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November 21, 2012

The Honorable Arne Duncan
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Mr. Jeffrey Zeints
Acting Director
Office of Management and Budget
Executive Office of the President
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Secretary Duncan and Director Zeints:

The Arts Education Funders Coalition, a program of Grantmakers in the Arts, has developed a policy agenda, which would advance arts education within the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. As the Administration makes final decisions on the President's fiscal year 2014 budget request, we would like to provide you with our recommendations for programs that can leverage arts education to ensure better schools, more effective teachers and students that are college and career ready.

The Arts Education Funders Coalition is an effort by concerned arts and education private, public and corporate grantmakers to promote equitable access to arts education in all public schools. As funders who have contributed millions of dollars to the public education system or to the nonprofit arts sector to compensate for lack of arts education in public schools, Coalition members have a stake in developing effective policy that will secure the place of arts education in twenty-first century education.

We are pleased that you, Secretary Duncan, have placed an emphasis on the importance of arts education and much of our agenda is consistent with this focus. I hope that the President's fiscal year 2014 budget will bring more of our policy agenda forward and allow us to reach our mutual goals. In particular, I believe a number of aspects of our policy agenda could be included within the Administration's proposals in the 2014 budget.

One area we believe is critical for a larger focus is on Title I. For many years, and despite your best efforts, significant confusion has existed in states and school districts over whether Title I funding can support arts education in a manner that drives increased student achievement. A statement in your budget highlighting arts education as an important focus for Title I schools would build upon efforts to add clarity in this area.

In addition, arts education can and does play a valuable role in school turnaround efforts, including under the School Improvement Grant program. The recent announcement of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities has showcased the dynamic role that arts education can have in transforming a school. I would recommend that your budget include a reference to the work of the Commission and make clear that arts education can and should be an element of school turnaround under school improvement grants, particularly in the transformation and turnaround models.

Another opportunity to expand arts education is through the 21st Century Community Learning Center Program. Under this authority, I would recommend that the budget encourage States to give priority to local applications, which propose inclusion of the arts and utilize local arts resources. The use of 21st Century funds, in this fashion, would further strengthen expanded learning time and afterschool programs.

Lastly, we think it is important that the President's signature initiatives of Investing in Innovation and Promise Neighborhoods support arts education. While i3 has funded projects that include an element of arts education, it hasn't yet maximized the potential to drive innovation in these areas. I recommend that the budget make clear for both of these programs that arts education be an allowable and encouraged activity and focus.

While I have attached our policy agenda in it's entirety for your review, I hope that the above recommendations are helpful to you in making final decisions on the 2014 budget. If you have any questions, or if I can provide any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janet Brown", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Janet Brown
Executive Director

Attachment