# Leadership in Art Education:
## TAKING ACTION IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES
### By Kerry Freedman

**Now more than ever,** leadership is needed at all levels of art education to sustain the field. The breadth of art education—in schools, communities, museums, and so on—is being threatened by political and economic forces causing the reduction and elimination of art programs. Advocacy can help, but advocacy is just one part of leadership. Advocacy can enable us to maintain what is currently in place, but leadership can enable the cultivation of new ideas and practices necessary for long-term sustainability.

Leadership in art education is a form of social action. Leader activism enables students to have the educational advantages they deserve. By forming and working in leadership groups, art educators promote essential alliances that can nurture a shared vision for the growth of art education among teachers, administrators, parents, and other community members.

Art education leadership demands a critical attitude that reveals a healthy skepticism toward status-quo practices, conflicting educational policy, and over-simplified solutions to complex problems. However, leaders must balance their critical perspective with a conviction that things can change for the better and the belief that they can make change occur.

Decision-making in school districts and other institutional contexts for art education is becoming increasingly data-based. Good data collection inside and outside of programs can lead to administrative decisions that support art education. Learning about and conducting data collection enables art educators to present a new type of case that can convince stakeholders to value art programs.

Although art education includes subjective content, an experienced art educator provides the carefully considered judgment of an expert. Such leaders are positive role models as well as sponsors of student interests.

**Effective leadership can transform a program and can help to protect it. Here are some places to start:**

1. Write a clear and timely rationale that includes a vision for the program emphasizing the contributions of art to cultural knowledge, personal and social identity, visual literacy, and the creative economy in a manner that laypeople can understand.

2. Publicize the program and its rationale using traditional means, such as exhibitions, and newer means, such as a website and electronic social networking.

3. Work with immediate supervisors or administrators to inform them about the program and educate them in the best ways to represent the program to others.

4. Develop a contact list of parents and other stakeholders who can be counted on to promote art education and the specific program by, for example, writing letters to district or state officials.

5. Establish a leadership group of teachers, community leaders, and other supporters of art education to develop a leadership plan with critical and constructive strategies to protect the program, such as establishing a communication network using a listserv or phone tree.

6. Document the program by collecting evidence that demonstrates its importance to students and community, such as student work and parent comments, for example, from a blog established for this purpose.

7. If a challenge to the program occurs, use the contact list to garner support and the leadership group to plan a presentation to the school board or other management group based on the documented evidence.

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