

**NEVES TESTIMONY FOR HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE (1/22/2024)
IN SUPPORT OF H-7020**

GOOD AFTERNOON, MY NAME IS DAVID NEVES. I LIVE IN WOONSOCKET AND am the ADVOCACY Co-CHAIR for the RI MUSIC EDUCATION ASSOCIATION. I bring almost 50 years of experience as a music and arts educator to the table (29 in RI and 12 in MA); I was the 2002 RI State Teacher of the Year, and am currently the Coordinator of Music Education for URI and Director of the RI Philharmonic Youth Wind Ensemble. Most importantly I am the proud father of three beautiful daughters, all who were fortunate enough to attend public schools in Cranston with its robust Arts programs, and one of whom, quite frankly, would likely not have graduated from HS without her passion for music being fed each and every day throughout high school.

I AM speaking today TO ASK YOU TO APPROVE MOVING H-7020, THE TRANSPARANCY IN ARTS EDUCATION ACCESS AND PROFICIENCY ACT to the full house and recommend its passage.

I want to start first by thanking REPRESENTATIVE BRIEN, AND THE CO-SPONSORS Baginski, Craven, Corvese, Casimiro, Noret, Newberry, and Finkelman FOR INTRODUCING THIS BILL.

I WANT TO applaud RIDE for the work they have done in the recent past to ensure that the Basic Education Plan Arts Proficiency graduation requirement remains in place, and including reference to it in the recently revised High School Graduation requirements. I also applaud RIDE for its support of the **RI Arts Education Data Dashboard** which collects arts education DATA from each community each year. I also applaud RIDE and RISCA for the recent addition of a part time Arts Curriculum Coordinator position at RIDE. These three actions are an important step in helping to maintain the current state of Arts Education in our state.

The fact is that, over my almost 50 years of activity in RI Music Education, we have made some strides in some schools in expanding and ensuring more students have access to a comprehensive arts education, especially in music and visual arts. However there continue to be major equity issues, and there are storm clouds appearing for our strongest current Arts programs. Over the past few years, we are seeing more challenges that are undermining even our best Arts programs in place, and exacerbate the inequities that continue to exist from district to district. These challenges include:

1. The expansion of CTE programs in many high schools while maintaining existing traditional schedules, making it almost impossible for many CTE students to fit the Arts courses they have passion for and need to become arts proficient.
2. The continued lack of significant arts courses at many vocational and charter schools in our state.
3. The expanded credit requirements for all students in Math, World Language, and other traditional academics in the updated graduation regulations. Any high school that implements these without substantially adjusting traditional scheduling methods will likely find it impossible for most students to fit in the arts courses they desire and need to authentically meet the Basic Education Plan arts proficiency requirement.
4. The continued lack of attention to arts programs in some middle and high schools, especially in our largest city, Providence.

As such, there is still work that needs to be done to ensure that the Arts Education regulations are understood by all schools, communities, parents and students and that the actual status of arts education and participation is easily seen for each school district so that current inequities and trends between and within districts can be seen and addressed. This bill, if passed, will be a major step in addressing these needs.

The three steps asked for in this bill are that: Arts Education participation data be included on each school's annual report card; that a random check on graduating senior's actual arts proficiency be done each year for each high school; and that the current Arts Curriculum Coordinator position at RIDE be made a permanent position to ensure its presence into the future. It is currently funded via ESSA monies and RIDE has not indicated it plans to renew the position.

Including the Arts participation data for high schools and middle schools on the annual report card will support the following:

- a. It will support improved accuracy of arts data reporting. Example: The Arts Education Data Dashboard currently shows that Mt. Hope High School has 0% of students enrolled in music classes. In reality there were over 200 HS students enrolled in music classes that year.
- b. It will enable our communities, including parents and students, to easily see the actual student participation rates in each high school and middle school to examine inequities. Example: Barrington HS-76% Woonsocket HS-24% (2021-22 Arts Ed Data Dashboard)
- c. It will enable current inequities in arts course offerings between schools/districts to be more easily seen and addressed. Example: 30% of RI public schools do not provide access to the minimum arts access established by the BEP. (2021-22 data from RI Arts Education Data Dashboard (<https://arts.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur946/files/2023-08/FINAL%20Key%20Highlights%20PDF%202021-22.pdf>)
- d. It will be a transparent tangible official public "statement" that Arts Education for every child is of the same level of importance as ELA, Math and Science in terms of ensuring a fulfilling comprehensive well-rounded education. The good news is that for some schools that are struggling with the ELA, Math and Science current proficiency percentages, listing Arts participation % will provide a positive spotlight – and deservedly so! Their Arts Participation rates could be their only truly positive data on their report card.

Doing a random check on a student's work demonstrating arts proficiency by graduation will:

- a. Ensure high schools are being attentive to the proficiency mandate and that their definition of "proficiency" aligns and includes the proficiency indicators within the Arts Standards. (NCAS Standards are the "official" arts curricula standards for RI)
- b. Provide definitive samples of what Arts Proficiency actually looks like as schools work to continually improve their Arts Education Programs.
- c. Allow for showcasing highly proficient arts students to serve as exemplars and models for other students and children in their communities.

Making the RIDE Arts Curriculum Coordinator position a defined permanent position in the department will

- a. Ensure that Arts Education will have a voice at the table at RIDE during important policy discussions and development so that the impact of RIDE decisions on the Arts are always taken into careful consideration.

- b. Provide RIDE high quality leadership for statewide guidance and professional development for Arts education for school district leaders and educators.
- c. Provide a dedicated point person at RIDE to support the ongoing monitoring and support at the district level that is currently needed and would come about as a result of this bill.
- d. Place RI on the map nationally as a state that truly supports Arts Education by having a voice at the national level via SEADAE <https://www.seadae.org/about/member-directory>
(Without the position, RI would join the small minority of states without an Arts ed leader at the state level)

If passed, this bill will help RIDE shine a spotlight on the importance of Arts Education for every student, and remind school departments to ensure that enough courses, classes, and opportunities are available for every child to truly become proficient in one of the arts prior to graduation as required by the state Basic Education Plan, and the recently revised High School Graduation regulations. Currently, in many if not most, school districts, students are labeled “proficient” in one of the arts by merely taking a single ½ credit course sometime during their 4 year high school experience. While this is the minimum “seat time” requirement in current regulations, if a student enters high school without a solid foundation in the particular art form due to substantive instruction/experiences at the middle school level, then it is impossible to become proficient as defined by the state’s adopted National Arts Standards with a single ½ credit course.

In addition,

Without this added support, we know that, as has happened far too often in the past, music and the arts will be relegated to a second class academic and, in some districts, be the first to be targeted for cutbacks when budgets become tight.

We believe that there may be an underlying belief by many, including some of our Educational Leaders, that actually requiring ALL students to be proficient in one of the Arts before graduation is unrealistic, impossible, and overly burdensome. For any of these disbelievers, I would ask you to examine the many schools in Massachusetts that require a full year of Arts Course work prior to graduation. IN fact, I worked for 12 years as FPA Director for the Needham Public School where the HS Arts graduation requirement is TWO FULL YEARS of Arts course work. Every single student in Needham, regardless of their socio-economic status, post graduation intent, etc. graduates highly PROFICIENT in the ARTS, and it has been that way for years and continues today. RHODE ISLAND CAN DO THE SAME.

RIDE and RISCA has done excellent work already collecting Arts data through the recently developed RI Arts Education Dashboard, so securing the Arts info for the School Report Cards should not be a difficult task. However, by putting that data on each School Report Card, it will finally make the Arts truly on the same level of importance as the currently reported out academic subjects. PLACING THE ARTS ON THE SCHOOL REPORT CARD WILL BE A BOLD DECLARATIVE EASILY SEEN AND EASILY UNDERSTOOD STATEMENT BY RIDE AND THE STATE THAT THE ARTS VITALLY IMPORTANT FOR EVERY CHILD TO STUDY THROUGHOUT THEIR EDUCATION TO ENSURE AN ENRICHING AND FULFILLING LIFE FOREVER.

The power of the ARTS for transformation of lives is second to none and its positive influence on other critical aspects of schooling is clearly. Do you want to improve Attendance Rates? Give students an authentic meaningful feelingful Arts Class Experience every day to look forward to; Do you want to raise the ELA and MATH proficiency rates for every child in our state?*** Give them an authentic meaningful

feelingful connected Arts Experience every day to look forward to; Do you want to ensure every child graduates with from high school having discovered their creative self and joy as a human being? Give them an authentic Arts Education experience to look forward to every single day.

In the end, this is about **equity**. Why should a child not have access to, and be given opportunities to achieve authentic arts proficiency based on the particular school they go to? A child going to school in Providence should have the same education, including the Arts, as a child going to school in Barrington or North Smithfield. The 2021-2022 RI Arts Education Data Dashboard shows that: 30% of RI public schools do not provide access to the minimum arts access established in the BEP. **18% of schools with high FRPL do not provide any arts access**, and **over 40% do not provide the minimum required by the BEP**. In contrast, over 99% of schools with low free/reduced-price lunch rates provide arts access and 87% provide the minimum required by the BEP. <file:///Users/dneves/Desktop/FINAL%20Key%20Highlights%20PDF%202021-22.pdf>

As former National Music Education President Scott Shuler shared in his eloquent message to you: *“The fact that students in less affluent districts are more likely to experience such voids in their education makes study of the entire core a critical civil rights issue. Every student must receive a high-quality education in the arts, or lead a life that is less fulfilling... with a hole in his/her soul.”*

In closing, we often hear a lot in the media about how RI ranks in terms of education, business climate, quality of life etc. I truly believe that if this bill is passed, and its actions are attended to, Rhode Island will become known throughout the country as the NUMBER ONE STATE in ARTS EDUCATION including above Massachusetts, which our Governor has asked us to overtake in education. The ARTS are transformative for every human being. Let’s make a major step in ensuring that every child in RI has the access to, and is enrolled in enough school-based Arts Education classes and experiences to ensure that Arts Proficiency for all becomes the norm. I ask you to support this bill and move it forward to the full House for approval.

Sincerely,
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Advocacy Co-Chair
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DATA from ARTS EDUCATION DATA DASHBOARD (2022 Data – some data is definitely inaccurate – apparently dependent on the local “reporter?”) AND THE RI SCHOOL REPORT CARD (2022-23)

***Possible Correlation between Music Enrollment and ELA Proficiency?

PERCENTAGE	MUSIC	ART	Theater	Dance	Media Arts	TOTAL	ELA Proficiency
NON-SELECT PUBLIC HSs							
MT PLEASANT HS	33%	33%	0%	0%	0%	66%	17.1%
CENTRAL HS	16%	42%	5%	2%	28%	93%	9.4%
CENTRAL FALLS HS	19%	34%	3%	1%	0	57%	10.5%
CHARIHO HS	5%	52%	5%	0	5%	67%	67.2%
BARRINGTON HS	23%	44%	6%	0%	24%	97%	83.2%
JENKS MIDDLE SCHOOL	0	47%	0	0	0 0%	47%	13.1%
GOFF MIDDLE SCHOOL	26%	77%	0	0	0 0	103%	20.1%

HOWEVER THERE ARE DEFINITELY SOME DATA INPUT PROBLEMS ON THE ARTS DATA DASHBOARD

MOUNT HOPE HS (data prob) 0 !! 88% 0 0 25% 113%!

IN 2022 THERE WERE OVER 200 STUDENTS IN MUSIC PERFORMING CLASSES!