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April 3rd, 2019

Dr. Brian Maher - Superintendent of Schools  
Instructional Planning Center  
201 East 38th St.  
Sioux Falls, South Dakota 57105

Dear Dr. Maher,

Arts South Dakota was recently made aware of a proposed schedule changes to fine arts and physical education in the curriculum, after many of our constituents reached out to us with great concern. While we fully understand the difficulty scheduling presents, and applaud the goals of increasing reading ability amongst our student population, we must register our strong concern that this move will be detrimental to students, and cause far more harm than benefit.

We know you are a strong supporter of the arts, and we hope your understanding of their benefits will help the district to reconsider these changes. As a reminder, beyond enriching the inner lives of the students, the arts also provides many tangible impacts to educational outcomes, including:

- **5X LESS LIKELY TO DROP OUT** – Low-income students who participate in the arts, both in school and after school, have a dropout rate of just 4 percent—five times lower than their peers.<sup>1</sup>
- **2X AS LIKELY TO GRADUATE COLLEGE** – Low-income students who are highly engaged in the arts are more than twice as likely to graduate college than their peers with no arts education.<sup>1</sup>
- **SUCCEED IN SCHOOL** – Research connects learning music to improved verbal memory, second language pronunciation accuracy, reading ability, and executive functions in youth.<sup>2</sup> Students with an education rich in the arts also earn higher grade point averages and score higher on the SAT. These gains hold true regardless of socioeconomic status, which means that where at-risk students are getting arts education, it is helping to close the achievement gap.<sup>1</sup>
- **SUCCEED IN WORK** – 72% of business leaders say that creativity is the number one skill they are seeking when hiring. Students who participate in a robust arts education are more prepared for the demands of the modern workforce.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arts Education Navigator: Facts & Figures. Americans for the Arts.

<sup>2</sup> How musical training affects cognitive development: rhythm, reward and other modulating variables. Frontiers in Neuroscience.



The arts teach students innumerable lessons, and are core to learning, not ancillary to them. Creative problem solving is key to developing a self-driven learner, and life-long growth. **Cutting these programs, will in the end, provide for worse outcomes for the students who need the help the most.**

*We also reach out to you as a statewide organization with the understanding that the Sioux Falls School District is a leader and example across our state. Many of your colleagues look to your actions as precedent, and we are concerned that other school districts that have even less of a focus on the arts will use this as an excuse to consider further cuts to these necessary programs.*

Arts South Dakota supports the desired goals as stated in the curriculum changes, but we strongly urge you to reconsider the methods used, and to do more research into why this change will prove detrimental to your student population. If you have time and availability, I would be available to meet or talk on the phone any time to further discuss these questions and concerns.

Best regards,

Jim Speirs  
Executive Director  
Arts South Dakota

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