THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

August 2009

Dear School and Education Community Leaders:

At this time when you are making critical and far-reaching budget and program decisions for the upcoming school year, I write to bring to your attention the importance of the arts as a core academic subject and part of a complete education for all students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) defines the arts as a core subject, and the arts play a significant role in children's development and learning process.

In June, we received the 2008 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the Arts results for music and visual arts. I was reminded of the important role that arts education plays in providing American students with a well-rounded education. The arts can help students become tenacious, team-oriented problem solvers who are confident and able to think creatively. These qualities can be especially important in improving learning among students from economically disadvantaged circumstances. However, recent NAEP results found that only 57 percent of 8th graders attended schools where music instruction was offered at least three or four times a week, and only 47 percent attended schools where visual arts were offered that often.

Under ESEA, states and local school districts have the flexibility to support the arts. Title I, Part A of ESEA funds arts education to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students. Funds under Title II of ESEA can be used for professional development of arts teachers as well as for strategic partnerships with cultural, arts, and other nonprofit organizations. In addition, the Department's Arts in Education program supports grants for model program development and dissemination and for professional development for arts educators. Moreover, local school districts can use funds under the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act for the arts along with other district expenses.

Because of the importance of the arts in a well-rounded curriculum, the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) plans to undertake a survey to assess the condition of arts education in grades K-12. This fall, elementary and secondary principals will be asked about their schools' offerings in music, dance, theater, and visual arts. Next spring, NCES will survey elementary classroom teachers as well as music and visual arts specialists at the elementary and secondary levels about their programs and resources. In early 2011, the Department expects to begin reporting findings from this comprehensive profile, the first since the 1999-2000 school year. This data will help practitioners and policymakers make more informed decisions about arts education.

We encourage you to visit the Department's Web site for arts education at http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/programs.html to learn more about our grant programs and find resources to meet the challenges ahead. Together, we can and should do better for America's students.

Sincerely,

/s/

Arne Duncan