

Texas Coalition for Quality Arts Education

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 9, 2009

Arts educators outline legislative priorities as hundreds of students perform at the Capitol

AUSTIN – While hundreds of fine arts students displayed their art and staged music and dance performances at the Capitol on Monday, arts educators voiced support for bills to overhaul the state’s school accountability system and to stop schools from pulling students out of fine arts classes for TAKS test preparation.

Citing data showing that the percentage of middle and high school students in music and fine arts courses has declined steadily each year since 1999, a coalition of more than 30 arts education groups called for a renewed emphasis on the arts in public schools.

“A well-rounded education must include the fine arts and there is a growing awareness that jobs in the 21st Century workforce will demand the kind of creative, innovative thinking promoted by studying music and the other fine arts,” said Robert Floyd, Chair of the Texas Coalition for Quality Arts Education. “We must stop and reverse the decline in arts education in our schools to ensure students are properly prepared for college and the jobs of the future.”

Floyd was joined at a Capitol news conference by Senate Education Committee Chair Florence Shapiro (R-Plano) and House Public Education Committee Chair Rob Eissler (R-The Woodlands). Sen. Shapiro and Rep. Eissler last week introduced legislation to revise the accountability system used to measure the performance of Texas schools. Their proposal (Senate Bill 3 and House Bill 3) would, for the first time, include student participation in fine arts courses among the school performance measures.

Sen. Shapiro is also the author of Senate Bill 1364 that would stop schools from pulling students out of regular classes for special tutoring to boost student test scores. She said the test preparation tactic has become widespread and must be stopped to ensure that students are receiving instruction in every area of the required curriculum. Floyd said in some elementary and middle schools many students are absent from music and art classes as much as half of the school year to attend required test preparation sessions.

Arts educators said they would also oppose any legislation that would reduce opportunities for students to choose music and fine arts courses as electives, including a bill that would replace two semesters of middle school elective choices for every student with more mandatory physical activity. Floyd said that bill would eliminate the opportunity for many middle school students to include in their schedules band, choir and art courses and thus accelerate the decline in fine arts education in Texas schools.

In recognition of Arts Education Days at the Capitol on Monday and Tuesday, hundreds of students from across the state will perform in the Capitol Rotunda and on the South Steps of the Capitol and exhibit their art in the Capitol Extension. Students from the following locations will be performing at the Capitol: Austin, Aransas County, Carrollton-Farmers Branch, Clear Lake, Forney, Fort Worth, Garland, Georgetown, Granbury, Katy, Leander, Marble Falls, McKinney, Pasadena, Round Rock, San Antonio, and Spring.

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