

Assembly 2007  
Baltimore, Maryland

Peer Session Notes  
**Executive Directors**

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6<sup>th</sup>**

**Education Reform, Arts Learning and the SAA**

*Presenter: Dick Deasy, Arts Education Partnership (AEP)*

Deasy concurred with many of the observations about policy challenges shared by EDs via the listserv, and affirmed that implementation of arts education policies, standards and best practices remains challenging in the current environment. He provided a report on forthcoming resources from the Arts Education Partnership ([www.aep-arts.org](http://www.aep-arts.org)) that may assist state arts agencies and other partners in strengthening both policy and practice.

One of those resources will be a **National Arts Education Policy Database**. The AEP has recently updated a comprehensive database of the arts education policies in place in each state, including notes that track whether and how those policies are implemented. Topics addressed in the database include teacher licensure, certification and coursework requirements; arts requirements for high school graduation and college entrance; arts education curriculum standards; assessment requirements; and other key topics. Fresh material is currently being compiled and will be available shortly via the AEP Web site. Users of the database will be able to search by state or policy area.

Deasy observed that changing public policy at the state and federal levels will require a significant attitudinal shift. The AEP is therefore actively engaged in **building a research platform** about public attitudes and opinions related to arts education. This information will help arts educators and advocates understand current attitudes toward arts education, and correctly diagnose the opportunities and barriers to building support and shaping the actions of policy makers.

- **21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Poll:** Broad public support for the values and capacities developed through arts learning can be seen in the bipartisan poll released in September by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (<http://www.21stcenturyskills.org>). According to this poll, the public ranked imagination and innovation, cooperative learning and teamwork, thinking and reasoning skills among the highest outcomes they want from schools. Similar skills are seen as crucial in *Tough Choices for Tough Times* and other reports assessing what must be taught if America is going to stay competitive in today's world.
- **“Imagination” as a Key Concept:** Following the above poll, the AEP conducted a series of focus groups that further explored attitudes toward education, creativity and the arts.

These focus groups revealed that the concept of “imagination” is a consensus idea, readily embraced by most people as both a personal value and an educational ideal. This data – along with analysis conducted by Frank Lutz, a leading Republican pollster – suggests that “imagination” is currently “one of the most powerful words in the English language,” according to Deasy. “Innovation” and “invention” are also key concepts. Thinking well, having direction and making good decisions are perceived as far more important than academic achievement in today’s environment. Notably, focus group participants identified much less readily with the concepts of “creativity” and “art,” suggesting a need for arts education advocates to revisit the vocabulary used to advocate for arts education and to address its benefits to students and society.

- **National Poll:** Based on the findings of these focus groups, the AEP believes there is potentially enormous – and untapped - public support for arts education in the schools. To test this theory, the AEP is conducting a national opinion poll in conjunction with the National Education Association and other supporters. The poll, due to be released in January, will address the value of arts education to the public, and should provide evidence that legislators, chief school officers and other pivotal policy makers will find highly persuasive. The AEP will release the data, along with talking points a video and other advocacy tools. See <http://www.theimagination.net/> for more details.

Following Deasy’s report, participants broke into small group discussions about specific arts education leadership challenges:

- Advocacy
- Relationships with State Departments of Education
- Managing NCLB (No Child Left Behind)
- Outsourcing and decentralizing
- Research
- Teacher training and artist training

See the [ED Peer Session Breakout Notes](#) for discussion notes from selected tables.

## **SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8th**

### **Creative Ways to Handle Increased Work Demands and Extend SAA Capacity**

*Presenter: Kelly Barsdate, Chief Program and Planning Officer, NASAA*

Barsdate framed the discussion by sharing some [observations SAA role diversification](#). In addition to their traditional roles as grant-makers and information providers, state arts agencies are increasingly active in many other areas, such as training programs, PR campaigns, e-commerce efforts, research, international diplomacy and special policy initiatives. These activities are human-resource intensive, prompting many state arts agencies to reconsider staffing configurations in order to address new demands on staff time and staff skills. The expansion of direct service portfolios can expand the influence of the SAA and can broaden constituencies for the arts. Alignment with core values and plan priorities, however, is a continuing tension, as is

the increasing competition for financial resources. All of these evolutions are occurring in an era of flat or even declining resources - especially when inflation is taken into account. State arts agencies are therefore adopting a wide variety of strategies to enhance their operational capacity:

- Creative use of technology to streamline operations
- Continued pursuit of partnerships that build human and financial resources
- Making (non-grant) services and activities explicit in strategic plans and operational workplans
- Re-positioning the state arts agency (to policy makers and the public) as more than a grant-maker
- Attempting to document the ROI (return on investment) of nontraditional activities or non-grant roles

*Presenter: Julie Henahan, Executive Director, Ohio Arts Council*

Henahan provided an overview of [ways that the Ohio Arts Council is using technology](#) to enhance efficiency and maximize staff time across its operations. In addition to an extensive e-grants system and constituent Web site, the OAC uses a suite of technology applications for:

- Coordinating advocacy efforts and communications with elected officials (in addition to the information included in the presentation, you may download a [sample report](#))
- Automating travel approval for staff and contractors
- Managing event publicity and event registration information
- Using digital recording to make council meeting proceedings easier to share and archive
- Planning workloads and project timelines (for special initiatives, strategic planning, etc.) using Microsoft Project
- Managing time sheets via a centralized spreadsheet application
- Coordinating staff schedules using Outlook Calendar

Following Henahan's presentation, small group discussions were held on the following capacity-related challenges:

- Advocacy/leadership
- Outsourcing/partnerships
- Staff development
- Resource allocation
- Managing expectations

See the [ED Peer Session Breakout Notes](#) for additional details.

### **FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION**

Participants volunteered the following ideas to be considered for future discussion among executive directors:

- Aim for continuity of conversation among ED convenings. Pick up some threads of this discussion to continue working on in subsequent discussions.
- Continue conversation with Dick Deasy. Invite him to the next ED gathering, or consider connecting an ED meeting or NASAA meeting with an AEP meeting.
- Convene a conversation about staffing issues. Provide a forum for EDs to discuss ways of motivating staff and dealing with burnout and entrenchment issues.
- Discuss the varied roles that Deputy Directors play and how the ED-DD team can best be configured.
- Consider establishing an “ED Hotline” for dealing with staff challenges or other difficult issues.

Executive directors will gather again for a summer 2008 ED retreat (time and location to be announced soon) as well as in September at Assembly 2008 (September 11-13, Chattanooga, TN). Thank you, Susie Surkamer ED-SC, for volunteering to be on the planning team for the summer 2008 ED retreat. Additional volunteers are needed for the planning team for both the retreat and the Chattanooga sessions. Contact Kelly Barsdate ([kelly@nasaa-arts.org](mailto:kelly@nasaa-arts.org)) to participate.