

# STANDARDIZATION OF DANCE EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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## **Introduction: Background and research concern**

In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed *the Goals 2000: Educate America Act* into law and revised *the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)*, causing the educational reform of standards and assessment to become a mainstreamed. With these actions, the federal government changed the educational system from local-centered education to more nationally mandated, defining what children should know and be able to do, and how to assess what children learned. In this educational reform, dance as well as music, visual art, and theater/drama, was added to core curriculum as a fine art subject, and voluntary national standards for dance education were created and endorsed for the first time in the history of dance education in the U.S. It seemed that dance education would progress dramatically in the K-12 schools in the U.S. However, this research posits that the current environment for dance education is not beneficial for students, especially after *the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* became law. According to the research of the National Center for Education Statics (NCES, 2000, pp.6 & 38), which was conducted in 1999-2000, the number of elementary school students who took dance classes as a fine art subject was 20% for all grades and 14% in secondary school grades. In addition, the research of NCES (2010, pp. 41-43) conducted in 2009-2010 showed a worsening of these numbers with only 3% in elementary schools and 12% in secondary schools (see table 1).

	K-12 elementary schools offering dance classes		K-12 secondary schools offering dance classes	
<b>Year</b>	1999-2000	2008-09	1999-2000	2008-09
<b>%</b>	20%	3%	14%	12%

*Table 1 NCES (2010) Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 2009-2010, U. S. Department of Education, pp.41-43.*

Why did such a severe change happen in the number of elementary classes offered in spite of the standardization of dance education in the U.S? This author feels that educational reform of standards and assessment, in general, did not fulfill its promise to improve the status of dance education K-12 schools; instead it denigrated any advancements made in the past.

To explore more deeply the dilemma of worsening numbers in dance education being offered in schools throughout the nation, in this paper I summarize the history of educational reform in the U.S and then elucidate how this history connects to the history of national standardization of dance education. To do this, I will refer to K-12 schools in Wisconsin as a case study to see how the events in dance education took place. As I mention later in the paper, the first dance program found its place in higher education at Department of Physical Education for Women, the University of Wisconsin-Madison<sup>1</sup>. Also, Wisconsin state is known to have created the first state level guidelines for dance education in the U.S. in 1977<sup>2</sup>. Clearly, each state will have a different story and different statistics about dance education; however, by looking at Wisconsin, a sense for how standardization can affect dance education can be further explored. At the end of this paper, I propose what can be done in order to change what is the severe situation of dance education in the U.S.

## **The history of standard/assessment educational reform in the U.S.**

The Tenth Amendment in the U.S. Federal Constitution established that the right of organizing education belongs to the states. However, in 1957, the Soviet Union succeeded in winning the space wars with the development of Sputnik, the first man-made object to orbit the earth. This Russian advance caused the U.S. federal government to revise some policies regarding how education should be conducted in the future. In *the National Defense Education Act of 1958*, the federal government stated clearly that federal financial support would aggressively go to math and science education and the offering of foreign language as a required subject. In the 1960s, the civil rights movement became major social issues. Affected by this movement of equity, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)* was signed into law in 1965 with Title I as part of the law's mandate, thus providing financial support by the federal government to local state educational agencies for the support of children from low-income families. Title I was sponsored by the Democratic-controlled Congress and became the progressive symbol of American educational policy. However, during the Reagan presidency after 1981, there was a gradual movement for outcome-based educational policy. This movement led to the 1983 report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education, titled *A Nation at Risk*, warning that the U.S. would be at risk economically and socially unless the educational system was reformed for children (Vinovskis, 2009, p.14). This reform encouraged the states and federal governments to create uniform national standards for subjects taught in the schools (Ravitch, 2010, p. 25). During the 1960s and 1970s, the basic value of the states and federal government's educational policy was equity, and they focused on children living in low-income environments. However, in the 1980s, the basic value of them shifted from

equity to efficiency and quality, and states educational policies focused on setting educational goals and assessing outcomes of students' learning (Kirst & Wirt, 2009,p.244).

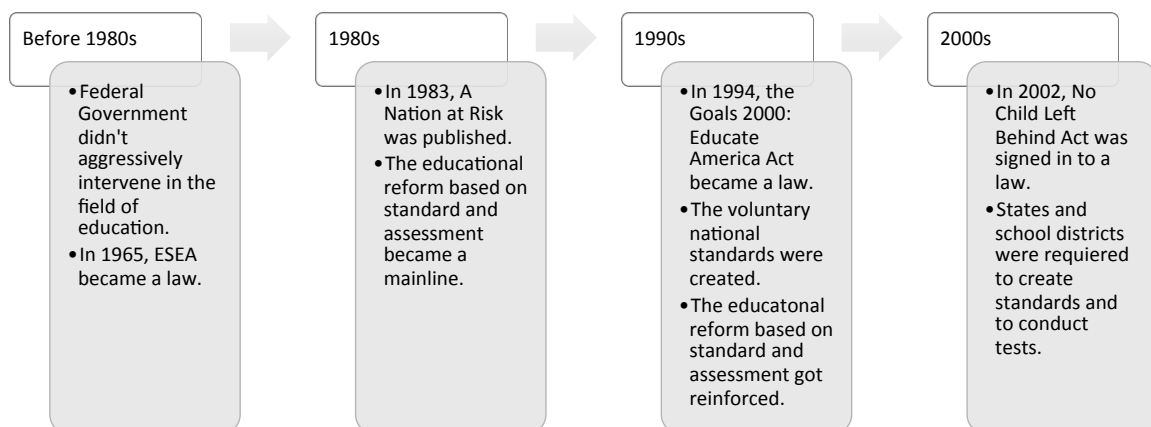
Republican President George H. W. Bush, who was a self-professed Education President, held a bipartisan national Educational Summit in 1989, and delivered *America 2000*. These policies focused on all children starting school ready to learn. This focus led to the creation of further voluntary national standards and test. Although Bush's attempt failed, due to the opposition of Congress, Democrat President Bill Clinton, inaugurated in 1992, signed *the Goals 2000: Educate America Act* into law. One of the goals of this act was that 'all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in, what was deemed as core and challenging subject matter, to include English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, the arts, history, and geography'<sup>3</sup>. Further, what was considered as the standard for competency was very clearly defined. With this act, the voluntary national standards were created for the first time in the history of American education. The federal government provided the resources to the states in order for them to initiate and create their own standards. President Clinton, therefore, provided the new framework for the federal government's role in elementary and secondary education with the states having to create a standard/assessment educational system in order to receive financial support from federal government (Kirst & Wirt, 2009, p.240).

*The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*, which Republican President George W. Bush signed into legislation in 2002, further strengthened the need for standardized assessments for subjects. According to Chapman (2004, p.3), NCLB was

based on the following basic principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on methods that have been proven to work. According to Ravitch the NCLB mandated the following actions:

First, all states were expected to choose their own tests, adopt three performance levels (such as basic, proficient, and advanced), and decide for themselves how to define 'proficiency'. Second, all public schools receiving federal funding were required to test all students in grades three through eight annually and once in high school in reading and mathematics and to disaggregate their scores. Third, all states were required to establish timelines showing how 100% of their students would reach proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014. Fourth, all schools and school districts were expected to make 'adequate yearly progress (AYP)' for every subgroup toward the goal of 100% proficiency by 2013-2014. (2010, p. 97)

If the schools failed to make progress for more than two years, they were put on probation or at worst forced to close. A market principle was introduced in which schools with high test scores were the only ones able to survive intact. At this point, the federal government now had achieved a higher level of power over the states with a primary focus only on students' achievement in certain subjects. This focus of the federal government had a huge effect on dance education in the U.S. On the following page is a table summarizing the historical progression of dance education in the United States.



*Figure 1 A brief history of educational reform in the U.S.*

### **The standardization of American dance education**

As was shown in the previous sections, there was originally no concrete attention to education in the *Federal Constitution* with the right to educate children historically belonging to each state. In 1926, dance was placed in higher education for the first time within the physical education department for women at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Margaret H'Doubler played a leading role in the establishment of the first dance major in higher education. During this time, dance was a part of physical education in the K-12 schools with it only being seen as a fine art in the 1950s (Hagood 2000, p.167).

The Dance Section of the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (AAHPER), which is one of the oldest continent-wide dance organizations, initiated a Dance Division through the Dance as a Discipline Conference on June 20, 1965. At the conference, Margaret H'Doubler presented her kinesthetic approach to dance and Alma Hawkins<sup>4</sup>, from the University of California, asked: "Does dance have a theoretical framework? Does dance have a body of knowledge?" This initial conference symbolized the independence of dance as an academic discipline<sup>5</sup>.

In 1972 *Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972* was enacted. This amendment protected people from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities which receive federal financial assistance<sup>6</sup>. In addition, *the Women's Educational Equity Act of 1974* was enacted, which promoted educational equity for girls and women. This legislation for equity did not intervene in the control of how the

states or school districts implemented the amendment, but it did serve to safeguard students from inequitable practices within the schools. Interestingly, before this legislation physical education classes were segregated between men and women; however, with this amendment dance education moved out of physical education and began to be offered as a co-ed option in the K-12 schools with most of the physical education departments for women being dissolved<sup>7</sup>. Dance programs gradually became associated more with the fine arts rather than with physical education (Bonbright, 2007, p.2).

Further, the national art policy changed dramatically in the 1960s. In 1965, Democrat President Lyndon B. Johnson signed *the Arts and Humanities Bill* into law, and the National Endowment for the Arts was established allowing artists to receive financial support from the federal government. Major funding provided the initiation of the Artists-in-Schools (AIS) programs fostering the placement of many artists in the elementary and secondary schools in 1969<sup>8</sup>. Although the AIS program started primarily in the visual arts, it expanded to dance and other arts throughout the 50 states with the support of further funding in 1973-1974<sup>9</sup>. In this way, the transition of dance as a fine arts subject in K-12 education gained momentum through the actions of the federal government.

In 1986, the U.S. government of education published *First Lessons: A Report on Elementary Education in America*, in which fine arts subject was noted as necessary to education<sup>10</sup>. In 1988, the NEA published *Toward Civilization: A Report on Arts Education* in which Congress was asked to call for a study of the state of arts education. *Toward Civilization* declared that “basic arts education aims to provide all students, not

only the gifted and talented, with knowledge of, and skill in, the arts<sup>1 1</sup>, and it incorporated literature, visual art, design, performing arts and media art into this basic arts education. Although dance was still taught as a part of physical education in many school districts, it was now clearly included in performing arts in the report. Also, the report referred to the severe environment of dance: only 35% of the school districts had curriculum guides at the elementary grade level for dance (75% of school districts had had music guides for all grade levels), and only 30% of school districts had curriculum coordinators of dance and drama, although about half of school districts had arts curriculum coordinators<sup>1 2</sup>. The report further suggested that states and school districts should have clear standards and assessment methods and hire certificated teachers who can teach arts education.

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, dance was recognized as a fine art subject more and more and was placed in the stream of standard/assessment educational reforms undertaken by the states and school districts, even though some states had standards for dance education before the 1980s. However, the federal government was deeply concerned about the inconsistent environment of school education throughout the U.S. This concern prompted the need for a defined core curriculum and the continued encouragement for the states to create clear standards. This led to a call for guidelines for the needed content in standards for differing disciplines. The National Dance Association (NDA) established a task force in 1986, to meet this call and developed the first national dance education guidelines<sup>1 3</sup>. In January 1992, representatives from NDA attended the meeting led by the National Art Education Association with representatives of other art education organizations, and, after many



drafts, completed the National Standard for Dance Education<sup>1 4</sup>. According to the guidelines, the states, school districts, and teachers had a responsibility to decide on how the curriculum would be developed to achieve the stated goals<sup>1 5</sup>. The following were identified as foundational goals within the standards for what the students should learn and be able to do in k-4 grades, 5-8 grades, 9-12 grades:

1. Identify and demonstrate movement elements and skills in performing dance
2. Understand choreographic principles, processes, and structures
3. Understand dance as a way to create and communicate meaning
4. Apply and demonstrate critical and creative thinking skills in dance
5. Demonstrate and understand dance in various cultures and historical periods
6. Make connections between dance and healthful living
7. Make connections between dance and other disciplines

The assessment method for measuring student achievement in music, visual art, and theater was developed in parallel with the creation of the national standards for those disciplines. In 1995, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) conducted a survey of the number of students who were taking dance classes, specifically within grades 4 and grade 8 students, and then in 1997 another assessment was created for students in grade 12. In 1997, NAEP conducted a survey of music, visual art and theater, but dance wasn't included because of the shortage of the samples.

In the process of this development of standards and assessments and the realization of how much further dance needs to grow within the school systems, NDA, which played a central role in making the national standards for dance, increased the intensity of its efforts to become independent from AAPHER after 1994. Some core

members in NDA chose to separate in order to explore dance as a fine art totally divorced from physical education. In 1999, these core members established the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO)<sup>16</sup>. NDEO developed and published the revised version of the National Dance Standard in 2005<sup>17</sup>.

In the next section I reveal the severe environment of dance education in the U.S. with some resources, and explore the structural elements of standard/assessment educational reform which made it difficult for dance education in K-12 schools to get enough resources.

### **The difficulty of dance education in the U.S.**

In 1996, dance was incorporated into the fine arts core curriculum by *the Goals 2000: Educate America Act*. May 12, 1996. The following excerpt from an article in the *New York Times* demonstrates the optimism this incorporation invoked:

Dance and drama classes in New Jersey's public schools? Only if the district is wealthy, or lucky enough to find volunteers willing to lend their expertise. (...)Arts education has been languishing for years, but there is suddenly cause for hope.

This month, the State Board of Education approved a new set of curriculum standards that describe what schoolchildren should learn in seven academic subjects. Of the 56 standards, 6 are devoted to visual and performing arts. If the standards are followed, children in kindergarten through 12th grade will study art, music, drama and dance more intensively than ever before<sup>18</sup>.

With the publication of *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, the fine arts, including dance, were finally not considered as 'frills'. This new status was hoped to insure that fine arts classes would increase in number in K-12 schools. However, after President George W. Bush was inaugurated in 2002, he enacted the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* act which many felt would put dance education at risk. Chapman (2004, p.118) revealed the severe situation of visual art classes in elementary schools and lamented that,

‘Although NCLB does include the arts in a list of core academic subjects, the law does little to support education in the arts, or foreign language, or the humanities and social studies. Indeed, since NCLB has been implemented, these neglected subjects have been called the "the lost curriculum" by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2002) and cited in a discussion of the "atrophied curriculum" by the Council on Basic Education (2004)’. In addition, Meyer (2005, p.35) wrote that, ‘While NCLB includes the arts 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’, and that because NCLB put importance on the results of the tests on mathematics, reading and science, the time and resources might be reduced. In January 24, 2005, The Washington Times published an article stating that after the enactment of NCLB, the fine arts subjects were marginalized with not enough and fair space, time and resources for a low-income district in Maryland to offer the fine arts programs<sup>19</sup>. Further, according to Pedulla (2003, p.43), some teachers reduced the amount of time previously dedicated to foreign languages and fine arts classes and instead devoted them to subjects outside of the humanities. Also, Pederson (2007, pp.288-289) revealed that the number of the states which conducted the assessment of arts and humanities subjects decreased as *NCLB* became pervasive around the country.

Interestingly, while NCLB was becoming embedded in the U.S. educational system, many dance educators continued to hope that the National Standards for Dance coming out of NDA and NDEO might still improve a bad situation. According to the survey of Education Commission of the States (2005), forty-eight states and the

District of Columbia established content standards in the arts and 44 states and the District of Columbia had policies that specifically require schools or districts to offer instruction in the arts<sup>20</sup>. However, although dance education progressed dramatically in a paper, it didn't in practice.

This author feels that NCLB was primarily responsible for threatening the survival of dance education in the K-12 schools. *NCLB's* 'carrot and stick' management policy by the federal government in which the states are forced to test reading and mathematics and further impose sanctions against the schools which do not successfully improve, caused the arts to be marginalized within K-12 education. In addition, the impossible goal that all students must meet specified proficiency levels by 2014, forced many schools to force teachers to only prepare for the tests. Stecher et al.(2008, p.70), working with continuous research coming out of California, Georgia, and Pennsylvania, indicated that subjects not counted into the results of the test do not get as many resources and attention as those subjects with tests. According to the research of the Center on Education Policy (2006, pp.ix-x), thirty-six states ran out of funding to hire staff in the arts and 33 states recognized that they were getting less support from the federal government. As a result, the fine arts, including dance, which did not have mandatory tests were considered a low priority in funding. The concentration of funding and time was rather delegated to core curricula in mathematics and reading.

In Wisconsin, where Margaret H'Doubler established the first dance major in higher education and created the first state level guidelines for dance education in the U.S. in 1977<sup>21</sup>, there was a shift in schools to meet the standard/assessment educational reform in the 1980s. Republican Governor Tommy Thompson, who served

as a governor from the late 1980s to the 1990s, promoted educational reform aggressively and launched various kinds of educational policies. In February of 1990, Governor Thompson founded the Commission on Schools for the 21st Century, which then shaped some of the state's educational policies. The Commission proposed 'the restructuring of schools' based on the educational goals launched by National Governors Association (NGA) and President Bush in 1990<sup>2 2</sup>. The report, which proposed 'the restructuring of schools' by outcome oriented educational reform, suggested the states create the framework of the curriculum, make school districts follow it, and control the outcome by assessments. Especially, the report strongly recommended that states primarily concentrate on subjects which would be the center of the standardized tests, saying "priority should be placed first on developing assessments in reading, language arts, and mathematics. Assessments of learning in science and technology should be added as soon as possible"<sup>2 3</sup>. Following the report of the Commission on Schools for the 21st Century, *Wisconsin Act 269* was enacted in 1991, which obliged the state to set the educational goals and measure students' achievement. In such a stream, mathematics, language arts, science and social studies were differentiated from other subjects such as physical education and fine arts. In some states, such as Wisconsin, the tested subjects were given priority over non-tested subjects. In Wisconsin, now, there are only a small number of K-12 schools that include dance in their curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

Dance education in the U.S. in K-12 schools started as a physical education subject. It was gradually recognized as a fine art subject and standardized as a fine art

subject in the standard/assessment educational reform from the 1980s to the 2000s. However, the standardization of dance education didn't trigger the progress hoped for in the arts. Now dance education is often becoming peripheral in many K-12 schools in the United States. This paper proposed that the cause of this strained condition has its roots in polarization among the disciplines as some are prioritized while others are marginalized.

With resources for dance education often floundering, it may be time for the U.S. to look at how differing countries in which dance education is blossoming are succeeding in their efforts. In Japan and Finland, both of which received strong results in international achievement tests, the schools teach PE and fine arts<sup>2 4</sup>. Especially, in Japan, all of the public middle schools have to teach dance as a part of physical education with well-rounded curricula including dance, music, art, and foreign language. It is firmly believed that the support of all these subjects will educate students as whole human beings. Further, in Japan, there is a belief that students should attain various abilities in diverse subjects and practices. Each of these subjects is not separate; instead, they are all connected one to another. In order to improve the situation which now threatens the continued growth of dance education in the United States, it is important that educators, curriculum designers, administrators, and politicians all engage in an ongoing dialogue with educators in other countries to assure that dance can contribute to the future development of healthy, active, and culturally aware children.

### **Acknowledgement**

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Ross, J. (2000) *Moving lessons: Margaret H'Doublar and the beginning of dance in American education*, Wisconsin: the University of Wisconsin press, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (1980) *Dance: Creative/ Rhythmic Movement Education: A Conceptual Approach for K-12 Curriculum Development*.

<sup>3</sup> The Goals 2000: Educate America Act, Sec. 102. Retrieved November 21, from <http://www2.ed.gov/legislation/GOALS2000/TheAct/sec102.html>

<sup>4</sup> She founded independent dance department as a fine art in the University of California-Los Angeles in 1962, and she presented the case study of UCLA at the conference.

<sup>5</sup> Hagood, T. K. (ed.)(2008) *Legacy in dance education: essays and interviews on values, practices, and people*, US: Cambria Press, p.33.

<sup>6</sup> Retrieved October 25 of 2013 from [http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix\\_dis.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix_dis.html)

<sup>7</sup> Verbrugge, M. H. (2012) *Active bodies: a history of women's physical education in twentieth-century America*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp.191-197.

<sup>8</sup> Leonard, A. E. (2012) *Moving the school and dancing education: case study research of K-5 students' experiences in a dance residency*, a doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Wisconsin-Madison (unpublished), p.45.

<sup>9</sup> The National Endowment for Arts (1988) *Toward civilization: a report on arts education*, p.161.

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, W. J. (1986) *First lessons: a report on elementary education in America*, U. S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>11</sup> NEA (1988) , *op. cit.*, p.13.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.73-74.

<sup>13</sup> National Dance Alliance (1991), *Dance curricula guidelines K-12* (3rd edition).

<sup>14</sup> National Dance Alliance (1994) *National standards for dance education: what every young American should know and be able to do in dance*, US: Music Educators National Conference for the National Dance Association, p.5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>16</sup> Hagood (2000) *op. cit.*, p.309.

<sup>17</sup> NDA remains in AAHPERD in 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Goodnough, A. (1996, May 12) Schools; setting standards that say, 'the arts are not just a frill', *The New York Times*, p.8.

<sup>19</sup> Widhalm, S. (2005, January 24) Arts funding uneven in schools, *The Washington Times*, p.B01.

<sup>20</sup> Education Commission of the States (2005) State policies regarding arts in education, *State Notes Arts in Education*. Retrieved November 21 of 2014 from <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/63/92/6392.html>

<sup>21</sup> Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (1980), *op. cit.*

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<sup>2 2</sup> Commission on Schools for the 21st Century (1990) *A New Design for Education in Wisconsin: Schools Capable of Continuous Improvement*, p.2.

<sup>2 3</sup> Commission on Schools for the 21st Century (1990), *op. cit.*, p.30.

<sup>2 4</sup> Ravitch, *op. cit.* ,p.231.

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