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April 22, 2009

Dr. Eric J. Smith
Commissioner
Florida Department of Education
325 West Gaines Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400

Dear Commissioner Smith:

We would like to call your attention to the data supplied recently by the Department of Education regarding fine arts credits for high school students. It appears that Florida students confirm national studies: the more arts credits achieved, the better student achievement on SAT and FCAT and a greater likelihood of high school graduation.

Looking at last year's cohort of 12th graders:

- For the general population, the more music and arts classes taken, the higher student achievement by all measures (SAT, FCAT Reading, Writing, Math)
- For students on "free and reduced lunch," an indicator of socioeconomic levels, the more music and arts classes taken, the higher the student achievement in all measures (SAT, FCAT Reading, Writing, Math)
- For students divided by ethnicity, the more music and arts classes taken, the higher the student achievement in all measures.
- The more arts classes taken, the less likely a student is to dropout of the cohort group.

Given these measures (graduation rate, SAT, FCAT Reading, Writing, and Math) are the primary means established by the Department of Education and the Legislature for evaluating student achievement, and given that the arts have a significant, positive impact, we must conclude that the arts are an important element of the curriculum.

While undoubtedly there will be curriculum reductions in some areas by school districts, the Department of Education should do all possible to encourage principals and superintendents to ensure the continuation of music and other arts programs (visual art, drama, dance).

It is rare to find a curricular area that demonstrates such wide effect on student achievement and reaches across ethnic and socio-economic barriers. By the data provided, it is clear the arts do just that. Given that student achievement gains appear to increase with sequential arts

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instruction, it would be counter-intuitive to cut programs at elementary, middle, or high school levels.

It is also apparent that many students have had opportunities in the arts reduced because of remediation requirements. Policies of the Department should encourage student participation in the arts and encourage schools to offer the arts in ways that allow time and access in the schedule. If changes in statute are necessary for such encouragement, we welcome your recommendations for the 2010 legislative session. We thought you might want to share the data with the 67 superintendents and add your insight from the attached data.

Sincerely,



Stephen R. Wise

Sincerely,



Nancy C. Detert

SRW/cc

cc: Representative Anitere Flores