STATEMENT FROM RHODE ISLAND ARTS LEARNING NETWORK IN SUPPORT OF “ARTS EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL”

As policymakers plan for school in the Fall, the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA) joins more than 50 organizations throughout the nation in endorsing the statement, "Arts Education Is Essential" (attached). It speaks to arts education's role in supporting the social emotional well-being of students. This is an area that all administrators, educators, and parents have highlighted as "essential" to student safety and success during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, regardless of the model of learning that will be in place this Fall.

In light of the recent outbreak of COVID-19, we acknowledge that all areas of daily life have been compromised. We also acknowledge that difficult decisions needed to be made during the rapid transition to distance learning. However, as preparations for the Fall begin, steps need to be taken to ensure that arts education is reinstated as a critical and integral aspect of learning for ALL students. Arts education, during and after the school day, is vital to a well-rounded academic experience. Data shows that engagement with the arts bolsters critical and creative thinking, an essential skill for the creative workforce of the 21st Century. In addition to acquiring skills from participation in an arts program, learners of all abilities are instilled with a deep sense of community and belonging because of the accessibility of arts education.

In support of the National Policy Statement, “Arts Education is Essential” we are also calling on policymakers to implement the following Rhode Island specific measures to ensure that all of our students have continued access to quality arts education when the new school year begins. We call for:

- Guidance from the RI Department of Education (RIDE) to Districts/LEAs to ensure that the BEP (Basic Education Plan) and RI Graduation Requirements, as they pertain arts education, are enforced ¹
  - The RI BEP recognizes arts education as a primary core content area and we must ensure that there is adequate planning for content delivery. At a minimum we call on RIDE to mandate that arts education is primary and not supplemental content in their Fall learning guidelines and in any and all learning models moving forward, either in distance learning or a combination live/distance learning model.
  - We call on RIDE to mandate guidance that states arts learning should maintain the same or equitable class offerings during distance learning or any combination of distance/live learning as it existed prior to the establishment of distance learning initiatives in March 2020.
  - Going forward, arts education must be held to the same standard as other academic content areas. It should continue to be defined and defended as a core subject area in the comprehensive curriculum, with guidance and external support that ensures it does not sustain permanent setbacks from the changes made during the pandemic.

- Assurances from Districts/LEAs that there will be sufficient certified arts educators in place in the Fall to ensure that the RI BEP and RI Graduation Requirements as they pertain to arts education are enforced
  - We call on RIDE and policymakers to actively discourage cuts and layoffs that unjustly target any one academic discipline over others. We recognize that cuts and layoffs in arts departments across districts will impact student learning and have a detrimental effect on community life.

¹ From the RI BEP:1.2.1 C Comprehensive Program of Study
1. “Each LEA shall provide a comprehensive program of study in …. visual arts & design and the performing arts,…..throughout the PK -12 system.”
We offer the assistance of RISCA and the partner professional organizations represented on the RI Arts Learning Networks to provide support for art educators through professional development.

- Acknowledgement from RIDE that arts education is an essential path toward ensuring the social and emotional well being of our students
  - The “Arts Education is Essential” policy paper clearly illustrates the link between arts and social emotional development.
  - Many students look to arts educators as a constant adult figure in their school experience. Arts educators are one of the only educators that interact with almost every student in a school, and taking away this consistency, would be detrimental to students who have relied on these teachers.
  - All learners benefit from quality arts education programs, including traditionally underrepresented groups of students, language learners and special education students. The “sense of community” and expression promoted through these programs is particularly important to students with developmental or intellectual disabilities.

In April 2020, the Governor launched #RIarts as a means of uplifting and promoting mental wellness through artistic expression at the height of the pandemic, recognizing that it was the vibrant community of RI artists, performers and arts educators that inspired us to make content that unites us all while physically apart. In order to fulfill Governor Raimondo’s vision regarding the importance of the arts and its role in the vitality of our state and the mental health of our students, schools must be equally committed to giving due space to arts education by allowing students time to be creative and expressive as they navigate school this Fall.

In closing, the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, the Rhode Island Art Learning Network and a multitude of Arts and Cultural Organizations are ready and able to serve as resources to meet the needs of LEAs as they navigate arts education in the Fall. We ask for a commitment from RIDE and state policymakers that arts education will not suffer this Fall.

Who we are: The Rhode Island Arts Learning Network, housed at the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, was established as a public/private partnership to coordinate efforts around arts education incorporating home/family involvement, school and community based resources. The network seeks to facilitate public engagement, assist in aligning resources (public and private/state and local), and facilitate dialogue and action between and among its partners with the goal of ensuring all Rhode Island students have access to quality arts education. Contact information for contributing organizations available by contacting the RI State Council on the Arts.
It is imperative that all students have access to an equitable delivery of arts education that includes dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts that supports their educational, social, and emotional well-being, taught by certified professional arts educators in partnership with community arts providers.

Teaching and learning will never quite be the same in our post-COVID-19 world. However, our commitment to provide rich and varied educational experiences remains unwavering. The arts have played an important role in these tumultuous times and will continue to do so for all students, including the traditionally underrepresented, those with special needs, and from low-income families. Here’s why:

**Arts education supports the social and emotional well-being of students, whether through distance learning or in person.**

Self-awareness, self-efficacy, self-management and perseverance, social awareness and relationship skills are central to any arts education activity, no matter the age and ability of the student or the environment in which the learning takes place. The arts, with their strong emphasis on team-building and self-reflection are supremely suited to re-ignite students’ interest in learning through collaboration, while simultaneously fostering creativity, critical thinking, and communication.

**Arts education nurtures the creation of a welcoming school environment where students can express themselves in a safe and positive way.**

Celebrating our ability to come together as educators and students is vital to creating a healthy and inclusive school community. The arts, through a rich partnership among certified arts educators, teaching artists, and community arts providers, play a valuable role in helping students and their families build and sustain community and cultural connections.

**Arts education is part of a well-rounded education for all students as understood and supported by federal and state policymakers.**

As defined in ESSA, “music and the arts” are part of a well-rounded education. Every state in the nation recognizes the importance of the arts as reflected in rigorous PreK-12 state arts standards. Forty-six states require an arts credit to receive a high school diploma, and 43 states have instructional requirements in the arts for elementary and secondary schools. As noted in *Arts Education for America’s Students: A Shared Endeavor*: “An education without the arts is inadequate.”

The healing and unifying power of the arts has been evident as the COVID-19 pandemic swept the country. We have seen and heard it play out through works of art on sidewalks, shared musical moments from porches, in plays and dance performances, and every other imaginable iteration of art making. As states and schools work through multiple challenges in the years ahead, arts education must remain central to a well-rounded education and fully funded to support the well-being of all students and the entire school community.
Endorsing Organizations

Afterschool Alliance
American Choral Directors Association
American Composers Forum
American Orff-Schulwerk Association
Americans for the Arts
American String Teachers Association
Barbershop Harmony Society
Carnegie Hall
Casio America, Inc.
Chorus America
CMA Foundation
College Band Directors National Association
Conn-Selmer, Inc.
D'Addario Foundation
Eastman Music Company
Education Through Music
Educational Theatre Association
Give a Note Foundation
Hal Leonard
Historically Black Colleges and Universities
National Band Directors' Consortium
Jazz at Lincoln Center
Jazz Education Network
KHS America
KORG, USA
League of American Orchestras
Little Kids Rock
Mr. Holland’s Opus Foundation
Music for All

Music Teachers National Association
NAMM Foundation
National Art Education Association
National Association for Music Education
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Coalition for Core Arts Standards
National Dance Education Organization
National Education Association
National Federation of State High School Associations
National YoungArts Foundation
Organization of American Kodály Educators
Quadrant Research
QuaverEd
Recording Academy
Save The Music Foundation
State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education
The Rock and Roll Forever Foundation
United Sound, Inc.
Varsity Performing Arts
West Music Company
WURRLYedu
Yamaha Corporation of America
Young Audiences Arts for Learning
YOUnison

Do you represent a national organization interested in endorsing this statement? Email essential@nafme.org

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