



## For Immediate Release

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### **IT'S THE IMAGINATION, STUPID** *Left and Right, Pollsters Sense a Surge in the Electorate*

**Washington, D.C. (Feb. 14)** – As education surfaces as a critical platform issue across both parties this election year, recent poll data suggests that a large group of Americans are planning to vote to ensure developing skills of the imagination in public education. Celinda Lake and Lake Research Partners have identified a new voting constituency united by a mutual priority – much like the ‘soccer mom’ phenomenon of the late 1990’s. This group of self-identified voters, known as the ‘imagine nation constituency,’ will readily and strongly support both policy and candidates who advocate incorporating the imagination in the classroom in order to meet the 21<sup>st</sup> century demand for innovation in the marketplace.

According to the recent national survey of 1,000 likely voters, a core group of Americans who feel intensely about this issue comprises 30% of the voting population. This population within the growing constituency is a more intensely committed group of very likely voters ripe for mobilization – an “imagine nation.” The imagine nation constituency represents voters who, when asked initially, say that building capacities of the imagination in core courses is extremely critical. They hold similarly strong views on all other key questions asked. The poll found that swing voters are especially reactive to this issue. Over half of voters in the imagination constituency are swing voters, who do not strongly identify with either party.

“These are surprising results that indicate a strong set of shared public values are not being detected by public leaders,” said Celinda Lake, president of Lake Research Partners. “A significant number of voters believe that today’s educational approaches are outdated, impair critical capacities of the imagination, and stifle teachers and students alike, blocking potential for innovation and cost-effective educational opportunities. These data show a large population we call the ‘imagine nation’ are hungry for imagination in education and are going to take action accordingly—both in their local schools and at the voting booth, so that children are prepared for the world in which they will live.”

A majority of all voters, diverse in demographics and political affiliations, agree that an education that develops skills of the imagination is politically salient, and they are planning

to strongly consider it as they prepare to choose a candidate. With a 3.1% margin of error, the poll indicates that:

- 57% of voters say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who came out in support of more funding for development of skills of the imagination in schools.
- 57% of voters say they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who votes to cut funding for building capacities of the imagination in public education, and 36% percent of voters say they would be much less likely to do so.

In addition, the poll identifies that:

- 73% of voters believe (63% strongly) that building capacities of the imagination that lead to innovation is just as important as the “so called” basics for all students.
- 56% of American voters believe that, when compared to other nations, America devotes less attention to developing the imagination and innovation. Only 19% of respondents believe the United States is ahead.

To round out 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, this constituency has identified an education in and through the arts as the most direct and effective path to developing the imagination. “Voters react very strongly to the idea of combining the basics with the arts for the cultivation of the imagination. They also feel an education in the arts makes a major contribution to participating in a group or being a team player, learning to set goals and respecting multiple values and perspectives,” said Lake.

- 91% of voters say that arts are essential to building 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

Richard Deasy, director of the Arts Education Partnership, added, “The Lake research poll confirms that the public understands what years of research and experience in arts education has proven. Arts develop the imagination, and imagination is the cognitive capacity that most directly prompts innovation. Given the overwhelming support for education that develops the imagination, policy leaders can now stand firmly on that platform.”

Based on a 2005 Skills Gap survey conducted by the National Association of Manufacturers, 81% of respondents said they could not find qualified workers to fill open positions. According to the poll, there is a growing fear among the business community that our current and future workforce is not prepared to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

“In the coming years, the manufacturing industry will lose over 50% of its workforce. The future of American innovation and our country’s prosperity hinges on our students’ ability to develop the skills and abilities to be imaginative and creative,” said Phyllis Eisen, senior vice president of the Manufacturing Institute at the National Association of Manufacturers. “Without these skills, our nation’s economy runs the risk of not being able to compete with other countries and sustain its competitive manufacturing base, along with its leadership role in innovation.”

Signs of this growing constituency can be seen in state and local initiatives around the country. For instance, Dallas, Oklahoma, and Ohio are involved in major initiatives that incorporate development of the cognitive capacities of the imagination in what supporters deem to be a successful, well-rounded 21<sup>st</sup> century education.

In Ohio, the state's department of education is committed to an education that produces innovative and creative students by incorporating skills of the imagination as an outcome of its STEM initiative. To do so, it is encouraging local districts to integrate an education in and through the arts into the science, technology, engineering, and math curriculum. "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 in the Ohio Department of Education. "Arts learning frees students to think imaginatively and reach beyond their own capabilities to be the leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs of the 21st century."

The Dallas Arts Learning Initiative is focused on "creative learning," implementing arts-based learning in schools and communities to develop skills of the imagination skills that lead to an innovative workforce. The initiative includes hiring 140 additional art and music teachers in the public schools. "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."

On February 7, the Governor of Oklahoma in cooperation with business, civic, and education leaders, launched the Oklahoma Creativity Project with the goal of fueling innovation in commerce, culture, and education. "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 more imaginative, interdisciplinary education will help nurture the creative capacities in every learner."

Lake Research Partners' data are consistent with aggregated findings from polling across a two-year period, including a fall 2007 poll from the Partnership for 21st Century Skills as well as focus groups conducted by Marmillion + Company, which confirmed the strength of America's desire for imagination in learning. The results also mirror 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..."

"When I heard Frank Luntz in a speech to the National Conference of State Legislatures mention that the word 'imagine' was the most powerful word in the English language, we began investigating the strength of a constituency for imagination in education," said Val Marmillion, president Marmillion + Company. "If this was the most powerful word for

Americans, there had to be a strong base of support for this initiative, which we found to be true beyond our expectations.”

Based on the results of the poll, a broad coalition of national leaders has joined with national, state, and local organizations on an agenda to restore imagination and innovation as key outcomes of learning. This coalition includes the National Education Association; the Manufacturing Institute, the education arm of the National Association of Manufacturers; NAMM: The International Music Products Association; the Ford Foundation; the George Gund Foundation; and the Arts Education Partnership, representing a coalition of over 100 education and arts organizations.

For additional resources and more information on the poll, please visit [www.theimagination.net](http://www.theimagination.net).

*Additional characteristics of the imagine nation constituency: 54% of the voters in the imagination constituency are women. Their geographic distribution is similar to voters overall. 75% percent are under the age of 65. The majority of these voters are married (59 percent). 30% of voters in the imagine nation constituency have children ages eighteen or younger. Among parents in the imagine nation constituency, more than half have children 12 or younger. The majority will vote in upcoming elections.*

*About the Arts Education Partnership: 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. [www.aep-arts.org](http://www.aep-arts.org)*

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**In The News and From the Pages of:**

# EDUCATION WEEK

## **Arts Education Touted as Key to U.S. Innovation Agenda**

**By Andrew Trotter**

**1/30/2008**

A majority of U.S. voters agree that building students' imaginations to equip young people with the ability to innovate is as important as teaching them the academic basics, according to a poll commissioned by an advocacy coalition for education in the arts.

The Washington-based Arts Education Partnership cited the results, released today, in urging that the arts not be overlooked as policymakers emphasize the so-called STEM disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics as the keys to boosting innovation and U.S. competitiveness in the world economy.

"We're finding that the public is seeing that if you don't have a capacity to imagine, you're not going to make anything anyway," said Richard J. Deasy, the director of the partnership, a coalition of about 140 organizations, including the U.S. Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Nearly nine out of 10 respondents in the telephone poll of 1,000 "likely" adult voters, conducted for the partnership by Lake Research Partners, a Democratic polling firm based in Washington, said an education in and through the arts is essential for cultivating the imagination.

And a similar number said that using the imagination is important to innovation and for success in the knowledge-based global economy of the 21st century. Funding for the AEP poll came from the 3.2 million-member National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers' union.

The partnership also launched a new Web site that will offer information and resources to support the arts in education, including case studies from several U.S. cities and states. Development of the Web site, [www.theimagination.net](http://www.theimagination.net), was supported by the George Gund Foundation, based in Cleveland.

Some prominent business leaders have touted the importance of STEM and innovation to

the nation's economic fortunes, but not the arts and the imagination, Mr. Deasy said.

In the poll, which had an overall margin of error of 3.1 percentage points, 57 percent of the respondents said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supported building the capacities of the imagination among students in public schools. What's more, a majority said they would vote a candidate out of office if he or she did not respond to that message.

### 'Imagine Nation'

The pollster Celinda Lake, the president of Lake Research Partners, helped define and popularize the notion of the "soccer mom" in the 1990s. Ms. Lake and the sponsors of the new poll argue that the findings reveal the existence of an "Imagine Nation," a voter constituency that supports a renewed emphasis on the arts.

According to the poll, that constituency makes up 30 percent of voters. A diverse group by gender and geography, more than half consists of "swing voters" who do not identify strongly as Republican or Democrat.

In the poll, fewer than half the voters said schools are teaching students imagination and creative skills well, with many respondents worried that such skills have decreased in the past decade. The findings suggest that 56 percent of voters believe that standardized testing discourages students' imaginations and creative skills.

Poll respondents said they are likely not to favor a candidate who has voted to cut funding for building capacities of the imagination in schools.

On hand for the Jan. 24 release of the poll results were representatives of model projects: the Dallas Arts Learning Initiative, a partnership in that Texas city to elevate the role of the arts in students' lives; the Ohio Department of Education's initiative to promote the arts and "innovative thinking" in schools; and the Oklahoma Creativity Project, a statewide partnership to promote more creative approaches to education, among other activities.

Mr. Deasy, who plans to retire in June after leading the 12-year-old partnership since its establishment, called the poll's results a "surprising affirmation" that the public wants schools to teach more than academic skills.

"They want the schools to inculcate values, and one of these values is imaginative capacity," he said.