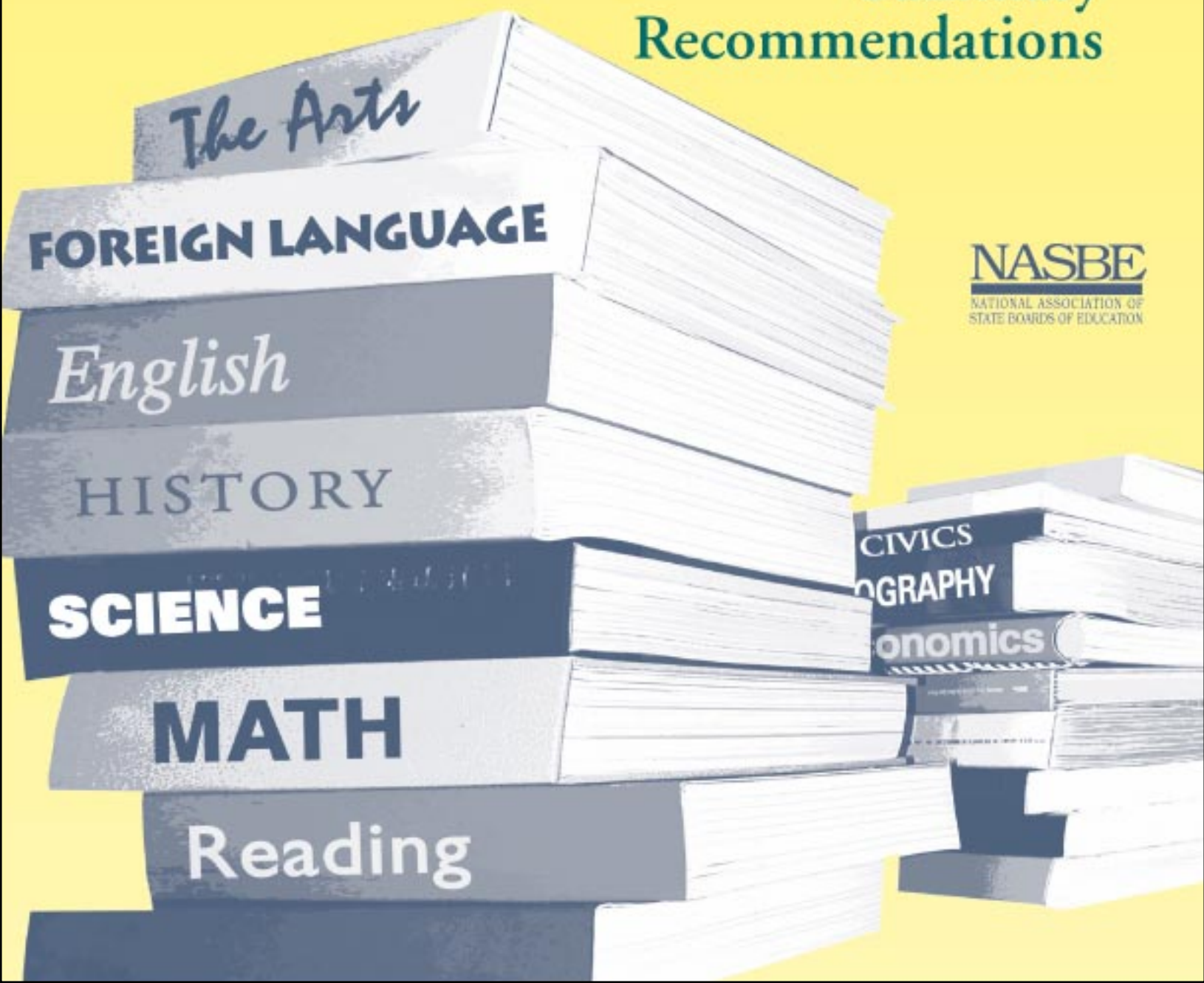


*The* **COMPLETE  
CURRICULUM**

*Ensuring a place for the arts  
and foreign languages in  
America's schools*

**Summary  
Recommendations**



**NASBE**  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION

# Summary

## Recommendations:

### The Importance of the Arts and Foreign Languages

State policymakers have invested unprecedented resources in recent years developing standards and accountability systems to improve teaching and learning, and policymakers and practitioners alike are hopeful that the impact of standards-based reform will improve student achievement nationwide. But, with most states emphasizing accountability in only a few academic subjects, many are concerned that teachers, schools, and districts are emphasizing those few subjects at the expense of other important components of a comprehensive education, such as the arts and foreign languages.

The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has further raised concerns about the narrowing of the curriculum. While No Child Left Behind includes both the arts and foreign languages as part of a core curriculum, many fear that there is an unintended consequence: that states will focus their attention—and resources—on complying with

the law's primary emphasis on reading, math, and science, to the detriment of other curricular areas. As educators and policymakers focus on leaving *no* child behind, many are wondering whether our nation's schools may inadvertently leave *half of the child's education* behind.

Overwhelmingly, parents and the public at large support a comprehensive education: one that includes history, civics, geography, foreign languages, and the arts, in addition to other core subjects such as English, mathematics, and science.<sup>1</sup> Whether the label is a well-rounded education, a liberal arts education, or a comprehensive education, the goal is the same: to prepare students for the working world, for their roles and responsibilities as citizens in a democracy, and to prepare them for life in an increasingly interdependent and culturally diverse world.

In 2003, the board of directors for the National Association of State

Boards of Education charged the Study Group on the Lost Curriculum with examining the current status of curriculum in our nation's schools, particularly as regards the arts and foreign languages. After a year of intense study, the group drew several important conclusions about the status of these subjects, as well as some key recommendations for state policymakers.

*First, the Study Group concluded that there is a substantial body of research that highlights the benefits of including the arts and foreign languages in the curriculum.* For example, one study of third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students in Louisiana found that those who received daily instruction in a foreign language outperformed those who did not on the Louisiana Basic Skills Test, regardless of race, gender, or academic level. Similar studies have found that actively engaging in the arts increases academic achievement, as well.

*Second, while the Study Group on the Lost Curriculum found that the arts and foreign languages are not necessarily "lost," these subject areas have often been marginalized, and are increasingly at risk of being lost as part of the core curriculum.* For example, while virtually every state has adopted standards in the arts, only a few have incorporated the subject into their state accountability systems. Similarly, nearly all states require schools to offer coursework in languages, however, that has not translated into instructional time that is equal to that of other subjects, such as mathematics or English. Perhaps most alarming are current education reforms, which have inadvertently placed the arts and foreign languages at risk as policymakers and administrators, as they comply with new federal requirements, choose to narrow the curriculum in order to reach higher student achievement results in a few subjects.

To address these two key conclusions, the Study Group on the Lost Curriculum formulated ten recommendations for state policymakers to ensure that the arts and foreign languages are not lost, and more importantly to position both as integral parts of the core curriculum.

**1. Adopt high-quality licensure requirements for staff in the arts and foreign languages that are aligned with student standards in these subject areas.** This is a critical juncture because of the requirements NCLB has placed on states to ensure a highly qualified teacher in every classroom. How states will alter licensure require-

ments for arts and foreign language teachers remains unclear. What *is* clear is that NCLB provides state policymakers with an opportunity to set requirements for teachers of the arts and foreign languages that will ensure high-quality instruction.

**2. Ensure adequate time for high-quality professional development for staff in the arts and foreign languages.** State education officials should help to establish relationships

"Children learn better with arts as part of the curriculum. They learn all their subjects better. They're more engaged. Teacher attendance goes up. The child is happier; the teacher is happier."

Jane Alexander, former chair, National Endowment for the Arts<sup>2</sup>

between local school districts and universities in order to provide arts and language teachers with an adequate system for professional development. Education leaders should develop strong policies to ensure teachers receive high-quality professional development.

**3. Ensure adequate staff expertise at the state education agency to work in the areas of the arts and foreign languages.** It is important to designate staff to focus solely in each of these areas to provide assistance, implement policy, and to ensure compliance.

**4. Incorporate both the arts and foreign languages into core graduation requirements, while simultaneously increasing the number of**

**credits required for graduation.**

State policymakers should incorporate both the arts and foreign languages into core graduation requirements, while simultaneously increasing the number of credits required for graduation. This will allow students some leeway in deciding which courses to take, while providing seniors an important opportunity to experience the arts and foreign languages during what has become "down time" for students nearing graduation.

**5. Encourage higher education institutions to increase standards for admission and include arts and foreign language courses when calculating high school grade point averages.** While K-12 policymakers may not have authority to set college admissions

requirements, they can develop a policy that requires the inclusion of arts and foreign language course in figuring high school grade point averages.

**6. Incorporate arts and foreign language learning in the early years into standards, curriculum frameworks, and course requirements. Also, encourage local school districts to incorporate the arts and foreign languages into instruction in the early years, whenever possible.** Early childhood education is just beginning to earn the recognition it deserves as a critical key to student achievement in later years. Recently, federal, state, and local policy and practice has begun to recognize the benefits of early intervention, instead of waiting to intervene after a child has fallen

behind. As with reading, the more learning that occurs in the preschool and early elementary grades in the arts and foreign languages, the less likely our nation's children are to be "left behind" and the less likely we are to leave half the child's education behind.

#### **7. Advocate continued development of curriculum materials for the arts and foreign languages from the textbook publishing industry.**

Currently, there is no K-12 textbook series and few curricular programs for continuous K-12 language study in the United States. Programs are left to piece together their own materials, which is costly and inefficient. Arts education fares no better. While there is a wealth of material available through community and philanthropic organizations and the Internet, it may not always be an organized curricular program that is grade-level appropriate or aligned with state standards. State education officials should advocate continued development of curriculum materials from the textbook publishing industry, with a focus on textbooks and instructional resources for students in kindergarten through grade 12.

**8. Incorporate *all* core subject areas, including the arts and foreign languages, into the improvement strategies promoted by the No Child Left Behind Act.** The No Child Left Behind Act gave a powerful boost to the arts and foreign languages by including them as core academic subjects—such recognition had not been made in past authorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Thus, NCLB empowers states and schools to focus on a well-rounded, comprehensive education, which in turn allows states to reevaluate their policy frameworks—including accountability structures—for all core subject areas.

**9. Urge the National Assessment Governing Board to increase the frequency in the administration of NAEP assessments for both the arts and foreign languages.** Both the arts and foreign languages have NAEP assessments (foreign language is in the pilot stage). Contrasting the frequency with which NAEP is assessed in mathematics, compared with the arts, for example, has sent a less than encouraging signal to the

states about the importance of the arts as a core subject. It also reduces the potential that states will benefit from the release of test items, results of validity and reliability field tests of assessment exercises, and other ways in which the federal-state relationship works for math, reading, writing, and science in large-scale assessment.

**10. Urge Congress and legislatures to make a greater commitment to the arts and foreign languages.** At the federal level, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) are two federal agencies that target study in these areas. Congress created both in 1965 as independent agencies of the federal government. Funding for the each agency hovers around \$125 million. In stark contrast, the funding level for the National Science Foundation (NSF) hovers around *\$5 billion*—with around \$1 billion going toward K-16. Additional funding should be made available to states, universities, and local school districts to help develop programs surrounding the arts and foreign languages, as well as high-quality assessment systems.

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***NASBE gratefully acknowledges the National Endowment for the Arts and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation for their support of the Study Group meetings.***

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ISBN 1-58434-056-8

**Copies of the full report are available for \$14.00 each + 10% for shipping and handling (\$4.50 minimum) from the National Association of State Boards of Education at 277 South Washington Street, Suite 100, Alexandria, Virginia 22314; (800) 220-5183.**

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