

# THE ARTS AND EDUCATION initiative OF EPLC

The mission of the Education Policy and Leadership Center (EPLC) is to encourage and support the development and implementation of effective state-level policies to improve student learning in grades PK-12, increase the effective operation of schools, and enhance educational opportunities for citizens of all ages. In keeping with this mission, EPLC's Board of Directors and staff have become increasingly concerned with the need to promote a thoroughly educated citizenry. This need has become more apparent as social and economic requirements of society have become more complex and as the focus of education reform efforts—and the curriculum in many schools—has become more narrow. EPLC believes that:

- ❖ All arts experiences provide opportunities for learning and that access to the arts in its many forms is essential to nurturing an educated citizenry in Pennsylvania.
- ❖ PK-12 arts education programs and arts experiences for all youth are essential for their intrinsic value and because they support the broader educational goals of the Commonwealth.
- ❖ Effective public policies can enhance access to the arts for all citizens, assure valuable arts educational experiences for all youth, and raise public awareness of the social and economic value of the arts in communities.

In 2010, the EPLC Board agreed to undertake the Arts and Education Initiative (AEI) to support these beliefs. Since then, AEI has engaged a broad range of interested stakeholders who have contributed to this work in many ways and have been particularly valuable in helping to consider strategically the use of public policy to support the aims of the project.

Since the beginning, EPLC has made two commitments concerning AEI. The first is the completion of this report, the core of which is a set of recommendations for policymakers and other audiences. The second is to work with partner organizations to develop a public policy advocacy coalition and build individual and organizational advocacy capacity to promote the arts and education in Pennsylvania. That effort has begun and will intensify now that this report has been issued.

Why did EPLC choose to focus on the arts and education rather than the arts in education? EPLC's attention to this subject is rooted in a commitment to promote consideration of the following question: "What does it take to ensure the development of an educated citizenry in Pennsylvania?" This question implicates the deeply transformative, educational nature of arts experiences for citizens of all ages and the need to foster increased collaboration between the traditional education and arts communities. Instead of focusing exclusively on youth and arts in traditional school settings, EPLC recognizes the value of engaging the growing range of organizations invested in arts programming and seeks to provoke imaginative thinking about complementary public policies to promote robust cultural communities all across Pennsylvania.

Although it was not formally launched until the spring of 2011, AEI undertook a substantial amount of planning activity prior to that, including extensive meetings across the state with individual arts and education leaders (including staff of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and Pennsylvania Department of Education) and regional meetings in Harrisburg, Allentown, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh with groups of arts and education stakeholders to begin to assess the current state of affairs and need for public policy. During the planning period, AEI also developed an inventory of interested organizations, along with their policy positions and advocacy efforts. Since the launch, key activities have included:

- ❖ Working with a 32-member Study Group to help guide the project and develop its recommendations, although Study Group members understood from the start that EPLC would bear sole responsibility for this report. A list of Study Group members appears in Appendix B. The Study Group held four full-day meetings in Harrisburg during 2011 and January 2012 as well as several conference call meetings.
- ❖ Consulting with a 13-member Advisory Committee of state and national experts to provide a broader context for AEI's work and to suggest strategic direction. A list of Advisory Committee members appears in Appendix C. The Advisory Committee met via conference call six times during 2011 and 2012.
- ❖ Thoroughly reviewing current Pennsylvania and other state and national policies affecting the arts and education.
- ❖ Developing a website ([aei-pa.org](http://aei-pa.org)), social media presence, and publishing an online newsletter, the *AEI Note*.
- ❖ Convening a day-long Arts and Education Symposium on October 13, 2011 at the State Museum of Pennsylvania, co-sponsored by Citizens for the Arts in Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators, Pennsylvania School Boards Association, Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historical Organizations, Pennsylvania Art Education Association, and Pennsylvania Music Educators Association.
- ❖ Holding eight Arts and Education Regional Community Forums in Altoona, Enola (near Harrisburg), Allentown, Pittsburgh, Erie, Scranton, Williamsport, and Philadelphia between May and November 2011.
- ❖ Commissioning several arts and education questions in a public opinion poll of Pennsylvania voters during autumn 2011.
- ❖ Sponsoring an interactive online scenario of a general arts and education policy agenda during autumn 2011.

- ❖ Surveying school superintendents, arts educators, and arts organizations from December 2011 through February 2012.

All of these activities were possible only with the assistance of the many individuals and organizations who provided encouragement and support throughout the past two years, and EPLC expresses appreciation to them all.

Over the course of the Initiative's first year, research revealed many examples of successful PK-12 education programs from around the country designed with the arts as paramount. Often these programs are the result of collaborations among a variety of partners, including community arts organizations and private foundations working closely with agencies of state government and state universities. Many such programs are inventoried in a major 2011 report from the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.<sup>45</sup>

During the coming advocacy phase of the Arts and Education Initiative, EPLC will work with leaders in the arts and education communities to further examine some of these efforts. While we are not prepared to make a recommendation about these subjects at this time, they warrant further consideration.

For example, well-documented school victories have resulted from the A+ Schools Program, which began in North Carolina in the mid-1990s and now has a significant presence in five other states. A+ Schools is a comprehensive model for whole-school reform that views the arts as fundamental to how teachers teach and how students learn in all subjects. Schools that belong to the A+ networks include drama, dance, music, visual arts, technology, and writing in their curricula, and these forms of daily instruction are also integrated within non-arts content areas. In North Carolina, the A+ Schools began with private dollars, but the program was swiftly supported by state government. It was administered through the University of North Carolina at Greensboro beginning in 2003, and in 2010 it found its current home within the North Carolina Arts Council as the numbers of its state champions grew.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to strong arts education program configurations for school audiences, it is important to note that many states have adopted education policies that are

opening up new possibilities for arts learning to flourish, and some are promising candidates for consideration in Pennsylvania. In a policy climate favoring high-stakes testing—frequently to the detriment of engaging students intellectually, emotionally, and socially—some states have begun to address a growing need in public schools for creative and personalized learning opportunities. These states are designing public indices that measure creative learning opportunities in schools and thereby promote the availability and significance of such opportunities. Massachusetts established a commission

that designed a low-cost index to measure the number of creative opportunities in all schools.<sup>47</sup> In Oklahoma, Governor Mary Fallin appointed her Secretaries of Education and Commerce to work in a public-private partnership to design the Oklahoma Innovation Index. In January 2012, the California Senate approved legislation to establish a task force, and legislation has also been filed in Nebraska. Pennsylvanians should better understand how efforts like these can contribute to assuring all students have relevant and meaningful opportunities to learn.



Inherit the Wind, 2009, Parkland High School. Photo by Frank Mittman.