



*Arts in Education Creates Flourish of Intellect, Economy
For Texas of Tomorrow*
An Opinion-Editorial Respectfully Submitted by Senator Florence Shapiro

The Legislature has been working diligently to restructure the education system in Texas to ensure that our students graduate ready for future success. The economy that today's students will enter differs greatly from the one their parents entered. Jobs in almost every sector of the economy require a whole new set of skills and experiences, many of which are furthered and nurtured in fine arts courses. That is why we have paid particular attention to fine arts as an important component of reforming our education system.

As the global economy becomes faster and more competitive, innovation and creativity are increasingly important. The numbers in a recent report, commissioned by the Texas Cultural Trust as part of its Create Texas campaign, demonstrate a clear link between the growth of the creative industries and a strong Texas economy:

- By 2016, 1 in 12 jobs in Texas will be creative industry jobs.
- Between 2006 and 2016, creative sector employment is projected to increase by 22.4 percent, or 140,000 net new jobs.

Texas is realizing this at some levels. For instance, elementary schools are learning to integrate the arts into their overall educational program, from singing songs about grammar to performing dramatic presentations and drawing pictures in math. As students move into middle and high school, the emphasis on applied and creative thinking seems to wane.

I have long maintained that education cannot be one-size-fits-all. We must offer schoolchildren flexibility and opportunity. The creative mind is part of their future and incorporating arts into education is the way to get there.

This is why I amended House Bill 3, the public school accountability bill, to include a requirement that students earn one credit of fine arts to graduate. The original version of the bill, allowed for eight elective credits for high school students without an explicit requirement for fine arts. Because of the requirement of fine arts in higher education and because of the value of fine arts to the Texas economy, I decided it was important to add this requirement.

The accountability system will also provide distinctions for courses outside the test, as we'll recognize excellence in areas like Academic Excellence, Workforce, and Fine Arts. This is where fine arts will shine and schools may offer a full complement of fine arts at a distinction tier.

Additionally, I added to Article III of the State Budget, for educator professional development to provide training to teachers of mathematics, science, and the arts aimed at the integration of learning in these subjects, through the coordination of lesson plans, instructional strategies, and curricula.

It is important to understand that arts and other subjects are not separate fields but that they should be taught in tandem. Students gain far richer understanding of mathematical equations when they can apply it to the numerical patterns found in music and an in-depth knowledge of geometry can come from the symmetry of artwork.

One of our greatest concerns is making certain that students in Texas schools are getting the preparation they need to be successful in competing for the kinds of jobs that will lead to long and rewarding careers.

Art instills in students the habits of mind that last a lifetime: critical-analysis skills, the ability to deal with ambiguity and to solve problems, perseverance, and a drive for excellence. Our Texas students of today will be better citizens of tomorrow with an exposure to art education.

As the author Daniel Pink stated in one of our meetings, “we need to prepare our children for their future rather than our past.”

Word Count: 592

State Senator Florence Shapiro represents Senate District 8.