

**Letter to the Editor, *The Columbus Dispatch*  
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### **Support for the arts is vital to state, communities**

In his inspiring inaugural address, President Obama spoke of beginning again “the work of remaking America” at “a moment that will define a generation.” Ohio faces an economic crisis of historic proportions and the challenge of fulfilling our new President’s vision of a better and brighter future is significant. But we must and we can succeed, and the arts will play a key role in assuring Ohio’s future prosperity and success.

Ohio has nearly 18,000 arts related businesses that employ almost 88,000 people. Every major city and many smaller cities and towns in Ohio can boast with pride about their artists and their artistic and cultural institutions and initiatives that have created jobs, generated tax revenues and stimulated consumer spending to sustain and enhance our communities and our lives. On a national level, the arts account for six percent of the country’s gross national product, more than the construction industry.

Our museums, orchestras, dance and theater companies, art galleries, community festivals and the wide range of other artistic offerings throughout our state are much more than simply leisure activities. They pump millions of dollars into the state and local economies, promote cultural understanding and strengthen our civic pride. In Columbus, annual attendance at artistic and cultural performances would fill Ohio Stadium 10 times. And through their efforts, Columbus arts organizations reach people in all 88 Ohio counties, 40 states and 30 other countries.

These creative and innovative resources we possess provide us with the necessary foundation on which Ohio’s future depends. They are essential ingredients for attracting and retaining a skilled workforce for the 21<sup>st</sup> century - one that will demand motivated, well educated people who can think creatively, solve problems, exercise individual responsibility and interact effectively with others.

But creative, problem-solving individuals do not appear overnight; they are the products of an education system that consistently affords its students an environment supportive of creativity and inquiry. Sustained engagement with the arts in and out of school contributes substantially to building that supportive environment.

The arts are essential to igniting our children’s imaginations and invigorating teaching and learning in other fundamental school subjects. The arts encourage and reward teacher and student success by fostering innovation, a positive professional culture, community engagement, increased student attendance and effective instructional practice.

Schools integrating the arts into the curriculum as part of a comprehensive education reform strategy are documenting positive changes in the school environment and improved student performance. For example, creativity measures for students who participated in the SPECTRA+ program in Hamilton Ohio school districts were four times higher than those of their peers who did not participate in an arts curriculum.

Ohio’s future hinges on our students’ ability to develop the skills that are demanded by the complexities and opportunities of modern life. Cultivating young people’s creativity through the arts also has important implications beyond literacy and academic success. It will help develop an inventive and

skilled workforce, enhance social and cognitive development, and promote greater cultural understanding.

Public support of the arts in our schools and to communities through agencies like the Ohio Arts Council will feed our spirit and fuel our economy. By insuring broad access and exposure to the arts for all, young and old, Ohio can remain competitive in the new century. The arts and culture are essential to our need for hope and a belief in a better future for ourselves and our children. And the future of Ohio is tied inextricably to the future of our children.

The arts and arts education are not frills or luxuries. Support for the arts is a sound investment of public dollars—an investment that will provide significant returns in the form of stabilized, revitalized communities, a better quality of life, and an education system that engages our young people and prepares them to succeed in our rapidly changing world.

While the times do demand austerity and sacrifice, the decisions we make today for our state will have repercussions for decades to come. As we face, and solve, the problems now confronting us in Ohio, let us continue to recognize the importance and necessity of the arts in the solutions we craft.

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