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Top 10 in Arts Education 2015

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Each December, I have the pleasure to reflect alongside colleagues of the Americans for the Arts' [Arts Education Advisory Council](#) (<http://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/networks-and-councils/arts-education-network/council/matt-darrigo>) about what happened in arts education in America over the course of the previous year. It is truly one of my favorite activities – a chance to celebrate big accomplishments, learn from incidents that were not-so-good, and identify trends which may crop up in our work in 2016.

Last year, as [we looked back over 2014](#) (<http://blog.americansforthearts.org/2015/01/09/arts-education-ten-things-to-remember-from-2014>), we discussed STEAM, creative youth development, standards, new reports, resources for specific student populations, mayors and more. Some things continued this year, and some things did not – check out the list below!

A News Education Law in America – ESSA!

Since the summer, Americans for the Arts – and most education interested folks – began tracking movement on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was most recently authorized in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) bill of 2001. The U.S. has operated with no federal education legislation since 2007, and this movement was the first of its type in 14 years! Over the course of hearings, debates, and bill filings, the [new bill](http://blog.americansforthearts.org/2015/12/02/%E2%80%9Cwaiving%E2%80%9D-goodbye-to-no-child-left-behind) (<http://blog.americansforthearts.org/2015/12/02/%E2%80%9Cwaiving%E2%80%9D-goodbye-to-no-child-left-behind>) contained 11 arts-friendly provisions! On December 10, 2015, [the president signed the bill into law](http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/legislative-news/essa-enacted) (<http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/legislative-news/essa-enacted>) ensuring that [arts education be a part of the education of every child](http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/americans-for-the-arts-news/in-essa-arts-are-part-of-well-rounded-education) (<http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/americans-for-the-arts-news/in-essa-arts-are-part-of-well-rounded-education>) in America!

Arts Education For Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Accessibility is a major issue in the field of arts and culture and has been for years. In 2015, the field of arts education began to tackle a specific segment of this work – young people who fall on the autism spectrum. The University of Northern Iowa hosted a [symposium](http://www.uni.edu/unicalendar/autism-and-arts-education-symposium/04-24-2015-0) (<http://www.uni.edu/unicalendar/autism-and-arts-education-symposium/04-24-2015-0>) to discuss strategies in this work in the spring. Most notably, Lincoln Center Education in partnership with expert theatre makers and others, produced a new show [Up and Away](http://family.lincolncenter.org/events/up-and-away) (<http://family.lincolncenter.org/events/up-and-away>), which was specifically made for young people with autism spectrum disorders. The show was met with [critical acclaim](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/26/theater/up-and-away-for-young-audiences-who-dont-want-surprises.html?_r=0) (http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/26/theater/up-and-away-for-young-audiences-who-dont-want-surprises.html?_r=0). Now, the challenge will be to make replicable models and spread the good work.

Arts Education and Public Art Work Together

Public art has been a part of public schools for [hundreds of years](http://blog.americansforthearts.org/2015/05/04/the-intersection-of-public-art-and-arts-education) (<http://blog.americansforthearts.org/2015/05/04/the-intersection-of-public-art-and-arts-education>). In 2015, the field of public art and arts education came together to open a [dialogue](https://artsu.americansforthearts.org/products/series-current-trends-in-public-art) (<https://artsu.americansforthearts.org/products/series-current-trends-in-public-art>) about why schools do this, how we can do it better, and how artists, educators and administrators can tackle the unique set of challenges when doing this work. I would expect many new tools and resources from this work in the coming years.

Teaching Artists Professionalize and Debate New Challenges

In 2015, Americans for the Arts honored teaching artist, Eric booth, with their annual leadership award in arts education. Erik [spoke about the changing field of teaching artistry](http://blog.americansforthearts.org/2015/06/01/the-field-of-teaching-artistry) (<http://blog.americansforthearts.org/2015/06/01/the-field-of-teaching-artistry>) its professionalization and some of its current challenges like credentialing. In some places – like New York City – teaching artists have been organized for decades; however, in California, many organizations are popping up to further engage in this work, like the [Teaching Artist Support Collaborative](http://tascofcalifornia.org/) (<http://tascofcalifornia.org/>). Others are being formed nationally, like the [Teaching Artists Guild](http://teachingartistsguild.org/) (<http://teachingartistsguild.org/>). More will be coming out of this field in the coming years, I have no doubt.

States Adopt New Arts Education Standards

With the release of the new National Arts Standards in October 2014, 2015 saw the first wave of states adopting new standards in America. The last large wave like this was seen after the release of the 1994 Arts Standards. Americans for the Arts, as part of the [National Coalition for Core Arts Standards](http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/) (<http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/>) has been tracking the adoptions and will soon report out on the state of arts education standards in America. However, some states are openly discussing their process, like [Montana](http://blog.americansforthearts.org/2015/12/16/montana-arts-standards-an-interview-with-superintendent-denise-juneau) (<http://blog.americansforthearts.org/2015/12/16/montana-arts-standards-an-interview-with-superintendent-denise-juneau>).

We Are Still Talking About Access and Equity

We are still talking – and that’s good! The topics of access and equity are essential to our work in arts education. In 2015, we saw New York City address the gaps it saw in 2014 with an infusion of \$23m from city coffers, which resulted in [excellent data](http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/art-in-the-news/nyc-releases-annual-arts-in-schools-report-2014-15) (<http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/art-in-the-news/nyc-releases-annual-arts-in-schools-report-2014-15>). And with data that’s been collected, we saw advances in the sharing and utilization of that data like with the new [interactive dashboard](http://artsednj.org/reports-and-data/interactive-school-performance-dashboard/) (<http://artsednj.org/reports-and-data/interactive-school-performance-dashboard/>) launched in New Jersey.

It is not all about access and equity for arts education, though; the field has also been addressing how arts education can act as a conduit to schools and programs achieving their own goals in access and equity within the greater educational context. There is no doubt more work to be done in this area.

The Arts are Achieving the Goals of Title I

As the largest pot of money for school funding from the federal government, Title I is one of the most discussed programs of the U.S. Department of Education. In states, Title I directors often grapple with how to best achieve the goals of the program. However, in 2014, the [state of California worked](http://artsed411.org/blog/2014/03/embracing_arts_education_achieve_title_1_goals) (http://artsed411.org/blog/2014/03/embracing_arts_education_achieve_title_1_goals) its way toward bringing the arts into the conversation. 2015 saw this work expand to other states and influence work throughout the country. The [California Alliance for Arts Education](http://artsed411.org/) (<http://artsed411.org/>) launched a [new site](http://www.title1arts.org/) (<http://www.title1arts.org/>) about their work (and [Arizona](http://www.arizonatitle1arts.org/) (<http://www.arizonatitle1arts.org/>), too!). As Title I remains a part of ESSA, this conversation is sure to continue and spread to more states.

State Level Victories Abound

With the passage of ESSA, more power has been returned to the states for educational decision making. However, prior to this new law, states were hard at work already making decisions about arts education for their students. With a mix of good and bad news throughout the year, I would say the arts fared well! For example, in [Indiana](http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/art-in-the-news/indiana-board-of-education-ensures-arts-education-for-all-students) (<http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/art-in-the-news/indiana-board-of-education-ensures-arts-education-for-all-students>), when the state board of education wanted to remove the high school arts graduation requirement, students and parents fought back and kept the policy in place. In [Massachusetts](http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/art-in-the-news/massachusetts-legislature-overrides-governors-veto-and-restores-state-arts-funding-increase) (<http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/art-in-the-news/massachusetts-legislature-overrides-governors-veto-and-restores-state-arts-funding-increase>), the legislature approved more money than ever before for arts education and creative youth development. In [South Carolina](http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/art-in-the-news/south-carolina-ensures-arts-education-for-all-students) (<http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/art-in-the-news/south-carolina-ensures-arts-education-for-all-students>), the state board of education ensured that all students have access to arts education.

[the-news/south-carolina-legislature-restores-1-million-in-arts-education-funding](#)), with a governor who previously defunded the arts time and time again, 2015 saw a huge increase to arts education designated funding. [Iowa](#) (<http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/art-in-the-news/iowa-governor-approves-fine-arts-position-in-iowa-department-of-education>) saw the arts position at the Department of Education filled. Overall, it was a good year for state level arts education.

Creative Aging and Artful Aging: Arts Education for All Ages

We all know that the arts can transform lives. In the past few years, there has been a bank of research on how the arts [transform the lives of seniors](#) (<http://blog.americansforthearts.org/2015/11/24/transforming-lives-through-music-%E2%80%93-even-among-seniors>). Creative aging and artful aging have become rooted in the work of arts education professionals across the country. The pedagogy may be slightly different, but teaching artists, arts programs and community-based organizations are working together more than ever to provide opportunity for arts education for senior citizens. [Aroha Philanthropies](#) (<http://www.arohaphilanthropies.org/>), [the National Center for Creative Aging](#) (<http://www.creativeaging.org/>), and the [Arizona Commission on the Arts](#) (<http://azarts.gov/news/announcing-az-creative-aging/>) are prime examples of this good work in 2015.

STEAM Moves to the Next Level

The STEM to STEAM movement has been on this list for several years now. However, 2015 was the biggest year yet for STEAM education. In 2013, we saw the launch of the [Congressional STEAM Caucus](#) (<http://stemtosteam.org/events/congressional-steam-caucus/>) and their resolution about the benefits of STEAM education. In 2014, we watched the launch of the [Innovation Collaborative](#) (<http://www.innovationcollaborative.org/>), a national organization which works to network the arts sciences and humanities to provide practical tools and resources for educators and organizations to promote innovation thinking. And in 2015, we watched STEAM come to [national recognition](#) (<http://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/americans-for-the-arts-news/ovation-foundation-the-president%E2%80%99s-committee-on-the-arts-and-the-humanities-americans-for-the-arts>) at the White house and in Congress, ultimately resulting in the [unanimously accepted amendment](#) (<http://www.artsactionfund.org/news/entry/huge-arts-education-win-in-congress-today>) to the ESSA from Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), who serves as co-chair of the STEAM Caucus. Personally, I can't wait to see what comes next!

Overall this was an incredibly productive year for arts education at the local, state and federal level. We watched how policy, advocacy and practice can enhance the education of students (of all ages!) especially in the arts. Cheers to a great 2015! Now, let's bring our energy forward to a productive 2016 as well!



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