued in our society because as long as they are, there is hope that innovative and fresh ideas will be generated in order to sustain arts education. The future of our culture, our country, and our way of life demands this. In the end, arts education will continue to thrive in schools as long as education leaders keep it as a priority and teachers are continually supported administratively and with either government or private funding. Ultimately, what the future looks like depends on teachers such as those who will continue to deliver quality education with whatever resources they have on hand and utilized for the good of students. The hope for the future of arts education lies with them and the passion they demonstrate every day in the classroom. Since financial belts will need to be tightened as public funding diminishes, teachers will have to do more with less and focus on ensuring at least a basic exposure to all the art forms. Ultimately the private sectors role needs to increase as the following solutions illustrate.

Solutions

Since the government agencies are not fully funding the arts, what options are available to ensure that arts education continues? A review of the current infrastructure for arts learning for school-age Americans is needed in order to understand the current situation regarding institutional support. According to the Rand Corporation, four components make up the arts learning infrastructure, including: the K-12 public school system, higher education, public after-school programs, and arts learning in the community. Deficiencies in these include a trend of a continued and significant reduction in formal arts education and inaccessibility for all students to attend any type of arts education (Zakaras and Lowell xvii). What can school leaders do to increase arts education? The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) prepared a guide with support from the PCAH regarding three concrete actions school leaders can take to increase arts education in the schools. With a consideration for shrinking budgets each action is supported with low cost or no cost strategies that can be used in a variety of grade levels. These include establishing a school wide commitment to arts learning, creating an arts-rich learning environment, and rethinking the use of time and resources (“*What School Leaders Can Do to Increase Arts Education*”). Particular strategies related to these actions include articulating clear goals associated with arts education for every student, identifying the arts in the budget, making learning arts visible, engaging parents, using multiple approaches in daily classroom instruction, involving the local arts community, building community resources, using after school time, adjusting schedules, and repurposing space (“*What School Leaders Can Do to Increase Arts Education*”).

It is important to now consider specific ideas or plans concerning how to realistically and successfully implement theatre arts education in Virginia secondary education despite budgetary setbacks. As an example, the Theatre Arts Standards of Learning (SOLs) for the State of Virginia outline four strands that must be covered in a theatre curriculum. These strands are: performance and production, theatre history and cultural context, analysis evaluation and critique, and finally aesthetics (*“Theatre Arts Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools”* v). Given the nature of the preparation for the standardized tests, there isn’t enough time allotted to teach any elective classes, much less theatre. Educators can use the visual and performing arts to teach science, technology, engineering, math, and English. A very simple way to incorporate the arts in any classroom, while keeping students engaged, would be using songs to teach something as important as our government or to remember president’s names. Do you remember a television show called Schoolhouse Rock? The purpose of the show was to teach elementary age students about the government, multiplication tables, and grammar through interactive musical numbers. In more recent years, it has generated a cult following, and the program has now reached high school and college age students looking to relive those elementary school days. Jamie Myrick, an English teacher at Adams Middle school in California, does just that. She found a way to incorporate the storytelling and the dramatic arts into her English curriculum. She notes, “People are forgetting that math is taught when a child is playing an instrument. English is taught when a child is reading or writing a script. Critical thinking is taught when a child is analyzing art” (Holcomb 1). She also uses roleplaying to engage with her

students during a lesson. This is a perfect example of how the visual and performing arts can be creatively woven into the fabric of daily education.

George Righter uses another approach that is creatively and successfully utilized in our schools and organizations. As noted earlier in this paper he teaches at York County School of the Arts in Williamsburg, Virginia. He states that their solution to the budgetary woes was to form a theatre booster club. The theatre booster club has 501c3 non-profit status and it is made up entirely of parents of the students who attend the school. The sole purpose of the group is to financially support the school arts program and provide production support. Even though they still get small amounts of grant dollars that are awarded from state funding, their program is largely supported primarily by their private fundraising. Having money provided by the booster club is a necessity for the success of the program. Money for replacement parts to lights or shop materials is provided by funding from the booster club. However, there are some downsides. As a result of this arrangement, the technical director does lose some autonomy in decision making because the booster club has a final say as to what they should spend the money on. Mr. Righter said that \$70,000 had been cut from his program in the last four years. He said that in cutting funds to a high school drama program you are in fact holding back those students from applying what they have learned in their core classes. He admits that the development of the technical program has been stymied and this has not allowed growth to the overall equipment inventory (Righter).

Mr. Righter has developed another solution to keep his students busy and to receive some spending money. In the beginning of the year he sends a letter to the other drama teachers in the area and asks if they would be willing to buy any set pieces such as,

door units, window units, flats, platforms, or props for a nominal fee. If a school needs a door unit, for example, he'll place it in the schedule, buy the material, and will have his students build it with his supervision. Mr. Righter believes the best way to learn is through experience, but this solution to his budgetary woes, provides some financial incentive. Even though, the York County School of the Arts felt the sting of budget cuts over the last four years, they are striving to continue to do what they've always done raising funds while still being cut.

Private funds are increasingly becoming more important in school arts funding. In direct response to the state and federal budget cuts to arts education in schools across the country, parents and students interested in the arts are increasingly turning to outside arts organizations to educate their students from a wide range of subjects. Even though public schools have lost much of their art education funding, art organizations have not, and are continually funded through state and federal art agencies. There are hundreds of art organizations that have picked up the slack. These three art organizations, in particular, illustrate what is occurring in many states: ArtsQuest and The Pennsylvania Youth Theatre in Bethlehem Pennsylvania, Trollwood Performing Arts School in Moorehead, Minnesota, and Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

ArtsQuest is an organization funded through the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, which is an organization directly funded through the National Endowment for the Arts. ArtsQuest is an epicenter of art activity for all ages. It hosts 1,200 art programs annually and 65% of those programs are free (ArtsQuest). ArtsQuest is the mother organization and it oversees many smaller organizations. One of the organizations it provides for children is a performing arts program called the Pennsylvania Youth

Theatre. The Pennsylvania Youth Theatre or PYT has been active for the past 29 years. It has been providing performing arts training with classes in dance, drama, and voice with the understanding that some students may not have this opportunity in their respective school districts. Classes are available for children from grades Pre-k through high school. Parents must pay privately for the participation in this program and the prices vary depending on what division is selected. For example, the prices for such classes in the fundamentals range from \$415-\$730 or four payments of \$130.75-\$182.50 per class for one year of instruction. The classes are year round and the organization has two camps in the summer. Payment options and scholarships are available to students who would not otherwise be able to pay for such classes on their own (Pennsylvania Youth Theatre). Scholarships are primarily funded through private donations and fundraising as the selection for scholarships is highly competitive.

Organizations such as PYT are fulfilling a role in providing outside arts education but there are drawbacks: cost, the need for strong parental support, and time resources outside of the traditional school setting make this type of program prohibitive to many students who might otherwise benefit by a strong arts education. However, for students who do participate, the program offers a well-rounded theatre education in the arts, which is most important of all.

The Trollwood Performing Arts School (TPAS) is the managing arm for the Bluestem Center for the Arts in Moorehead, Minnesota. TPAS' sole mission is "to inspire those we serve through the arts, to realize their full potential and be a positive influence in the global community" (Trollwood Performing Arts School). They believe that the arts have the power to transform people's lives. Their goal is to deliver and

develop the highest standard of performing arts education, which offers their students the knowledge and skills needed to be successful. TPAS offers many theatre educational programs for elementary, middle school, and high school students that teach theatre education, youth leadership, and performance programs. It was founded in 1978 and since then they have educated thousands of young people who plan on making theatre their career. TPAS also offers a program called the STAR Program. It is a nationally recognized youth program that supports at-risk youth by using the arts as a tool to help them build the life skills necessary to deal with challenges in their lives. The students in this program are given free arts training, transportation, class supplies, and meals. Most importantly, the students receive guidance from the teaching artists who offer instructions and motivation, while emphasizing the student's strengths and helping them realize their fullest potential (Trollwood Performing Arts School). TPAS differs from PYT in that it works closely with the Fargo Public School which allows its students to attend classes for a discounted rate.

The "Oldest Theatre in America" Walnut Street Theatre (WST) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, offers educational opportunities in the theatre arts for students of all age groups from grade school to post-college apprenticeships and residency programs for students in Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York, and New Jersey. As a former Apprentice this program offered workshops twice a month where industry professionals at WST gave lectures about all the areas of theatre. A majority of lecturers were former apprentices at WST who decided to come back and educate the future theatre professionals. It is their mission in the education department "to build audiences for tomorrow, to educate audiences of today, to enrich the community, to provide an outlet for at risk children...to

bring the arts to schools and to encourage arts-in-education...” (Quinn). The passion and love of theatre is what drives them and in turn drives the passion and love of theatre in their apprentices. The Touring Outreach Company is equally as important as the apprentice program of the Theatre School at WST because it brings theatre to schools across the Delaware Valley that may not have a theatre program. The residency program brings theatre artists to area schools, community organizations, team building seminars, and staff development workshops for corporations and organizations. This program is important for these schools and organizations because it brings theatre to these groups that might not have the chance to be a part of theatre. They are given an opportunity to use theatre as a foundation to cultivate relationships. Probably the most important program WST has to offer is its Adopt-A-School program that creates a three-year partnership with a K-8 Philadelphia Center City public school. The Adopt-A-School program is individually designed to fit the needs of the host school in creating a curriculum, improving the students’ dramatic skills and guiding teachers through every aspect of producing a theatre performance (Walnut Street Theatre Education). WST funding is provided by donations, subscriptions to theatre events, and private grants. The key is a very strong subscription base, (Quinn) who are retired, upper class white folks, who love the theatre. In spite of difficult financial times the theatre flourishes. The benefits of the WST to arts education cannot be overemphasized in a city with a severely financially strapped school district that has incurred school closings and large teacher cuts in the past few years (Caskey and Kuperberg 22). Philadelphia is one example of how urban areas suffer from major problems in their educational system. Within the last three years there has been a \$304 million budget shortfall, which the media has dubbed it

a “Doomsday Budget”. As a result, the school district eliminated the entire funding for the arts and music programs as well as laid-off many of the teachers. Laying off teachers negatively impacts our education system and our society.

Philadelphia is not alone. The country as a whole faces an enormous educational crisis. Chicago Public Schools dealt a blow to arts education when it laid-off over a thousand teachers as a result of the closure of fifty schools. Nearly 10% or 159 teachers were art or music teachers. In 2011 the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) called for slashing the arts instruction staff from 1,065 to 722 full- and part-time positions within the district. That is a 32% reduction. The students in elementary schools would bear the brunt, losing almost 60% of their arts instructors. Secondary school arts staffing dropped by 26%. The likely layoffs would send some arts teachers teaching at a secondary school to high schools replacing the laid-off younger instructors who developed a relationship with teenagers. There is, however, a light at the end of the tunnel for the LAUSD. Using the slogan “Arts are at the Heart of Smart” they look to preserve the state funding which included short personal videos from individuals about how the arts have mattered in their lives (Boehm). And in 2012, the LAUSD voted to make the arts a core subject in their district. By mandating the arts, they are protecting themselves from state budget cuts and would hopefully be able to restore at least some of the \$60 million they were forced to eliminate since 2007. Of course this mandate doesn’t eliminate the need of money. It is relying on a \$4 million fundraising campaign called Arts Matter by the LA Fund for Public Education, seeking private donors (Fang). The results of this fundraising were successful.² From Philadelphia to Chicago, and to Los

² For more information on Arts Matter campaign visit www.lafund.org

Angeles, these cities are just a small percentage of regions that are having problems with educational funding. Los Angeles is recognizing the problem and has come up with a solution. Progress on rectifying the Philadelphia's Schools District's "Doomsday Budget" has been a painfully slow process.

Having dealt with the bigger issues related to arts education, it would be remiss if there was not a discussion about how the art educators are affected by it on a daily basis. At the Virginia Theatre Association Conference in October 2014, interviews were conducted with two high school drama teachers from the state of Virginia. The purpose of these interviews was to learn about real-world theatre education experiences in light of the current budgetary climate and to find out what motivated these teachers to teach drama at this time in arts education history. It was not surprising when the teachers related that it was the students and their love of theatre which drove them to share their knowledge. The common thread received during these interviews was that, they do not just educate students about theatre arts and skills, but they teach those students social skills and acceptance of their peers. One interviewee in particular cares about her students and their education. The life skills taught is very important for a maturing young adult who will need these in the harsh real world. These drama teachers do just that.

The Drama Department at Massaponex High School is lucky to have Kimberly Kemp. She is the drama teacher there but prefers to call herself a manager of opportunities. She tries to find opportunities that students relate to as she has learned over the years that the passion students have can be misdirected. Ultimately, it is her love and passion for the art form that motivates her to keep teaching and managing her students to be the best artists they can be. She wants everyone to succeed in her classes

and she wants them to like her class. Most of what she does in their first year has to do with participation and not with skills. Everyone learns at a different level and sometimes at a different point in their maturity. The first year is about exploring and motivating them. She tries to make the arts interesting and tries to relate it to real life. The second to fourth year students get more in-depth instruction, which includes theatre history, technical development, and perfecting skills (Kemp). Even though she has had to curtail her budget and must do more with less, she still feels supported financially and in fact, this school continues a reputation of having a successful theatre program. George Righter and Kimberly Kemp are two high school teachers whose teaching styles are completely different-George is technical and hands on and Kimberly is more didactic- but in the end, in spite of having to deal with lessened resources, their commitment to arts education remains strong and students they teach are fortunate to have them as teachers.

York County's George Righter relates that even though budgetary constraints persist, he is able to endure and continue a successful secondary technical theatre arts education. He considers experience to be the best teacher and advises students that making mistakes and trying is how you learn. The difference between artists and designer is designers have schedules. He advises that they must perform on command, on schedule, on budget and their work has to be functional and look good (Righter).

Future Considerations

An interesting and provocative perspective on the future of arts education is provided by Edward P. Clapp of Harvard University in a paper addressing the Second World Conference on Arts Education in Seoul, Korea. He stated that the arts education field adheres to a set of core assumptions that may no longer be applicable to our current cultural landscape and that arts education must undergo a radical transformation in order to maintain its relevancy. He alludes to incorporating the perspectives of a new generation of young professionals to re-strategize for the future. He notes a list of changes affecting arts education such as museums and performing arts institution struggling to attain and retain audiences but that more adults are pursuing arts education at different times of their lives (Clapp). Also, artistic expression is changing through the increase use of digital technology and electronic media such as a new and interesting online school for girls called School of Doodle. In spite of this, many arts programs continue to place an emphasis on the traditional visual arts rather than look to non-traditional arts makers. This means that children and young adults raised on the digital age as a means to express their creativity goes beyond the traditional approach to the arts, known as the non-traditional approach, rather than using the traditional approach to the arts. Arts assessment is changing given the push toward standards-based assessment and how to assess, document, and quantify teaching and learning can be a mystery. Finally, arts administration and funding is changing. Administrators are spending more time on fundraising which takes away from programs and discourages the young from wanting to pursue senior level positions (Clapp). These issues must all be addressed in order for arts

education to progress in the future. The digital age is upon us now and our future as arts educators must adapt to new and alternative methods to art education.

A novel and creative solution that lends itself to the Internet age is a free, crowd-funded (Kickstarter- an online fund raising website), peer-to-peer online arts school for teenage girls that brings the arts to students who need them. The project is called School of Doodle. The school is the brainchild of a woman named Molly Logan who has a PhD. in art history. She has spent years on producing projects in New York City with the Metropolitan Museum of Art. When Logan first taught a class of her own in graduate school, she objected to the “heavy-handed, one-sided” teaching methods her superiors asked her to use, and since then she has been intrigued with the idea of an arts curriculum that treated everyone, including the students, as teachers (Dewey1). The School of Doodle was a project that sought funding from Kickstarter, which surpassed its goal of \$75,000 with celebrity involvement and contributions. It uses trendy online-teaching approaches that teachers and students can log in to from anywhere. Social networks encourage student enthusiasm and overhead cost for the students is free. Logan points out that this is not education reform but may be used as a model for how technology can get arts into schools cheaply and quickly (Gilothwest 1). The School of Doodle should not just be an online school for girls; it should include boys as well. It falls short in that area, but it certainly captures the very essence of what Art, Theatre, and Music education should be. If it was a real school in multiple locations around the world it would better serve its purpose. There is something that is fundamentally missing from the School of Doodle and that is student to teacher interaction. There is only so much that can be done online. But we certainly cannot lose motivation on finding creative and new ways to

teach art. If Molly Logan can do it through a crowd funded website, why can't we come up with a better way that covers all areas of Art education?

Conclusion

The precedent has been set as there is not much that can be done about the current funding cuts to art education and that government funding of arts education will not improve soon. When any programmatic funding is removed, it is always difficult to get it back. We as theatre professionals must work to prevent that from happening, by contacting your local representative so he/she can stand up for arts funding. With the current political climate of fiscal constraint and concerns regarding national defense, the arts will continue to take a back seat. It is clear, therefore, that a multifaceted approach needs to occur, but any approach should emphasize the private sector's role. Private citizens and arts organizations will need to step up to ensure that arts education at both the basic and advanced levels from kindergarten through high school and thereafter, continues in multiple forms.

Private, voluntary and non-profit arts organizational efforts to provide basic and continued arts education are to be commended and all artists must be called upon to continually support them in word, deed and most importantly, with funding. Foundations need to be formed and funded privately by successful philanthropist actors and artists from all areas of the arts industry from Broadway, to Hollywood, and even Nashville. These places are seen as being the “the place to be” for aspiring artists and musicians. They all must align efforts to protect and ensure the continuation of arts education and ultimately to protect their industry.

Even though there is still No Child Left Behind, the private sector needs to ensure there is no disparity concerning support for creative and cost effective initiatives to ensure that all children have access to basic and continued arts education regardless of

their socioeconomic class. In addition, continued arts education must also be provided for adults who may have missed out in their basic arts schooling. Perhaps an added emphasis on adult continuing education through Walnut Street Theatre, ArtsQuest, Trollwood Performing Arts School, and Community Theater needs to be encouraged and advanced in order for this to occur. It is never too late to participate in community theatre.

Finally, there is no definitive evidence that this diminishment impacts our society at the present time, but the future risk is real and palpable. If we do not have public interest, arts education may be wiped away from our children's high school curriculum entirely. Arts education has the capacity to make a person more humane and civilized and cannot be allowed to disappear because of lack of interest and dollars. Many of the presidents and world leaders of our time were accomplished artists or musicians. St. Pope John Paul II was an actor in his local theatre; President Dwight D. Eisenhower was a gifted oil painter, as is President George W. Bush. President Harry S. Truman played the piano and President Thomas Jefferson was a violinist and an architect. Mr. Jefferson particularly took time to emphasize the value of the arts as evidenced by his practice schedule as noted in a letter written to his daughter: "From 8 to 10 o'clock practice music. From 10 to 1 dance one day & draw another. From 1 to 2 draw on the day you dance, and write a letter the next day. From 3 to 4 read French. From 4 to 5 exercise" (Jefferson). These noted persons were all well-educated, well-rounded individuals and leaders who used the arts to enhance their lives and their human capacity. They recognized that arts fill in the gaps between all the other "core subjects" that are currently stressed in traditional education. Technical Directors would not be able to draft designs without the knowledge of basic mathematics learned in high school nor would they be

able to draft a structural scenic element that is cantilevered over another set piece without understanding engineering (Righter). The arts motivate students to learn the sciences, math, and literature through a back door approach. Non-traditional approaches need to be used to keep the arts in curriculums and to keep students interested and engaged but also to provide a method to integrate the arts into traditional education. Examples are showing thirty minutes of *Schoolhouse Rock* as an alternate strategy to teach a math or government lesson, or integrating math problems and geometry into choreography, or incorporating role playing into the classroom to make history come alive. Students who are uninterested in core subjects may suddenly see the utility of learning these subjects because of these approaches. As traditional arts education declines, the arts must continue to flourish and use novel concepts such as the use of technology and media to engage and teach will need to evolve.

The point has been made about the impact of declining arts education in our society, the value the arts hold in our society, and how public funding is diminishing and how it is affecting this. The call is clear: we must all be obligated, especially those who are currently involved with the arts, to support arts education. There is hope that there will be enough committed government leaders, public sector organizations, administrations, teachers and artists to ensure that this will continue to occur. The strength of our nation depends on this.

Works Cited

"ArtsQuest." *ArtsQuest Imagine that*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Dec. 2014.

<<http://www.artsquest.org/>>.

Beveridge, Tina. "No Child Left Behind and Fine Arts Classes." *Arts Education Policy*

Review: 4-7. Print. Since the Bush administration enacted the No Child Left

Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002, lawmakers and school administrators have

questioned what changes, if any, the Obama administration will make. This

Article discusses the effects of NCLB on non-tested subjects, specifically music

and arts in the general curriculum. Major effects on scheduling and funding

policies have forced educators to reconsider how advocacy for the arts should be

approached.

Boehm, Mike. "White House Report Aims to Boost Arts Education While LAUSD's

Programs Face Ax." *Los Angeles Times* [Los Angeles] 10 May 2011, Culture

Monster: 1-2. *Los Angeles Times*. Web. 2 Jan. 2015.

<<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2011/05/arts-education-funding-obama-.html>>.

Caskey, John, and Mark Kuperberg. "The Philadelphia School District's Ongoing

Financial Crisis." *Education Next* 14.4 (2014): n. pag. *Education Next*. Web. 2

Jan. 2015. <[http://educationnext.org/philadelphia-school-districts-ongoing-](http://educationnext.org/philadelphia-school-districts-ongoing-financial-crisis/)

[financial-crisis/](http://educationnext.org/philadelphia-school-districts-ongoing-financial-crisis/)>.

Catterall, James S., Susan A. Dumais, and Gillian Hampden-Thompson. "The Arts and

Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies."

- National Endowment for the Arts* 55 (2012): 1-28. Print. This report was released by the National Endowment for the Arts in 2012.
- Clapp, Edward P. "Envisioning the Future of Arts Education: Challenging Core Assumptions, Addressing Adaptive Challenges, and Fostering the Next Generation of Arts Education Leaders." Towards a New Concept of Arts Education: Second World Conference on Arts Education. Seoul Korea. Speech.
- Dewey, Caitlin. "Can Kickstarter save Arts Education?" *The Washington Post*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Dec. 2014. <[http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/08/14/can-kickstarter-save-arts-education...>](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/08/14/can-kickstarter-save-arts-education...).
- Fang, Marina. "Public Schools Slash Arts Education and Turn to Private Funding." *Think Progress*. N.p., 5 Aug. 2013. Web. 30 Dec. 2014. <[Art in America. N.p., 21 Aug. 2014. Web. 30 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news/features/news/the-school-of-doodle-forcreative-girl-power>>.](http://thinkprogress.org/education/2013/08/05/2412381/public-schools-slash-arts-education...>.</p><p>Gilothwest, Beryle.)
- Goldsmith, Melissa. "Solutions to Cuts in Art and Music Programs in Public Schools." *Seattle Pi*. Hearst, n.d. Web. 30 Dec. 2014. <<http://education.seattlepi.com/solutions-cuts-art-music-programs-public-schools-1814.html>>.
- Holcomb, Sabrina. "State of the Arts." *National Education Association*. NEA Today, 17 Jan. 2007. Web. 1 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.nea.org/home/10630.htm>>. Despite

mounting evidence of its role in student achievement, arts education is disappearing in the schools that need it most. This article is an examination of the effects of No Child Left Behind on Arts Education at Adams Middle School in West Contra Costa California.

Kemp, Kimberly. Personal interview. 24 Oct. 2014.

"National Endowment for the Arts." *National Endowment for the Arts*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Dec. 2014. <<http://arts.gov/about-nea>>.

The National Visual Arts Standards. Reston: National Art Education Association, 1994. Print.

Obama, Michelle, et al. "Reinvesting in Arts Education; Winning America's Future through Creative Schools." 2011. *Conclusion and Recommendations: A Vision of Arts-Rich Schools*. Washington D.C.: Fletcher Design, 2011. 47-55. Print.

--. "Reinvesting in Arts Education; Winning America's Future through Creative Schools." 2011. *The Need: Education System in Crisis*. Washington D.C.: Fletcher Design, 2011. 27-33. Print.

Quinn, Tom. E-mail interview. 12 Dec. 2014. Tom is the Director of Education at Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. I conducted the interview for the sole purpose of gathering more information on what WST's Education department does for the city.

Ravenhill, Mark. "Let's Cut the Arts Budget." *The Guardian*. Guardian, 25 July 2010. Web. 7 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/jul/25/arts-funding-cuts-theatre-galleries>>. The knife should slice through marketing and development but leave the artists untouched.

Righter, George. Personal interview. 24 Oct. 2014.

Sabol, F. Robert. "No Child Left Behind: A Study of Its Impact on Art Education." *NAEF Investing and NAEA*. National Art Education Foundation, 3 Feb. 2010. Web. Dec. 2014. Research Study of Visual Arts Educators Details the Impact of NCLB on Curriculum, Instructional Practice, Assessment, Teacher Workloads, and Resources.

Spohn, Cydney. "Teacher Perspectives on No Child Left behind and Arts Education: A Case Study." *Heldref Publications* 109.4 (2008): 3-11. Print.

"Theatre Arts Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools." *Theatre Arts Standards of Learning*. Richmond: Virginia Department of Education, 2013. 1-30. Print.

"Trollwood Performing Arts School." *Trollwood Performing Arts School*. N.p., n.d. Web. Jan. 2014. <<http://www.trollwood.org/>>.

Vanderhye, Margaret, ed. "Commission to Cut Funding in Response to Governor's Directive." *The Virginia Commission for the Arts*. N.p., Sept. 2014. Web. 1 Dec. 2014. <http://www.arts.virginia.gov/2014_9.html>. The point of this article is to explain the budget cuts for the FY15 and FY16 in the state of Virginia, according to the governors directive on the current budget and how it affects the Virginia Commission for the Arts.

"The Virginia Commission for the Arts." *The Virginia Commission for the Arts*. N.p., n.d. Web. 28 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.arts.virginia.gov/about.html>>.

Walnut Street Theatre Education. N.p., 2014. Web. 2 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.walnutstreettheatre.org/education/report-2013-1014.php>>.

"What School Leaders Can Do to Increase Arts Education." *Arts Education Partnership*.

N.p., n.d. Web. 2 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.aep-arts.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/What-School-Leaders-Can-Do-To-Increase-the-Arts.pdf>>.

Zakaras, Laura, and Julia F. Lowell. "Cultivating Demand for the Arts." 2008. *Arts Learning, Arts Engagement, and State Arts Policy*. Santa Monica: RAND Corp., 2008. 1-51. Print.