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LIVING PROOF: The decline in Northeast Arts Education - and what can be done about it.

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LIVING PROOF:

The decline in Northeast Arts Education - and what can be done about it.

Christopher Comer

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Introduction

All my life, I have been raised and tempered by the public schooling systems of the Northeastern states. As I near the completion of my undergraduate studies, I can look back at all my years of education and see how my personality and skill-sets were forged into what they are today. Now, in the age of the No Child Left Behind Act, and in the middle of a war overseas, public schools nationwide and here in the Northeast are finding it increasingly difficult to produce the test results and proof of knowledge that is being asked of them. This mismatch has caused school systems to begin prioritizing teachings in a very lopsided fashion, diverting funding from certain subject areas in order to make the government's grade in the subjects that are deemed more important.

With this project, I intend to show both that the arts are one of these areas that is losing funding, and why the arts are just as important as any other subject area in education. Furthermore, I will explore why this prioritization is taking place, and how long it has been happening, as well as discover the long-term effects of a narrowed education. Finally, I will discuss several ways that organizations nationwide are fighting to counteract this trend, and what can be done on the personal level to join that fight.

This project is very personal to me, as I have spent most of my college career starting and running a number of charity groups to raise money for this and other important causes. The overall objective of this project is to both raise awareness about this issue, and to inspire the change that is necessary to ensure a complete education.

The Past: A History of Education

In order to understand the current situation regarding education budgets, we must first take a look at the historical trend. The data presented in the next section comes from the fiscal year 2008 historical budget analysis[1] as documented and published by the Office of Management and Budget, from the Executive Office of the President of the United States. This document contains a history of the United States Budget broken down by department and division, and dating back in some cases to 1940. The applicable sections we will be looking at here are the Outlays by Agency, and this data only shows actual figures from 1962-2006 (with estimates to 2012).

In looking at this data, the federal trend over the last 40 or more years is very clear, and while itself inconclusive, it is a very important part of the puzzle that I will be presenting to you here. As I have spent my time searching out and exploring these various forms of data, I have personally noticed the interesting trend that the Federal Government has always only been responsible for a very small portion of the total Education Budget. I should note now that this has always been the case, and in fact it has always been public knowledge that state and local agencies were responsible for the majority of education funding. I never knew, however, just how large the gap between funding agencies was.

[1] http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2008/pdf/hist.pdf

The 20th Century's Budgeting of Education

As you can plainly see in Figure 1, Education budgeting on the federal level has always been far surpassed by both Military and Health and Human Services. Though the military budget was cut down during the Clinton Administration (1992-2000), it has been raised incredibly high since September 11, 2001.

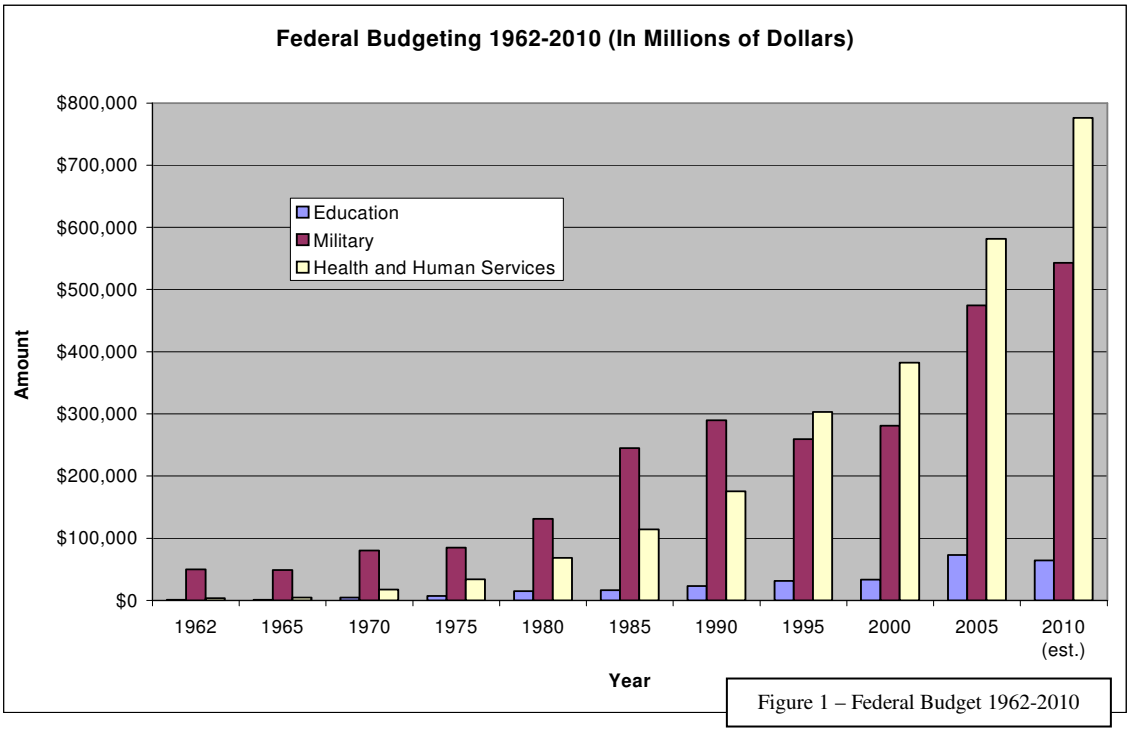


Figure 1 – Federal Budget 1962-2010

While America is not commonly regarded as a nation that spends large amounts of money on Health and Human Services[2], since 1995 the budget for this category has far exceeded that of the US Military. The Department of Health and Human Services, according to their website, undertakes a large variety of tasks including biomedical research, disease prevention, emergency medical preparedness, environmental and

[2] http://www.hhs.gov/

chemical response, and their budget includes that of the Food and Drug Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and nearly 300 other programs.

You will note from the chart that, throughout this entire span of nearly 50 years, the total amount of the education budget is incredibly small compared to these other two divisions. This large imbalance, while plainly visible in Figure 1, is even more astounding in Figure 2, which looks at the percentages of the total budget for each of these three categories.

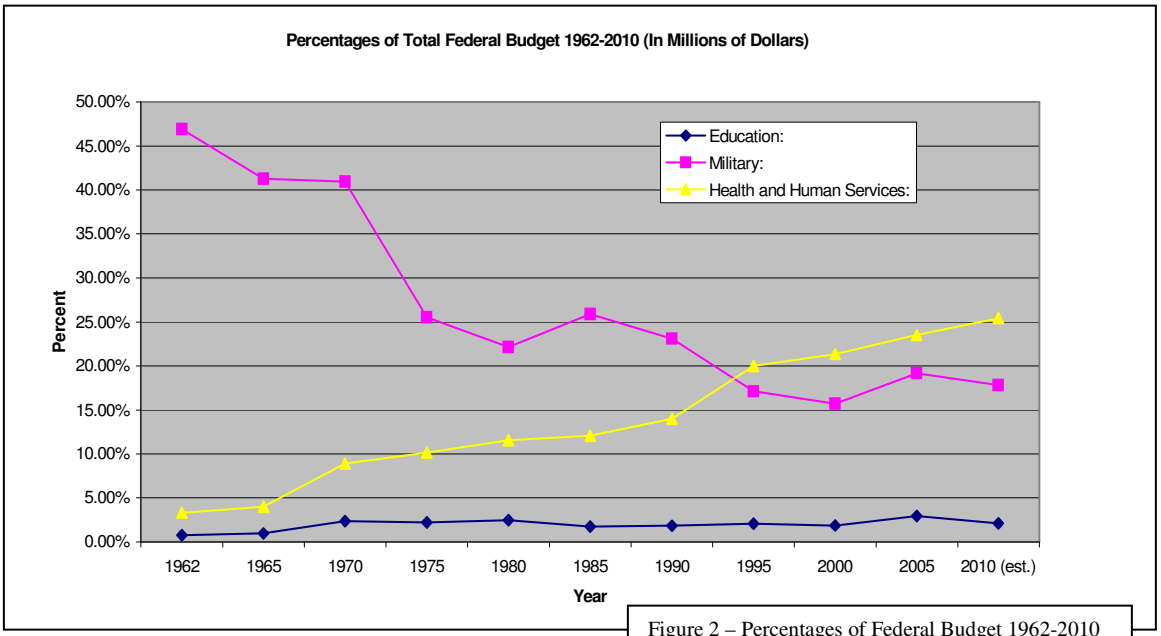


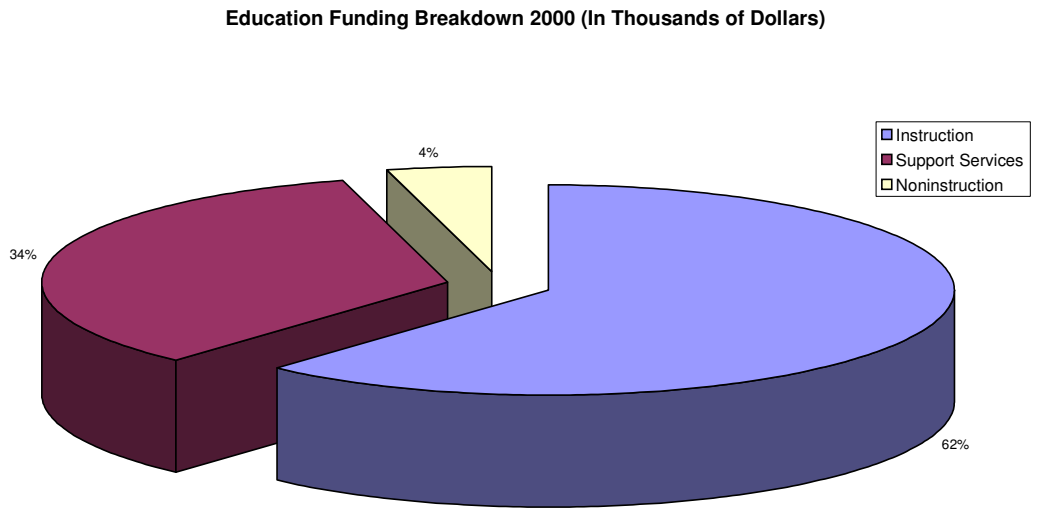
Figure 2 – Percentages of Federal Budget 1962-2010

You can see here that education has always been a very small percentage of the federal budget. Indeed, not once between 1962 and 2005 did the education budget account for more than 2.95% of the total federal budget.

So what does this mean? The incredibly low funding from the federal level means that states and local school districts are responsible for raising the funding for their own primary and secondary schools, and this necessity presents a very complicated problem

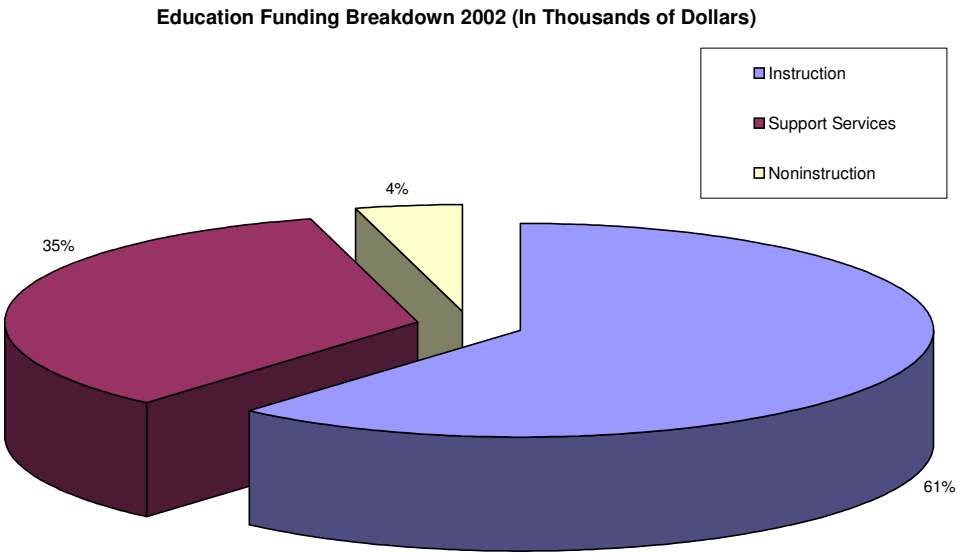
when the Federal Government, via the No Child Left Behind Act, begins asking for more from the schoolchildren.

The monies that are given by the Federal Government and raised by State and Local Agencies for education are divided into several sections that determine how they will be used.



At the beginning of George W. Bush's Presidency, 62% of all Education money went directly to Instruction; the actual teaching of America's Youth. In 2002, the first year of the No Child Left Behind Act, only 61% of the total education funding went towards instruction, while the remaining money went to pay teacher wages, run programs like bookstores and after-school clubs, and pay the bills in elementary and secondary schools. This 1% difference may seem insignificant, but I ask you to remember that this

one percent represents close to 4 Billion dollars that has been diverted from actual instruction to one of the secondary categories of education spending.



Before the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act, the money that did make a difference in the actual instruction of America's Youth was enough (though not by a large margin) to support and sustain almost all of the programs necessary to a well-rounded education, including tutelage in Math, Science, Reading, the Arts, Physical Education, Foreign Language, and other important subjects. Since the act has been passed, reports have been made nationwide and in the Northeast of some or many of these subjects receiving less attention in order to meet the goals set forth by the Federal Government in few specific subjects using the available resources (i.e. funding and time). It is therefore likely that if education funding were to be increased, these problems would be reduced or altogether eliminated.

The Present: Funding Allocation in the Current Age

While knowing the history of the federal budget is important, funding for specific school subjects has never really been an issue before the current presidential administration. Because this is a new trend, there is not a lot of data available to show any increase or decrease in certain school subjects directly, so we will have to examine the information that is available. To start, I will be looking into the financial situation of America's schools, specifically the Federal contribution to them. To do this, I will be analyzing data taken from the annual Department of Education Reports, as well as the 2008 Fiscal Year Budget History Report. Next, I will be taking a look at states nationwide, and the amount of funding per pupil that they are given.

A huge factor in today's education is the No Child Left Behind Act, signed by President George W. Bush in early 2002. Among the impacts of this Act are frequent high-pressure tests that are administered to students nationwide, accountability for schools and districts that do not produce students who can pass those tests, and (not necessarily by design) a decided focus on those subject that are tested while attention shifts away from those that aren't, such as the Arts and Physical Education. After I establish the general funding levels through the past several years, I will be looking at this Act and its immediate and long-term effects on the children in America's schools today.

Facts and Figures

We will begin by looking at the Federal Education Budgets since the late 1990's, ending the Clinton administration and welcoming in George W. Bush.

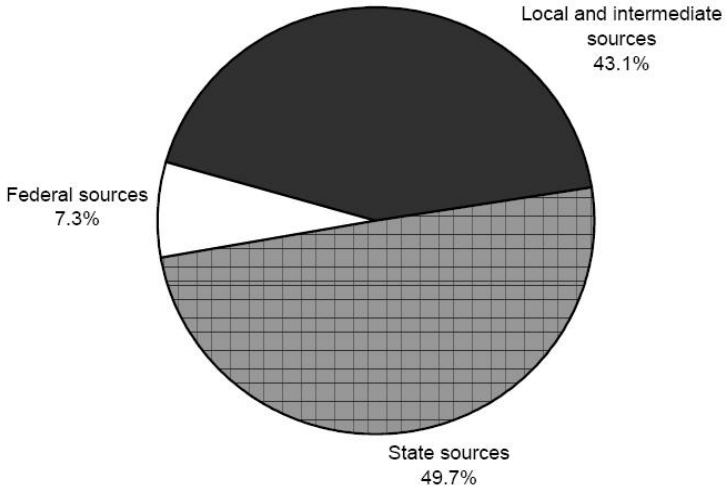
As shown below in a figure taken from the 2000-2001 Department of Education Report[3], Federal Monies only accounted for just over 7 cents on every dollar spent on education nationwide for the 2000-2001 school year, according to the US Department of Education. This first year of the new century, and also the last school year before both 9-11 and the No Child Left Behind Act, saw state governments providing almost half of every dollar, and other local and intermediate sources making up the 43% difference.

The total amount of monies raised in this school year for education was approximately $401 Billion (actually slightly less: $400,919,024,000[4]), of which the Federal Government saw itself responsible for just shy of $30 Billion. As far back as 1992, and probably farther, this 7% Federal Contribution has been about the normal level, and State and Local sources have made up the rest.

[3] http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pub_rev_exp.asp
[4] http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003362.pdf

Figure 1. The public education dollar: Revenues by source: School year 2000–01

(Total revenues: $401 billion)



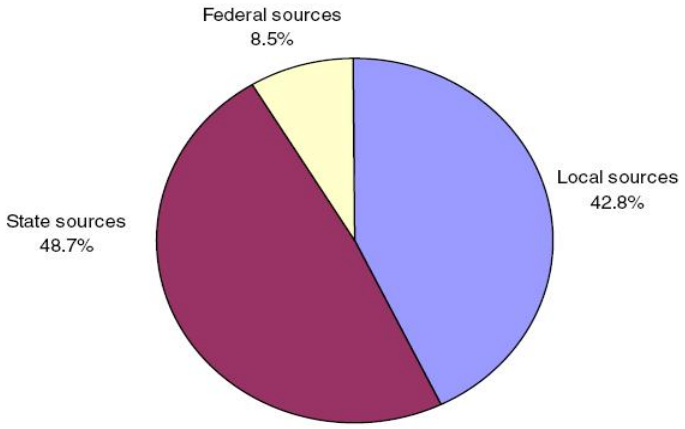
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "National Public Education Financial Survey," 2000–01.

In 2002-2003, the first full school year after NCLB went into effect, Federal monies rose to 8.5% of the total. While this rise at the federal level of funding obviously helped the total amount of funding available to educate America's Youth, State and local sources also made a significant increase in the amount of their funding contribution - from approximately 371 Billion in 2000 to just over 402 Billion in 2002[5].

[5] http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005353.pdf

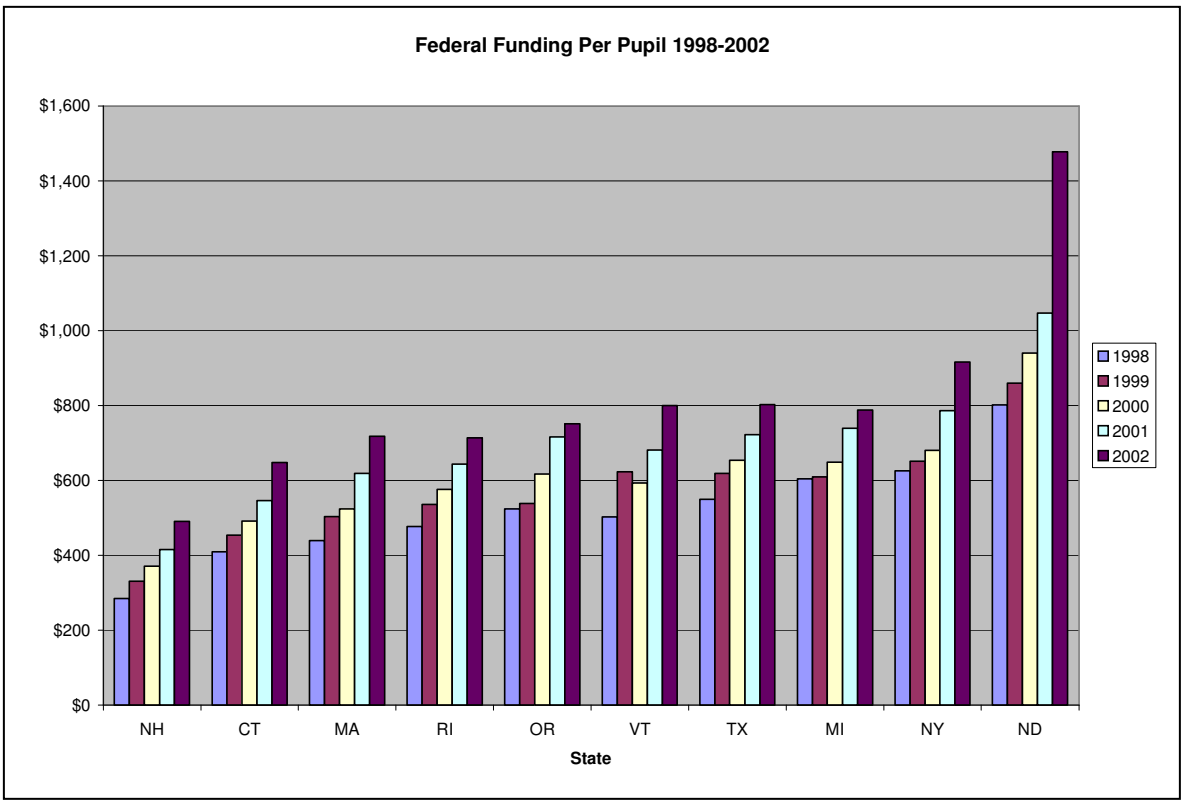
Figure 1. Revenues by source: School year 2002–03

[Total revenues: $440 billion]



SOURCE: Data reported by states to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "National Public Education Financial Survey," 2002–03.

Very interesting to note is *how* these federal monies were divided among the individual states.



In this chart created from Federal Data for 10 states – 5 from the Northeast (NH, CT, MA, RI, and VT) and 5 others from around the country (OR, TX, MI, NY, ND) – you can see that the federal funding per student is higher in the non-Northeastern states, and actually skyrockets in the state of North Dakota. A very interesting fact is that the fall enrollment in the state of North Dakota has actually declined from 114,927 in 1998[6] to 100,513 in 2002, and simultaneous to this decline, the federal government has increased its contribution to education in that state by more than 55 million dollars.

The consistently higher federal contribution per student in North Dakota is likely nothing more than an indicator of the states own inability to raise the funds necessary to educate its youth. According to a website called HearTheIssues.Com, there is no significant difference throughout all 50 states in student test scores for the No Child Left Behind Act based on either teacher salary[7] or the amount of money spent per pupil[8], where North Dakota ends up at number 33 on the list. This same website, which shows at least 3 Northeast states in the top 10 for each category, shows the average passing percentage for those states at just over 72%, exactly where the average percentage is across the board.

This website and its data, however, speak nothing for quality of education, much of which is hindered by the No Child Left Behind Act and its tendency to focus schools, teachers, and children on only a select few subjects and only interest them in a passing grade on a high pressure test.

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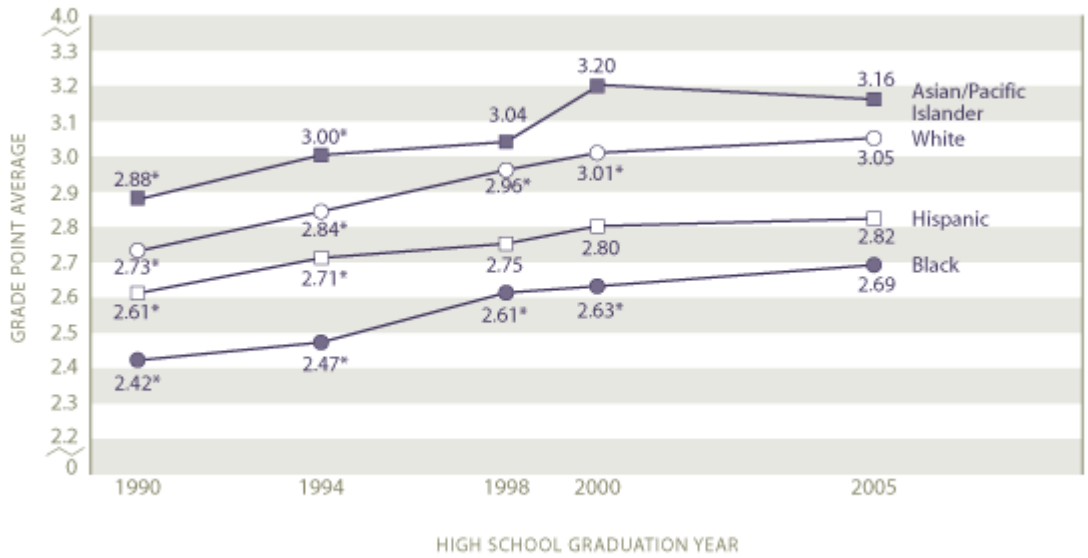
[6] http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001321.pdf
[7] http://heartheissues.com/educationsalaries.html
[8] http://heartheissues.com/educationfunding.html

The Reality of No Child Left Behind

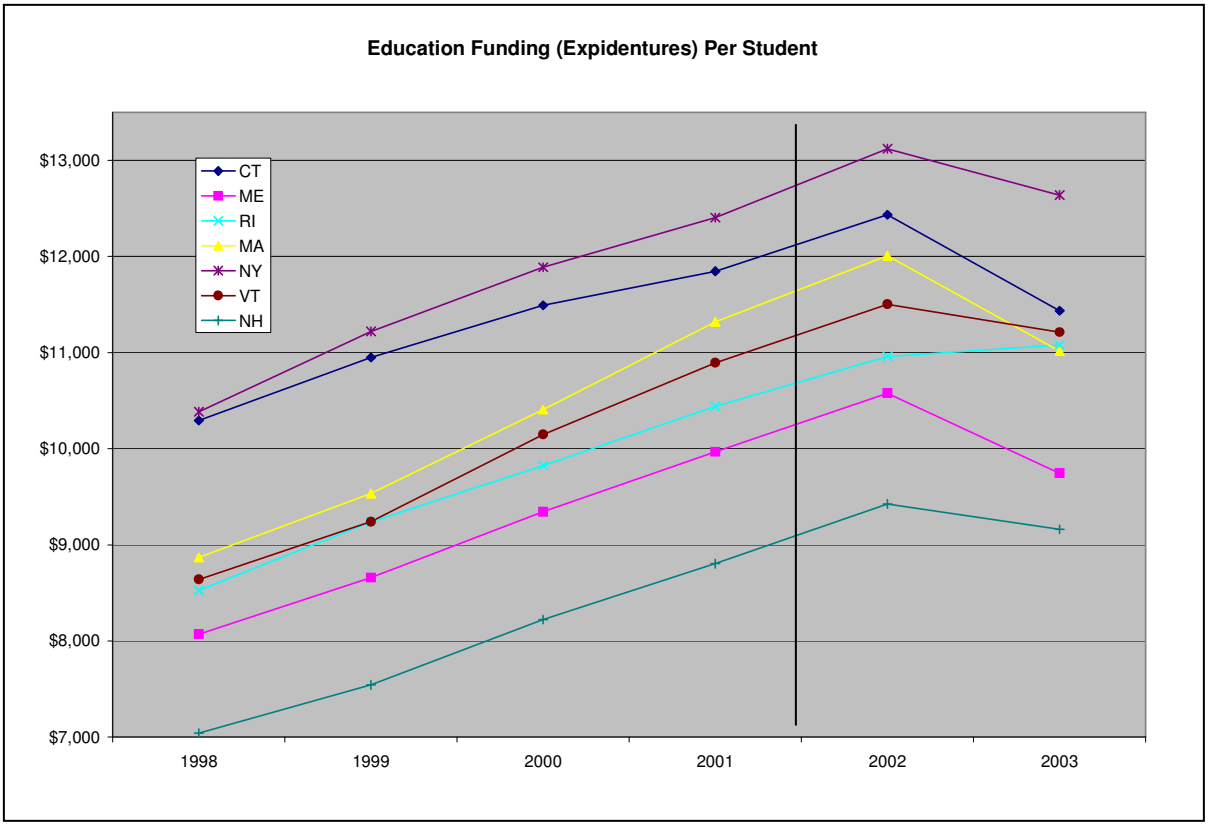
Since it was signed on January 8, 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (PL 107-110) has been a hot-button issue for students, parents, educators, and passersby across the nation. Critics say that the Act is ineffective, and causes "Teaching to the Test" rather than the valuable skills of critical thinking and problem solving that are supposed to be the foundations of education. Supporters say that the Act is working, and should be allowed to continue to do so, citing the Nation's report card and state data as their evidence.

The most controversial component of the Act is the method of ensuring stronger accountability for results: individual schools as well as the districts they reside in are both directly responsible for student performance, as the Act threatens to implement a variety of measures costly to both the school and the district if goals are not met. Schools are evaluated through annual school and district report cards, which ascertain whether schools are making adequate yearly progress (AYP). If a school falls below AYP levels, supplemental services must be provided by schools at no cost to the student—regardless of cost to the district, including programs like private and after-school tutoring. A multi-tiered program of corrective actions, up to and including privatization, will be imposed upon schools that continually do not demonstrate AYP.

The Nation's Report Card, a leading source cited by supporters of the Act, recently released its data for 2005 High School Graduates.

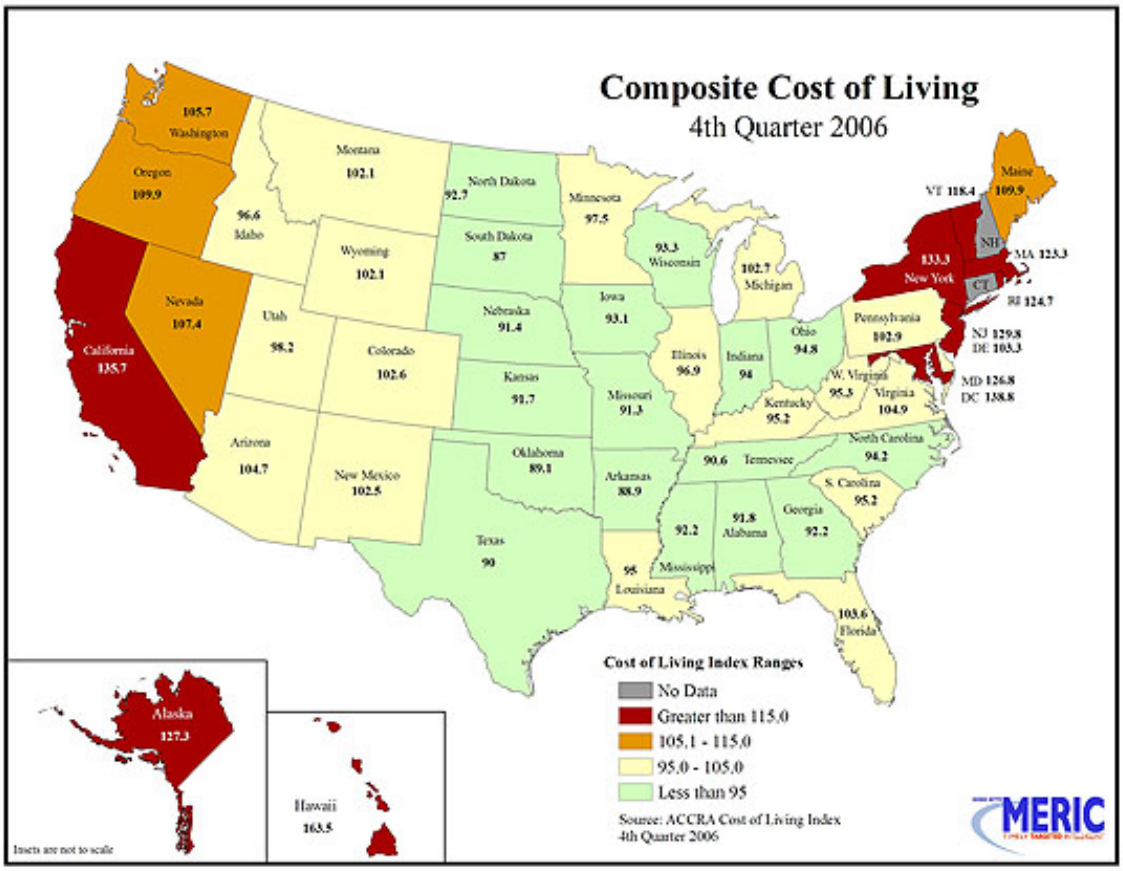


As you can see, the report clearly shows a decided increase in overall GPA since 1990, but what it does not show is any form of clear spike or rise in the last couple of years indicating the effect of the No Child Left Behind Act. While it may be too soon to determine the overall success of the Act for years or decades to come, any impact at all should be reflected using data from high school graduates beginning with the 2002-2003 school year as that student's final year of public secondary education. In fact, apart from the slight decline in Asian/Pacific Islander GPA, this chart appears to show that education reforms that predate the No Child Left Behind Act by more than a decade are responsible for the current positive effect on today's students.



Each of the northeastern states, as well as New York, is shown here with the data for each school year since 1998. The year listed is the year of the fall semester (so "1998" is the year 1998-1999). I have marked with a vertical line the approximate signing of the No Child Left Behind Act by President Bush. As you can see, though the school year immediately following this signing showed an increase in Expenditures Per Student, the following (2003-2004) school year showed significant decline, dropping even below the levels of the 01-02 school year in three states. Throughout this duration, however, the Northeast has remained above the national average (just under $9000/pupil in 2005) for expenditures. Aside from the fact that the national average in expenditures per pupil is already far too low to sustain well-rounded educations, the Northeast is the US region

which has the highest cost of living[9] with New Jersey and Rhode Island leading the way, beaten only individually by Hawaii, California, and Washington DC, as shown in this map:



Unfortunately, even having the advantage of additional funding does not necessarily give any advantage to the Northeast's schoolchildren. According to Neal McCluskey, an education-policy analyst at the Cato Institute, reporting for the National Review:

[9] http://www.missourieconomy.org/indicators/cost_of_living/index.stm

> "A partnership between the Long Beach Unified School District, the California State University at Long Beach, and an arts agency called Dramatic Results runs a project that the Department of Education reports "will provide systematic, illustrated information showing how to use basketry to provide quality arts instruction and how to integrate basketry into the academic curricula to strengthen instruction in math." This program, which literally uses basket weaving to help teach math, has received nearly a quarter of a million dollars from the federal government." [10]

Education needs to be taken more seriously by governments on every level, both nationwide and in the Northeast. While programs such as this receive more and more funding to teach math and science to students, more practical programs such as after school drama clubs and wood shops are falling by the wayside in order to mold our children into economic competitors. In 2002, a group called the Arts Education Partnership conducted a study which concluded that education in artistic subjects such as Drama, Music, Dance, and the Visual Arts have an academic effect – stating that students who include themselves in these studies tend to perform better than those who focus solely on academics. According to an article about the report:

> "[Research Coordinator James Catterall] says the studies suggest that arts education may be especially helpful to poor students and those in need of remedial instruction. "While education in the arts is no magic bullet for what ails many schools, the arts warrant a place in the curriculum because of their intimate ties to most everything we want for our children and schools," Catterall says. "[11]

In another document, which was compiled by the nations ten most important educational organizations (including the National Education Association, the National School Boards Association, and the American Association of School Administrators), the opening statement reads: "First, every student in the nation should have an education in the arts." The document goes on to say:

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[10] http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/mccluskey200407120836.asp
[11] http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2002-05-20-arts.htm

> "The arts should not be treated as extracurricular activities, but as integral core disciplines. In practice, this means that effective arts education requires sequential curricula, regular time-on-task, qualified teachers, and a fair share of educational resources. Similarly, arts instruction should be carried out with the same academic rigor and high expectations as instruction in other core subjects." [12]

This entire document, titled The Value and Quality of Arts Education: A Statement of Principles, was compiled by these education heavyweights as a plea to the American people, and as a document that could easily be used to educate those people on the importance of Arts Education. Unfortunately, no matter who signs this document it will not be making any headlines as a great step forward in the education of today. This report was made in January of 1999, and while true to every word it has not received nearly the attention it deserves. As this statement nears a decade in age, nationwide education is faltering and Arts Education is consistently and repeatedly becoming the first of many subjects to be the first off the metaphorical cart of our youth's education.

[12] http://www.menc.org/information/prek12/principl.html

First to Go

The No Child Left Behind Act, as well as the Nation's Report Card and many other areas of study look mainly at Mathematics, Reading, and Science as 'Core Subject Areas'. Of course, these subjects are crucial to education, but by focusing on these areas the Act and the resulting reports of the other studies can and likely will have a negative impact on the other areas of study, which are just as crucial to a well-rounded education. It is even so that the Nation's Report Card has begun to ignore these other areas in favor of the Core Subjects.

According to Americans for the Arts – a national Non-Profit organization – in text on their website:

> "Despite there being 10 core subjects, NCLB currently requires schools to report student achievement test results for only reading and mathematics. The law requires that all students in the country meet state-determined standards in core subjects by the year 2014. Because of the amount of change schools must see in student achievement, there are many reports of decreasing instruction time for other subjects, such as the arts. The Center on Education Policy has recently completed a report entitled From the Capital to the Classroom: Year Four of the No Child Left Behind Act. The report finds a majority of school leaders report gains in achievement, but 71 percent reported having reduced instructional time in at least one other subject to make more time for reading and mathematics. Elementary school leaders report a 22 percent decline in art and music instruction because of No Child Left Behind." [13]

Especially in the younger years, art and music can be vitally important to education – teaching not only the skills themselves but also inferring upon students increased coordination, visual and auditory recognition, and other basic yet necessary skill sets.

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[13] http://www.americansforthearts.org/services/arts_education/arts_education_015.asp

According to the College Board, administers of the SAT and other academic placement tests which, before NCLB, were often viewed as the standard of academic achievements, students who had participated in the Arts for four or more years on average scored 44 points better on the Math section, and 59 points better on the Verbal section of those tests than their non-artistic classmates[14]. These findings have been repeated across the board, with artistic students almost always faring better by a significant amount.

According to Dr. Ernest Boyer, of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching:

> "The arts are essential parts of the human experience, they are not a frill. We recommend that all students study the arts to discover how human beings communicate not only with words, but through music, dance, and the visual arts. During our visits (to schools) we found the arts to be shamefully neglected. Courses in the arts were the last to come and the first to go."[15]

It is time to stop this trend, and to put the Arts back in the schools where they have been lost. I will now take a look at some of what can be done to help accomplish this goal.

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[14] http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~faae/why.html
[15] http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/arts/dickinson_lrnarts.htm

The Future: What we can do to preserve Arts Education

Since 2003, when I was brought in on a plan to form a student group at the University of Rhode Island to hold concerts and other events as a way to raise money for charities, I have been changed both physically and mentally. In 2006, when that same student group planned and executed the largest single event to occur at the University in recent history, incorporating art in the forms of Music, Film, Photography, Painting, Sculpture, and the Spoken Word, I realized that no matter how much effort a handful of people put into something, it will never have the resounding effect that is necessary to enact change. Living Proof 2006, the event that I just mentioned, was a step forward for those involved, but without the support of a community, county, state, or even the nation, it was just another concert.

The 18-month preparation for Living Proof dominated my life for that period of time, and incited the increased passion in arts education that I carry with me today. I firmly believe that, if this event had been taken seriously from day 1, it would have been a much better result, and would have turned heads nationwide. The true missing element of Living Proof 2006 was the people, specifically the awareness of those people both local and nationally of the problems with Art Education. Because they did not know, and could not be shown these issues (a problem with Living Proof's Marketing), those people did not back this event, and it became a shadow of what the true vision for Living Proof should have been.

Now you know. Now you *can* do something. Lets talk about what can happen to change our children's future.

Political Changes

Since day one of the No Child Left Behind Act, politicians and citizens alike have questioned the methods and potential outcomes of its policies. Passed in the few short months after the tragedy of 9/11, NCLB still remains a question mark in many peoples' minds. The first step towards creating a better educational future for the youth of America is to remove, or at the very least heavily revise this Act and its methods. With NCLB off the books, the increased pressure to perform specifically in science and math will be removed, and schools will feel more at ease to explore programs in the arts as well as the standard book-driven education. Hopefully, the damage done to the education process by this Act will not in any way be irreversible.

The next step, politically, will be to appoint and elect government officials who are sensitive to education issues, and who appreciate the true complexity of a child's education. It is likely that persons with this understanding would have a background of Arts Education themselves, and having personally experienced the benefits and synergy of a well-rounded education, I expect that new laws and policies would be put in place along with additional funding to ensure that schoolchildren nationwide experience these benefits.

There is a growing opinion in many circles nationwide that, in addition to or possibly in lieu of additional funding, more hours should be added to the standard school day to enable teachers to spend more time on specific subjects without having to cut other ones out. This is an idea that, should NCLB remain in effect, could have a serious positive impact on the education of today's youth.

The Real World

Not all of us can change the world politically. Rather than feel overwhelmed by the task of changing the faces of America's government, I will now talk about how you, as one person, can single-handedly or with a small group of individuals greatly benefit Arts Education. There are many ways besides these that you can make a difference, so do not feel disappointed if one of these methods does not appeal to you.

Donate

Probably the simplest, fastest, and most efficient way to help in the effort to aid education is to donate either financially or physically to a local or national charity organization that is already focusing on this problem. Physical donations can include art materials to a local elementary school, photography equipment to a high school, or other similar donations. Financial donations, obviously, involve giving monies though check, credit card, or other method to a charity. These can often be advantageous to the charity or organization because of the ability gained to then purchase or acquire anything that is currently in need.

One of the more popular national organizations is Americans for the Arts, which specifically focuses on promoting arts education, and has offices in both New York and Washington, DC. Donations may be made to Americans for the Arts through their website[16] or in person at one of the many charitable events put on by this organization each year.

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[16] http://www.americansforthearts.org

A prime example of the power simple donations can have is outlined by the recent nationally televised fundraiser *Idol Gives Back*, where the popular TV show American Idol raised money for several causes both here in the United States and internationally, meant to benefit mostly the children wherever it went. This two-night event featured the stars of the show as well as other celebrities and artists both in studio and in Africa doing their part to show the worthy causes and to ask for the American People's donations[17]. Through such a popular method, this fundraiser was able to raise over $30 Million… within the first two hours of being on the air.

Volunteer

While more time consuming than standard donations, volunteer work is often regarded as a fulfilling and extremely gratifying experience. As a longtime volunteer myself, I can honestly tell you that at the end of the day any amount of work that went into your project was time well spent, and the looks on the faces of those you benefit, whether you see them or not, will more than show their appreciation.

Organizations nationwide are always on the lookout for volunteers, coordinators, and other new members, so check your local papers and television advertisements, as well as your town hall or library for more information.

[17] http://www.americanidol.com/idolgivesback/

Create

If Donating and Volunteering aren't enough for you, you may want to consider actually creating your own charity or event. While a lot of work, the satisfaction of seeing a project like this through to the end is undeniable, and in fact may well inspire you to want to try again, bigger and better each time. Though short lived, I was one of a group of college students that started up both a student group at The University of Rhode Island and a nationally recognized Nonprofit Organization, the latter of which has since gone under. The end result, however, was not as important as showing and knowing that it could be done.

In short, whatever you can do to help aid the arts and arts education is a great step forward in the progress of this country. It is these subjects that truly form the well-rounded individuals who will lead our society in the decades and centuries to come.

Awareness

As a final note, I implore you, the reader, to do whatever you can, whenever you can to help arts education. Even if that help is nothing more than spreading the word about this issue, your contribution to rectifying this problem will be immense. As a nation, many states and individuals alike are either ignorant or blind to the fact that the decline in arts education is a real issue, and without the word of people who know the truth, they will likely never believe otherwise.

In this paper I have shown you how the federal government, which asks more of America's schools and schoolchildren every year, is leaving the funding required to meet these demands up to the individual states and counties, which may or may not be able to raise those funds. In the cases of shortfalls, subjects that are not deemed as important by the government are likewise seen as less crucial to the schools via the trickle-down effect, and that is where gaps in a student's education begin.

The arts, across the spectrum, is one of these areas that is beginning to be overlooked on a more frequent basis, even though there is no real evidence that education in this area is any less valuable than math or hard science.

It is my hope that, here, you have learned a great deal about this issue, and are now well enough informed to be able to take a stand on arts education.