

Three Laws Drive Arts Education Initiatives

The Minnesota Academic Standards in the Arts are an important landmark for arts education, but additional laws and rules clarify the practical application of standards implementation in school districts. These additional laws and rules have given momentum to the Perpich Center efforts to provide teachers, schools and districts with processes and resources to productively use the standards for the benefit of all Minnesota students K-12.

Minnesota law provides these parameters for implementing arts education standards:

SEC 3. [120B.0021 Subd. 1]

[REQUIRED ACADEMIC STANDARDS]

(5) the arts, for which statewide or locally developed academic standards apply, as determined by the school district. Public elementary and middle schools must offer at least three and require at least two of the following four arts areas: dance; music; theater; and visual arts. Public high schools must offer at least three and require at least one of the following five arts areas: media arts; dance; music; theater; and visual arts.

A school district no later than the 2007-2008 school year, must adopt graduation requirements that meet or exceed state graduation requirements established in law or rule.

This section makes clear the scope of school offerings and the arts requirements for students for each level—elementary, middle and high school. Also it requires that locally developed standards must meet or exceed state standards, and that standards, either state or locally developed, must be in operation by the 2007-08 school year.

Specific details about the scope of arts knowledge and skills to be offered by schools and achieved by students to complete a standard are provided in the benchmarks:

SEC. 5 [120B.0024]

[BENCHMARKS]

(a) The commissioner must supplement required state academic standards with grade-level benchmarks. High school benchmarks may cover more than one grade. The benchmarks must implement statewide academic standards by specifying the academic knowledge and skills that schools must offer and students must achieve to satisfactorily complete a state standard. Benchmarks are published to inform and guide parents, teachers, school districts and other interested persons and for use in developing tests consistent with the benchmarks.

The rules regarding standards and benchmarks are clear and useful requirements that provide a foundation for arts education for all Minnesota students. Once these important pieces of policy are developed and in place, how will districts, schools and teachers know how to operate them for the benefit of all students?

The Minnesota State Rule below describes school district responsibilities for publicly setting instructional and curricular goals, planning for evaluation of individual student learning in each area of the standards, and systematically assessing arts curriculum and instruction. The assessment of curriculum and instruction is to be based on student achievement.

120B.11 Subd. 2]

[ADOPTING POLICIES]

(a) A school board shall adopt annually a written policy that includes the following: (1) district goals for instruction and curriculum; (2) a process for evaluating each student's progress toward meeting graduation standards and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of instruction and curriculum affecting students' progress; (3) a system for periodically reviewing all instruction and curriculum...

This last portion of state law requires transparency about the impact of teaching on student achievement of the arts standards that is forward thinking and helpful in making the quality of arts learning visible to parents and the community at large. It also provokes several questions:

- How will educators define quality in student achievement and determine the impact of curriculum and instruction on student learning?
- How can districts develop locally meaningful and useful assessments of student learning in the arts?
- How will these assessments influence teaching?
- How can arts educators promote reliability as they evaluate student achievement against a standard in arts classrooms across the state?
- How will districts make connections between student achievement in the arts and the arts curriculum review process?

The Perpich Center considers these essential questions in realizing the promise of high quality arts education for all Minnesota students K-12. The articles in this briefing describe our work in collaboration with arts educators across the state to better understand and find workable answers to these questions. A grant from the US Department of Education will allow us to pay particular attention to the impact of standards on students in high poverty schools.

In each article we describe promising resources and processes to aid teachers, schools and districts in meeting the requirements of Minnesota laws and rules regarding arts standards implementation. From our work over the past several years with the regional Arts Quality Teaching Networks, we understand that teacher discussion and collaboration in the development of these resources and processes are keys to improving classroom practice and student achievement in the arts.