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Good afternoon Madame Chair, Superintendent Spearman and members of the House Education Policy Review and Reform Task Force.

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today. My name is Christine Fisher, and I am the director of the Arts in Basic Curriculum Project. The Project is housed at Winthrop University, and is a collaboration among the SC Arts Commission, the SC Department of Education and Winthrop University. It is funded by the SC Arts Commission, and has been in existence since 1987.

One of the best parts of my job is working with schools to add more arts and arts integration into the school day. Over the past 14 years, I have seen huge transformations take place in these schools because of the arts. And there is a large amount of research to back up that statement. *The Arts in Basic Curriculum Project: A Ten Year Evaluation*, followed by *Arts in Education Research Project: A Five Year Longitudinal Study of ABC Sites* was conducted in South Carolina by the Office of Program Evaluation at USC. The research proved that the arts changed the ecology of schools. ABC Sites had higher student attendance, fewer discipline referrals, higher teacher moral and lower teacher turnover, and higher parent involvement and approval than the closely matched non ABC schools. Fifteen years of research proved the arts made meaningful changes in the schools.

We know that the world class skills, and life and career characteristics found in the *Profile of the South Carolina Graduate* are needed for success in today's world and the world of tomorrow. The arts inherently teach the majority of these life and career characteristics, and world class skills. The arts and arts integration do change students' lives!

In the past 27 years there have been great strides in providing arts education to students across South Carolina, however, there are many schools in high poverty areas that are not being served. An important task force was formed last August, 2014 to answer the question, "What must South Carolina do to ensure that all its young people explore, learn and grow in and through the arts?" (Regardless of the student's location or financial circumstances) The task force, made up of key stakeholders from across the state, concluded its work in February, 2015.

The Arts Education task force had the major recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Prepare and support a stable, qualified and motivated supply of arts educators, administrators, artists and community arts leaders to provide a quality arts education to all children.

Recommendation 2: Ensure that every student experiences a quality arts education, regardless of the student's location or financial circumstances.

Recommendation 3: Build capacity and provide relevant guidance and resources so that schools in all parts of the state are able to meet state standards for arts education and are empowered to develop innovative local approaches.

(To read the full report please go to:

<http://www.southcarolinaarts.com/education/ArtsEducationTaskForce.pdf>)

In light of these recommendations, I would like to recommend these three items for action:

Recommendation 1: Increase the capacity of the SC Arts Commission to develop and manage new programs, expand partnerships and services, such as after-school and summer school programs, STEAM programs and other innovative programs to reach the high poverty, rural students in our state.

Recommendation 2: Increase the capacity of the ABC Project to expand ABC Sites and services to the high poverty, rural students in our state.

Recommendation 3: Increase the SC Department of Education Arts Curricular grants funding.

All of our students deserve a quality arts education! A few months ago I was sitting on the floor of a fourth grade classroom watching a group of five boys, who had written, rehearsed and were now performing their skit about different clouds and the prediction of weather. When they had finished, one of the boys plopped down beside me and said, "Dog! That was the HARDEST fun I've ever done!! But I like it!"

The arts engage students, allows them to be creative and innovative, help students understand and be understood, and allows them to participate in active learning! And yes, the arts are hard fun. Every child in South Carolina deserves that opportunity!

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you this afternoon.