

February 28, 2014

The following message has been sent to the leadership of the four professional arts education associations supporting the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards project.

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In response to the February 2014 call for review of the National Core Arts Standards, the Virginia Coalition for Fine Arts Education invited representatives from dance, music, theatre, and visual arts to participate in discussion and critique. The following arts educators participated: Dr. Stephen King and Joyce Zsembery, music; Dr. Joleen Neighbours, theatre; and Mike Gettings, Mike Kalafatis, Dr. David Burton and Dr. Barbara Laws, visual arts. All of the participants are leaders within their disciplines and all have experience writing standards and/or developing curriculum. Most of these folks have spent significant time participating both collaboratively and individually in previous reviews and still see many of the same issues that concerned them originally and about which they previously wrote.

Following are – broadly – our concerns. While some examples have been addressed with specific examples, most of these issues are pervasive instances of shortcomings too numerous to mention that occur repeatedly and systematically throughout the standards:

- Not teacher friendly (according to teachers)
- Rhetorical and theoretical nature of the standards which do not link directly to classroom practice, but espouse a post-modernist point of view.
- Unclear standards that are not measurable or assessable
- Lack of articulation and alignment – Anchor Standard to Process Standards and within and across strands
- Lack of clear scaffolding – no vertical alignment, random order of many Performance Standards
- Lack of understanding of rigor
- Obvious political biases/stances – concentration on social arts education not cultural or artistic literacy

- Standards in which the teaching of rich learning strategies is not required
- Performance Standard strands where the content is not deep enough to be divided meaningfully into 13 parts resulting in little or no difference in levels, out of sequence Performance Standards, or topics not related to the Anchor Standard
- Isolated activities included as Performance Standards
- Multiple variables, (as many as 20), within one standard
- Terminology used is not common language in the discipline (e.g., “sonic experience,” “artistic investigation”)
- Frequent developmentally inappropriate standards
- Instructional delivery decisions included as part of the standard (e.g., specifying that work is to be done “collaboratively”).
- Teacher responsibility as part of the standard (e.g., VA: Cr2-PK-5 b.)
- Intrusion of other subject areas that have nothing to do with the arts discipline
- Politically charged language that will detract from the discussion of content (e.g.VA:Cn 10-8)
- Omission of critical and creative thought aligned with the production/performance of personal works of art that have personal meaning
- Lack of skills, techniques, processes
- Lack of personal expression and meaning making
- Issues related to production and performance in music (creating related to composition and not interpretation), art (planning and reflecting, very little creating) and theatre (developmental production steps not listed or not in logical order).
- Clear need for project-based assessment in all of the arts disciplines
- Art making process steps unclear
- Connecting strand is disconnected
- Unevenness of standards quality and writing across arts processes within arts disciplines
- Standards are unclear to arts educators, much less non-arts educators (i.e. administrators), therefore problematic with regard to performing fair and informed teacher evaluations.

Note: VA:Re7PK-VA:Re7-iii.a are clear, succinct, well sequenced and developmentally appropriate and should serve as an example for writing the rest of the standards.

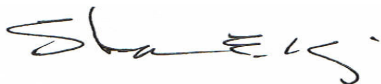
Further, it seems as though time constraints, student numbers and student populations have not been taken into account. At the surface level, 105 standards may seem to be less than primary and elementary folks are responsible for in their schools currently. However, the multiplicity of variables within many of the standards raises the numbers significantly once they are unpacked.

Standards legitimize what we do as art educators and can, if done well, serve as a significant advocacy tool, assisting us in explaining what we do and what students learn to those outside arts education. Given our collective experience, we understand and appreciate the enormity of the task you have undertaken. However, if the content is such that we cannot clearly articulate what students are learning then we lose credibility. As a whole, these standards seem to communicate that we are not about the “doing” of arts but planning and reflecting. Without “doing” there will be little for which to plan or upon which to reflect.

For us, the emperor appears to have no clothes. While standards development is well intended, there is clearly an attempt to align with “current” political programs, such as the Common Core that are currently the object of pushback from a variety of stakeholders. This set of standards fails to take into account what makes arts education in the United States unique – active participation and clear objective-based instruction. The current document moves American arts education towards the European model of tracked specialties. All of us strive for “artistic literacy.” An essential component within arts education must be a strong emphasis on performance and the making of art in all of its forms, to provide authentic experiences in the arts for our students.

Finally, many of us have spent untold hours reviewing and providing feedback in each of the reviews but do not see our concerns being addressed in any significant way. As a result, we are becoming a bit cynical about the process. If there is anything that any of us can do to assist with editing, clarifying, ensuring age appropriateness, and aligning the standards, please feel free to contact any one of us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen E. King', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Stephen E. King, Ed. D.  
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