

Arts and the Common Core

A Scan of State Education Agencies and National Arts Organizations

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With the adoption of the Common Core across the vast majority of states, many arts organizations, districts, schools, and teachers are looking for options to integrate or align the arts and the Common Core State Standards.

WestEd was contracted by the California Education Partners, CORE – California Office to Reform Education, to conduct a national scan of arts integration and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The intention of the review was to take a narrow focus and examine the websites of state education agencies and the national arts organizations to identify and summarize the information available regarding integrating the arts with the CCSS. WestEd reviewed the websites for the state education agencies that adopted the CCSS, reviewed the websites of the national arts organizations, and conducted interviews with staff from states that were identified as having information about the arts and the CCSS on their SEA website.

An Overall Lack of Information

Of the 46 states that adopted at least one discipline of the CCSS, the review found only 13 states whose websites contained at least minimal information about the arts and CCSS. For the national arts organizations, 2 out of 6 websites contained information about the arts and CCSS.

Twelve states and both arts organizations provided general information about the CCSS, while seven states and both arts organizations provided frameworks that linked the art standards with the CCSS. Only a few states offered resources, professional development, or lessons plans, and no information was available about assessments or arts integration policies.

	# of States	# of Arts Organizations
Information	12	2
Framework or Crosswalk	7	2
Resources	4	0
Professional Development	3	0
Curricula or Lesson Plans	2	0
Assessments	0	0
Arts Integration Policies	0	0

A Greater Lack of Original Information

Only six states provided original, state-developed information on their websites. Original content included PowerPoint slides about integrating the arts and CCSS or aligning CCSS with existing arts standards, revised course descriptions aligned to the CCSS, documents outlining how arts teachers can shift their work to align with the CCSS, and notices of professional development opportunities. The other states and the national arts organizations offered links to external sources, such as the College Board and Arts Education Partnership websites.

What States are Doing to Integrate the Arts and CCSS

Interviews revealed that some activities were common across all or several of the states, while other activities were unique to an individual state. Two aspects heard from all five states included professional development offerings related to the arts and CCSS, and clarifying what the CCSS is and is not with regards to the arts.

The use of art as text was a message several states were sending to districts, schools, and arts educators. Using art for the “close reading” required by the CCSS is already embedded into practice for English language arts teachers and art teachers alike in multiple states. One state developed free online modules for educators, while another state is in the process of seeking exemplar rubrics created by early adopters of the CCSS to modify and share with the arts field.

The easiest, most organic and seamless integration of the Common Core principles in arts instruction is the use of art as text. Simply put, it's a new labeling of what high-quality arts instruction has always looked like – going deep into a piece, observing closely, examining multiple perspectives and interpretations. If you are critiquing art and doing it well, you are deep-reading text.

–State Staff Member

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The most common challenge reported was misinterpretation and misapplication of the standards, including arts educators being instructed to supplant their arts curriculum and standards to instead engage in English language arts-based activities. Another challenge was the lack of time and funding for educators to appropriately integrate the arts and CCSS.

State staff recommended being deliberate with terminology when discussing the arts and CCSS, and ensuring arts educators are using the CCSS language correctly. The language of the standards is specific, and everyone will benefit from understanding the CCSS standards and how they will affect instruction in all content areas.