

November 28, 2006  
Ohio Assembly Testimony

My name is Camille Nasbe. I am superintendent of the Winton Woods City Schools, a suburban school district in Northwest Cincinnati. Over 3/4 of our nearly 4,000 students are minorities, 1/3 are economically disadvantaged, nearly 1/5 have special needs, and our Limited English Proficient population is growing. Our district earned an effective rating in 2006 and we are known as an arts district because of our strong art, music and theater programs.

I thank you for the opportunity to address you today on the Ohio Core on behalf of my district and at the request of the Ohio Alliance for the Arts Council. I am respectfully requesting that the Ohio Core be amended to include a fine arts requirement. I submit three reasons why I believe this esteemed assembly should include one credit of fine arts in Ohio's requirements for high school graduation. First, it is achievable. Second, it is critical to success in a global society. Third, it recognizes the talents of a whole segment of our student population and the value of working together to achieve a common goal.

First, requiring one credit of fine arts for graduation is achievable. In my district, every high school student is already required to take one fine arts course. The top graduates take several courses from among Band, Orchestra, Chorus, Art, and Drama. We generally schedule the Band and Chorus classes first in order to accommodate the large numbers wanting both. Each year our Varsity Ensemble performs with the Cincinnati Pops and our instrumental and vocal musicians win numerous awards and accolades from performing at events and competitions in and out of state.

In our district, elementary students can elect to take instrumental music lessons beginning in grade 5 with the possibility of being selected for the honors chorus in grade 6. We offer Gifted Art Classes in grades 3-8 and a variety of art classes at the high school, including Advanced Placement Art.

Our annual fall play and spring musical utilize the talents of numerous students, staff, and volunteers. We pack the auditorium so tightly that last year I had to buy a scalped ticket to see *Beauty and the Beast*. We are able to do all this in a district our size because we have a tradition of excellence and a commitment to the fine arts. We have never had a problem finding quality teachers.

Second, requiring one credit of fine arts is critical to success in a global society. I recently formed a Book Club to encourage staff and community

members to read and discuss books that have widespread implications for education. One of my selections was *The World is Flat* by Thomas Friedman. Friedman makes a compelling case for educating students to be collaborators and orchestrators, adapters and versatilists, and synthesizers. He notes that the Chief Information Officer of today is being replaced by the Chief Integration Officer, the individual who can synthesize disparate parts and transfer knowledge from one discipline to solve problems in another. If students are to survive in a global economy, he advocates that they develop their creative right brain as well as their logical left brain.

Friedman entitles one of the most interesting anecdotes from his book, "Tubas and Test Tubes". He relates how the President of Georgia Tech, G. Wayne Clough, wanted to increase the university's graduation rate several years ago and so he began to research why such outstanding students weren't all graduating. As you might expect, he found those who were being admitted had high GPAs, high SATs, and high school transcripts with rigorous math and science courses. What you might not expect is that he found the very best engineers were the ones who could also think creatively (pp. 301-310). He told Friedman that an "awful lot of talented students – the ones who were successful graduates – were interested in creative outlets other than what they were experiencing in the classroom – filmmaking or music making or some other offbeat hobby" (pp. 310-311). Georgia Tech changed their recruitment and admission policies and began admitting students who had also played musical instruments, sang in a chorus, or played on a team in high school. The university's graduation rate increased from 65% in 1994 to 76% in 2005 and it has seen enrollment soar in chamber ensembles, orchestra groups, jazz bands, computer music synthesizers, and virtual and robotic drummers. Clough maintains that musicians have more social skills; they are not burrowed down in their work (pp. 310-312). The head of a major engineering firm told him, "Don't send me engineers who can be duplicated by a computer. I am sending that work to India. Send me engineers who are adaptable - who can think across disciplines" (p. 312).

Given the flattening world in which our students must compete, I ask you, "What does more to promote this new thinking than training in the arts?" and "Where do students learn to collaborate and create a new product from disparate parts better than through the arts?"

Finally, requiring one credit of fine arts for graduation will recognize the talents of a whole segment of our student population and the value of working together to achieve a common goal. High school students, like Georgia Tech engineers, need creative outlets. For many students, the fine arts represents where their true talents and passion lie. Without the

one credit requirement, they may not have the opportunity to discover their talent or their future vocation. They may not experience the pride that comes from an individual performance or the satisfaction that comes from achieving something great by working collaboratively with peers.

The fine arts are by no means fluff; everyone needs exposure and training in the arts to fully appreciate their own creativity, as well as others'; to see others' perspectives in a multicultural world. Art is the universal language. It crosses all cultures, classes, and abilities. It gives voice to all students, but especially those most in need of self-expression. Often those are the kids most at-risk of not graduating.

I fear that what is not required may not be experienced. I urge you to require one credit of fine arts for high school graduation. I have seen first hand as superintendent of Winton Woods how the fine arts can transform the lives of high school students.