

The logo for Education Week, featuring the words "EDUCATION WEEK" in a white, serif, all-caps font centered on a solid blue rectangular background.

Encouraging Schools to Use Title I Funds for Arts

By Jackie Zubrzycki on September 13, 2016 2:02 PM

It's [National Arts in Education Week](#), and in New Jersey, two new efforts are underway to help bring arts to more schools.

One is part of a growing trend of states encouraging schools to use Title I funds to support arts education; the other is a campaign aimed at helping the public advocate for arts education in local schools.

The \$1 million [Title I Arts Integration Pilot Program](#), announced earlier this month, is offering grants to schools in the state to create programs that will serve as models for how to use arts to improve schools.

Bob Morrison, the director of the New Jersey Arts Education Partnership, said that the state is hoping to remind schools that Title I money can be used for the arts, and that Title I funds are intended to help improve more than just math and reading test scores.

"Things like art programs are the very activities that help keep students in school and bring the community into the school," Morrison said.

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provides federal funds to schools serving economically disadvantaged students, has four goals: improving student achievement, increasing student engagement, increasing parent engagement, and improving school climate and culture. Advocates for arts education argue that arts in schools can help with any and all of those goals.

In 2004, Rod Paige, then the U.S. Secretary of Education, released a [letter to school administrators](#) clarifying that Title I money could be used to support arts education programs.

Despite that permission, many schools and states have been reluctant or unsure about using Title I funds for arts initiatives. Kristen Engebretsen, who supervised the program for Americans for the Arts until recently, said that accountability for reading and math scores under the federal No Child Left Behind Act had left some schools wary of focusing Title I funds on arts. It seemed too risky to them.

There are major exceptions: California has a [Title I Arts Initiative](#), as does [Arizona](#).

But in many cases, "school leaders still don't understand that an arts intervention is an appropriate use of Title I dollars," Engebretsen said in an email.

Arts education groups are hopeful that the new federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act, will encourage more schools to use federal funds to support arts education programs. The [arts are specifically listed as part of a "well-rounded education,"](#) and the law makes clear that Title I funds can be used for arts education.

States and districts that are already using Title I funds for school improvement take different approaches. Some use them to hire arts teachers. Others use them to train classroom teachers in arts integration or to partner with nonprofits.

In Arizona, funds can be used to purchase materials for arts education, for professional education for teachers on how to integrate the arts into instruction, for assessing and evaluating arts education programs, for working with outside community groups on arts instruction, and more. In California, the school districts in San Diego and Chula Vista are also using Title I funds as part of school improvement efforts. This video from the California Alliance for Arts Education highlights San Diego Unified's Title I Arts program:



Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/137775675>

Morrison of the New Jersey Arts Education Partnership said his state was looking at models from both Arizona and California.

Advocacy tools

New Jersey also announced another arts education initiative, [Arts Ed Now](#), yesterday. The New Jersey Arts Education Partnership created a site on which community members can see what arts programs are and aren't offered at their local schools. It also offers tools to help people advocate for the programs they'd like to see.

A new [poll from Rutgers University](#) indicates that 95 percent of New Jersey residents support arts in schools, but fewer have taken a student to an arts program, donated, or volunteered for the arts.

The Arts Education Partnership is hoping the campaign will help get every student in New Jersey access to arts education, increase the number of schools that offer more than two forms of art (including dance or theater alongside music and visual arts, for instance), and increase students' participation.

New Jersey is ahead of many other states in being able to track this kind of information. Earlier this year, the state released a census of arts programs across the state. Many states and even school districts don't have this kind of comprehensive information.

Other states and organizations are also marking Arts in Education Week. The Kentucky Arts Council is offering grants to bring [artists in to schools](#). National PTA is offering a [toolkit](#) for schools. And local news outlets around the country are using the occasion to tout their support for the arts or local arts offerings.