

## Appendix A

*Developing an Explicit Vision,  
Goals and Strategies for Strengthening  
Arts Education in Vermont Communities*

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"If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place"

- Margaret Mead,  
Anthropologist

The mission of the Vermont Arts Council is to preserve and advance the arts at the center of Vermont communities. To achieve this mission, we focus on increasing opportunities for participation in the arts and demonstrating the public value of the arts. At the intersection of these two goals is the important work we do in arts education.

The Vermont Arts Council supports the notion that every child has a right to learn in a way that is meaningful to him or her and that the arts in education is the best way to guarantee that right. We further believe that an appropriate goal to aspire to is to become known as a state that consistently turns out creative and innovative secondary and post-secondary graduates.

For nearly fifty years, we have been advocating for and supporting high-quality arts learning experiences for our children throughout the state and believe that this work is crucial in ensuring that our schools remain vibrant and dynamic centers of community life.

We stand committed to voicing the importance that the arts play in the education of every Vermont student; it is imperative that we examine the equity, access and excellence of each child's education in and through the arts.

# *The Importance of Arts Education<sup>1</sup>*

"Art does not solve problems, but makes us aware of their existence," sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz has said. Arts education, on the other hand, does solve problems. Years of research show that it's closely linked to almost everything that we as a nation say we want for our children and demand from our schools: academic achievement, social and emotional development, civic engagement, and equitable opportunity.

Involvement in the arts is associated with gains in math, reading, cognitive ability, critical thinking, and verbal skill. Arts learning can also improve motivation, concentration, confidence, and teamwork. A 2005 report by the Rand Corporation argues that the intrinsic pleasures and stimulation of the art experience do more than sweeten an individual's life -- according to the report, they "can connect people more deeply to the world and open them to new ways of seeing," creating the foundation to forge social bonds and community cohesion.

Strong arts programming in schools helps close a gap that has left many a child behind: From Mozart for Babies, Tutus for Toddlers, to family trips to the museum, the children of affluent, aspiring parents generally tend to be exposed to the arts whether or not public schools provide them. Low-income children, however, tend not to be given this same opportunity.

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from **Why Arts Education Is Crucial, and Who's Doing It Best** by Fran Smith

"When you think about the purposes of education, there are three. We're preparing kids for jobs. We're preparing them to be citizens. And we're teaching them to be human beings who can enjoy the deeper forms of beauty. The third is as important as the other two."

- Tom Horn, Arizona State Superintendent of Public Instruction

## *The Challenge*

"If the focus remains only on math, science and reading, then we're missing something fundamental: the full development of a life of the mind that comes only with an ease with the arts, an appreciation for the masters, and active participation in creative endeavors.

Artistic disciplines reinforce higher learning and thinking skills."

- Janet Barresi, Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction



There are several challenges to providing access to a quality arts education for every Vermonter. The first is the increasing pressure

for schools to narrow curriculum that focuses on content in standardized tests. It has become a mantra in education that the federal education law No Child Left Behind, with its pressure to improve test scores, has reduced classroom time devoted to the arts (and science, social studies, and everything else besides reading and math). Evidence supports this contention -- but the reality is more complex. Arts education has been slipping for more than three decades, the result of tight budgets, an ever-growing list of state mandates that have crammed the classroom curriculum, and a public sense that the arts are lovely but not essential.

This erosion chipped away at the constituencies that might have defended the arts in the era of NCLB -- children who had no music and art classes in the 1970s and 1980s may not appreciate their value now. "We have a whole generation of teachers and parents who have not had the advantage of arts in their own education," says Sandra Ruppert, director of the Arts Education Partnership, a national coalition of arts, business, education, philanthropic, and government organizations.

In addition to this national trend that threatens the presence of arts education in our schools, the Vermont Arts Council also faces challenges in creating new partnerships and collaborations at a state level. Previously, the Arts Council collaborated with and relied on its partnerships with the Vermont Alliance for Arts Education (VAAE) and the Fine Arts staff member at the Vermont Department of Education to help us advocate for and support strong arts education in Vermont. Both of these key partnerships have been compromised as 2011 saw the nonprofit VAAE close its doors and the Department of Education reassign the fine arts position to another role within the Department.



These occurrences exacerbate the marginalization of the arts in the state of Vermont, but also illuminate a clear charge for the Vermont Arts Council to take more leadership in advocating for better and more equitable access to excellent arts education for all Vermonters.

"Arts education enables those children from a financially challenged background to have a more level playing field with children who have had those enrichment experiences."

-Eric Cooper, National Urban Alliance for Effective Education

## *The Opportunity*

It is clear that the Vermont Arts Council is in new and uncharted territory. But this new landscape is not without its bright spots. There are ample opportunities for the Council to pursue a more complete and comprehensive agenda for the arts in education than we have historically, when our partners' efforts were coordinated with our own. Indeed, it is critical that we survey the landscape and make focused, strategic decisions about areas we can have the greatest impact and placing our time and resources in these areas.

While it is incumbent upon us to have a firm grasp on the national trends that impact arts education and how we might leverage them to improve access to arts education for all children in Vermont, it is also equally important that we have a firm understanding of the specific needs, challenges and strengths of those schools, organizations and individuals supporting arts education for our children. Holding the national trends within our local context, we can craft actionable steps that strengthen arts education opportunities along the continuum—from early childhood arts initiatives to in-school instruction through formal classes and community visits and artist residencies, out-of-school-time (OOST) programming and policy and advocacy agendas.

The Arts Council seeks to align its efforts with other partners who are likewise invested in strengthening the quality of our children's education and to measure and improve our programs to that end.

“Children learn better with arts as part of the curriculum. They learn all their subjects better. They're more engaged. Teacher attendance goes up. The child is happier; the teacher is happier.”

- Jane Alexander,  
former chair, National  
Endowment for the Arts

# Considerations & Collaborations

## EDUCATION POLICY

- School Quality Standards: strengthen and sustain
- High School Graduation Requirement: 1 fine arts credit
- Local Arts Assessments: required of every district in 2008
- Portfolio assessments; extended learning or proficiency-based credits

## ADVOCACY

- Messaging to administrators, school boards, parents
- Sharing success stories, promoting programs that work

## PUBLIC VALUE

- Targeting underserved populations; focusing on rural issues, youth at risk and poverty as a social justice issue in equitable education for all
- Service Learning through the Arts (see portfolio assessments; extended learning & proficiency-based credits)

## POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Vermont Department of Education
- Professional organizations (VMEA, VATA, VDC & VSDF etc)
- Higher Education (pre-service arts & general ed. programs)
- VT Afterschool Network, Out-of-school time; Social Services
- Arts Partnership grant recipients; Nonprofit art ed. programs
- Governor's Institutes of Vermont, VT Young Writers Project, Vermont MIDI, VT Youth Orchestra
- VT Businesses for Social Responsibility; VT Business Roundtable
- Agency of Human Services, Department of Corrections

“The arts should be supported not only because research supports their value, but also because they are as dynamic and broad-based as more widely accepted disciplines... Ultimately, the arts can help make us better people.”

- Eric Jensen, Author & Educational Researcher

“Aesthetic matters are fundamental for the harmonious development of both society and the individual.”

- Friedrich Schiller,  
German philosopher

## *Our Goals*

1. Increase opportunities for everyone to experience and participate in the arts;
2. Demonstrate the benefits of investing in VT communities through the arts.

## *Our Strategies*

Gather & analyze information to understand and be able to:

- Promote life-long learning in, about, and through the arts
- Promote arts education and arts in education, including integration with core subjects, sequential, lifelong, & multimodal learning
- Reduce policy barriers to providing arts education
- Point to models for arts education
- Identify the current status and satisfactory level of arts education in public schools and teacher training, current standards and core content, and trends in delivery systems
- Train artists to teach in schools and to provide professional development in the arts to organizations and teachers
- Advocate for arts education and arts in education
- Evaluate and provide feedback to PK-12 school and out-of-school programs

## *Our Focus*

It is critical that the Vermont Arts Council collect data from Vermont schools and communities to determine a baseline of arts education opportunities currently being offered to students. This data collection will need to be thoughtful and thorough and must be revisited over time for longitudinal study and measurement of impact.

Furthermore, we seek to leverage our statewide Artist Corp to strategically target underserved areas of the state and augment arts education programming in those areas. Teaching Artists can not only improve learning outcomes for students, but also can provide valuable professional development for teachers.

We will also strengthen partnerships with professional teacher organizations, providing synergies in communications and recognition within the field and promoting events and achievements on a clear and consistent basis.

We will continue to fund artists in schools as well as cultural transportation initiatives and will seek to reach a greater number of schools through these funding initiatives.

We will collect and share stories of what is working in arts education and strengthen the link with the education committees of the legislature and other education stakeholders, such as the Vermont School Board Association, the Principals Association, Superintendents Association and the Department of Education to make sure these stories inform policy.

“Children are born curious, creative, and imaginative. The point is: What we do as parents and educators matters enormously in the continued development of these traits.”

- Tony Wagner, author of *Creating Innovators*

## Conclusion

"Finally, the arts are about joy. They are about the experience of being moved, of having one's life enriched, of discovering our capacity to feel. It that was all they did, they would warrant a generous place at our table."

- Elliot W. Eisner,  
Stanford University



Vermont is a small state. With fewer than 300 schools, there is the potential to positively impact arts education in every one *every year*. Those who do not utilize our grant programs might

still benefit from the resources that we could provide. Our Poetry Out Loud model, where we provide high-quality resources and access to programming that educators value to every single high school in the state, provides a way to envision how we can connect with education stakeholders across the entire state.

Furthermore, if we are thoughtful about collecting data and stories that illuminate the current status of arts education in Vermont, we can

work to insure that the arts maintain a place of importance in the education of our young people. We advocate for this comprehensive approach to education because we know that it



enriches individual lives and communities in Vermont.