



For Immediate Release

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New Initiative Responds to Public Demand For Imaginative and Innovative Learning in Schools

Takes Action To Push Public Education Beyond Average Expectations

WASHINGTON, DC (January 11, 2008) – Prompted by new data that show 80% of Americans feel that jobs today require learning a different set of skills in school, a broad coalition convened by the Arts Education Partnership (AEP) has joined with national, state, and local organizations on an agenda to restore imagination and innovation as key outcomes of learning.

AEP is working in concert with a diverse set of educational interests, including the National Education Association and the National Association of Manufacturers, to highlight the success of three initiatives at the state and local levels that are mobilizing a public consensus for a renewed emphasis on building skills of the imagination to develop an innovative workforce and citizenry for the 21st century.

“What is very clear in recent public opinion polling and our own research is that people across the country want a much more engaging and broadened education for students,” said Richard J. Deasy, AEP director. “They want schools to help students set high standards for themselves, have ambition and aspirations for success, and develop the skills to fulfill their dreams and meet the demands of the 21st century world in which we live.”

According to a national poll released in November 2007 by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, a majority of survey respondents indicated that schools need to do a better job of keeping up with changing educational needs. This mirrors earlier findings released by the Conference Board in 2006 citing that nearly three-fourths of business leaders surveyed ranked “creativity/innovation as among the top five applied skills projected to increase in importance for future graduates...”

“There are very successful models for building capacities of the imagination that lead to innovation. We decided initially to work closely with three unique initiatives in different settings to show how an education in and through the arts can be a crucial force shaping the imagination and its application to produce the innovative and creative graduates we desperately need to retain America’s leadership role in the world. Each of the initiatives is successfully engaging all levels of leadership and mobilizing public support for a new vision of education that will put imagination at the core of learning in all subjects taught in the schools. Research shows the arts can be the catalyst and ally in achieving this vision,” said Deasy.

In particular, AEP will focus on groundbreaking work in Ohio, Oklahoma and Texas. In Ohio, the emphasis will be on the role of the arts within STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) schools and programs at the K-8, high school, and university levels. “Our mission is to institute statewide education restructuring through international benchmarking, extend the arts in our schools, and use the STEM initiatives to foster imagination and innovation across disciplines in every level of our educational system,” said Susan Tave Zelman, superintendent of public instruction. “Arts learning frees students to think imaginatively and reach beyond their own capabilities to be the leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs of the 21st century.” Zelman established a statewide Committee on Arts and Innovative Thinking under the Ohio Department of Education to ensure a secure position for the arts within Ohio’s educational system.

“We understand that developing the imagination will benefit the workforce in every industry in the state. We need workers and citizens who are resourceful, ingenious, and well-rounded,” said Phil Moss, Executive Director of Creative Oklahoma, Inc., a statewide effort to promote creativity and innovation, featuring connections with business and community leaders who support a more creative workforce leading to innovation. “A more imaginative, interdisciplinary education will help nurture the creative capacities in every learner.”

The Dallas Arts Learning Initiative, a partnership between the City of Dallas, the Dallas Independent School District, numerous cultural partners and Big Thought, is focused on implementing a creative learning curriculum in schools and communities that will help to shape imagination skills and lead to an innovative workforce. The initiative includes additional art and music teachers in the public schools, teaching artists that integrate arts learning into the school curriculum, and a community-based component that partners with existing arts programs and brings together organizations to develop new partnerships and programs to meet neighborhood needs. “Organizations around Dallas have positively responded by incorporating creative learning as an important part of a well rounded curriculum,” said Gigi Antoni, CEO/President of Big Thought the managing partner of the initiative. “This consortium of leaders in business, government, and academic fields is working to engage students at all levels and implement programs that will help ensure a strong, innovative workforce for our future.”

“Parents and teachers alike tell us that too much of what goes on in schools stifles the enthusiasm and commitment of students for active, and engaged learning,” continued Deasy. “They long for an education that urges and enables kids to succeed beyond the average expectations embodied in standardized testing. These three initiatives and others across the nation are responding to that demand.”

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The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) is a national coalition of arts, education, business, philanthropic and government organizations that demonstrate and promote the essential role of the arts in the learning and development of every child and in the improvement of America's schools. AEP was founded and is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and U. S. Department of Education in cooperation with the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. The Partnership includes over 140 organizations that are national in scope and impact.