



Title I and the Arts — Yes, you can!

Posted by [Laura Smyth](#), Apr 05, 2016

For the last four years, The California Alliance for Arts Education has been pursuing its Title I Initiative, an effort to clarify confusion around the appropriate use of Title I funds for arts education programs, and to provide tools to school leaders on the ground for planning and implementation. For us, the initiative is not just about finding ways to provide more access to arts education—it's about providing a high quality education, full stop, for every student. That high quality education must and should include the arts.

Title I funds comprise a federal grant program dedicated to closing the achievement gap for the nation's most disadvantaged students. They are the largest block of federal education funds distributed to the states. Title I spending in 2014 was \$14.5 billion overall; California's share was \$1.7 billion. Every school district received at least some Title I funding, and for many schools with over 40% low-income students, Title I funds represent a potentially powerful supplement to their annual programs. These "whole school" Title I programs have a great deal of flexibility, and funds can be combined with other federal and state grants to maximize impact. However, a fear of reprisal—the potential revocation of funding—was keeping schools and districts from including arts education in their strategies for achieving Title I goals, or were moving forward in a way that would draw no attention to those practices.

Once we clarified the permissibility of dedicating Title I funds to arts-based initiatives, our strategy was simple—get the word out as clearly and often as possible. We met with school and community leaders around the state, and based on their recommendations, we created an online resource, title1arts.org. The website is built around the year-long planning cycle for Title I school wide programs, with each stage of the planning cycle having its own dedicated resource 'room' with detailed information, so that users can dig in as narrowly or as deeply as they choose. The 'Identifying A Strategy' resource room, for example, is dedicated to the Title I requirement of selecting a research-based strategy for a school wide Title I program. We developed a research matrix drawing from the Arts Education Partnership's ArtsEdSearch, with its over 200 vetted studies, that mapped the studies onto the four Title I goals—Student Achievement, Student Engagement, School Climate and Culture, and Parent Involvement. Once schools have identified the biggest needs in their school community, they can use the research matrix to help select an appropriate arts-based strategy or strategies to help meet those needs.

title1arts.org contains a lot of information, and in our current phase of the initiative we're trying to break down the process from planning to action as far as Title I is

concerned. We're learning a lot from districts like San Diego Unified, standing at the vanguard of early action, and with their help are taking those lessons around the state. Working with CCSESA, the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, we're piloting trainings at the county and district level this fall to help them operationalize the website, and build the alliances and relationships necessary to move from idea to implementation. To that end, we've developed a two-page flyer, *Four Things You Can Do to Start the Conversation about Title I and the Arts*, with action steps linked back to resources available on the website, and are building our training model based on those action steps.

From the beginning we've tried to keep in mind that Title I is not just a statewide, but a national program. We know we aren't the only ones doing this work, and everything we've created has been developed with an eye to—we hope—easy adaptability in other states and locales. Our first test of this adaptability came last fall, when we embarked on a partnership with Arizona—no stranger to working through the labyrinth of arts and Title I—to develop an Arizona-based version of the title1arts.org website.

The Arizona-specific website debuted in October 2015, and can be accessed from the website homepage. It follows the basic website template, but information has been adapted on every page to speak to the specifics of Arizona state law, policy and procedures. We are hoping to work with a number of other states in the near future. With the passage of the new ESSA law, state-based advocacy is becoming even more important and effective, and we all have an opportunity to get out ahead where arts education in general, and Title I in particular, are concerned. We're excited about where we're going, and glad to be traveling with friends along the way.



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