



**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **ACCESS AND EQUITY PROBLEMS IN ARTS EDUCATION – A SIMPLE SOLUTION**

This past March, the Rhode Island Music Education Association (RIMEA) presented the 84<sup>th</sup> Annual All-State Music Festival. Over six concerts, 887 superb music students came together to showcase their musical achievements. These students, selected based on auditions, represented almost every community in the state. Achieving All-State status was the result of years of instruction and practice in PreK-12 music classes in their schools.

Unfortunately, as wonderful as these concerts were, the All-State Festival provided disturbing evidence of a continuing equity issue involving Arts Education, and Music in particular. Despite more than two decades of Rhode Island requiring every child to be proficient in one of the Arts by graduation, there are still many schools not providing sufficient access to the arts to achieve it. As a result, becoming proficient in the arts, especially music, is a case of the “haves” and the “have-nots”, usually based on where a child lives. For example, whereas Providence’s student population represents 16% of the student population in Rhode Island, only 20 Providence students, or 2% of the 887 total all-state students, were proficient enough to even audition for All-State. If things had been equal, there should have been close to 120 Providence students in All-State. There were also other school districts with few or no students in All-State. The reality is that most students in Providence, and in other poorly represented districts, are not getting access to the same quality comprehensive arts and music education that students who live in communities such as Barrington, North Kingstown, East Greenwich, Cranston, and the like, are getting. Additionally, this equity issue is mostly hidden, as most of the “have-nots” are unaware of what they are missing. Though RIDE deserves credit for maintaining the Arts Proficiency Requirement, and seems to understand the power of the arts, RIDE has not invested the resources to fully support, monitor, and ensure all districts provide arts proficiency for all.

The good news is that there is a solution. RIMEA worked with Representative Jon Brien and Senator Pam Lauria to introduce bills H7020 and S2042: the Transparency in Arts Education Access and Proficiency Act (TAAPA). If passed, TAPPA will allow parents and communities to easily see the status of their own school’s arts programs and give RIDE the tools it needs to support districts in ensuring all students become arts proficient. TAAPA will ensure RIDE publicizes and shares accurate data regarding arts access and enrollment in middle and high schools, requires checking proficiency levels of samples of graduating seniors work to assess arts program effectiveness, and ensures the continuation of a RIDE Arts Curriculum Coordinator on its staff to assist communities in Arts curriculum work. The current plan to terminate this position in September will only exacerbate arts inequities and send the message that the Arts are not vital for every child.

Passing TAAPA will remind local leaders that when financial constraints arise, or school schedules are considered, access to arts classes must be maintained. As Representative Jon Brien indicates, “Unfortunately when there are cuts made to educational programs due to financial

shortfalls, it seems as though it is always the Fine Arts that are the first on the chopping block. That is unfair to the kids that we are elected to represent. This legislation will ensure that students are proficient in the fine arts, and that is the least we can do for our children who really rely on these important resources.”

The House and Senate Education Committees hearings on their respective TAAPA bills received overwhelmingly positive testimony. All parents, and all who value the Arts, need to contact their legislators and ask that TAAPA be approved prior to the end of this legislative session. If we want to ensure that every child has an equitable education and finds their own unique voice and pathway through the Arts, then TAAPA needs to be passed. Ensuring every child has quality curricular arts experiences will raise attendance rates, enable students to enroll in Arts programs in college, and have entry ways to careers in the multi-billion-dollar creative economy. The Arts are not just for rich, gifted, or talented, but for all. Every child in Rhode Island deserves nothing less.

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