



The Answer Sheet

A School Survival Guide for Parents (And Everyone Else)

John Lennon and Arne Duncan

My reverence for John Lennon notwithstanding, I was not planning to write about today's visit to the Department of Education of the [John Lennon Educational Tour Bus](#). But then, the department made me do it.

The John Lennon bus is essentially a state-of-the-art audio and visual recording studio on wheels. It travels across the country giving free hands-on experience to kids to encourage them to write and play music, engineer recording session, and produce video projects. The nonprofit organization that operates the bus works with local partners to bring the facility to schools, concerts, conventions and other venues.

The idea is to help keep arts education alive for people of all ages, but especially in the many schools where it has been cut in the past decade because of budget tests and an emphasis on academic subjects. The bus is just one of the many private efforts that have been undertaken around the country to bring music and art study to students.

Today the bus is visiting the Department of Education from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., where it will be visited by local students. Education Secretary Arne Duncan will speak at the program about the importance of school music and arts program. (You can see the bus schedule by [clicking here](#).)

It was the department's e-mail announcing the event, sponsored by the International Music Products Association, known as NAMM, or, rather, its sub-headline, that led me write.

It said:

“Local Area Students and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan Board the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus with NAMM to Imagine a Nation with Strong Music and Arts Education Programs”

Of course, I couldn't help thinking that since Duncan is the education secretary, he doesn't have to simply “imagine” strong arts programs like the rest of us; he could actually do something about it.

In a recent speech he gave to the Arts Education Partnership Forum in Washington D.C., Duncan talked about how a well-rounded curriculum that includes art and music is important to a child's development. Amen.

But talking about it and ensuring that it happens are two different things, a point made by Richard Kessler, the executive director of The Center for Arts Education, on the Dewey 21C blog. The center is a non-profit organization dedicated to restoring and sustaining arts education in New York City public schools.

[In a recent post on the blog, Kessler wrote](#) about what he wished Duncan had actually said in that arts speech -- calling them "The Lost Paragraphs," and he rewrote some of what Duncan actually said.

Following are the paragraphs Kessler wished Duncan had said; you can go to the website to see the whole speech:

....That is why I am excited to announce that we are instituting a new policy to help make my remarks today a reality across the United States. For too long the arts have been overwhelmed by other interests and issues, and we will no longer allow that to happen through any of our policies and programs at the USDOE.

Starting today, we will institute a policy that requires all funded programs at the USDOE to include a provision requiring that applicants and grantees certify that their programs will not negatively impact arts education. And what is more, we will ask them to indicate how programs in other areas will help to support arts education in each applicable school community.

For years we have required that certain programs are supplemental and do not supplant. Based on that precedent, we believe that this intervention can help to ensure that the curriculum will be expanded, not narrowed, and that arts education as part of a well-rounded education will be advanced and expanded rather than diminished.

This provision will be incorporated into ESEA and across all programs going forward. I only wish that this had been done in time to be incorporated into the Race to the Top and i3 guidelines."

We can only imagine Duncan putting his full weight behind arts education.