

VAC Arts Education Action Plan: Executive Summary

Vision:

The Vermont Art Council believes that every student in Vermont has the right to learn in, about, and through the arts. A student's ability to actualize that right will, in large part, determine both their own creative futures as well as the cultural landscape of our state.

Goal:

The goal of this plan then, while ambitious, is simple: to turn that right from a talking point into a reality.

Challenges/Opportunities:

The current changes in education in Vermont are more significant than any seen since the introduction of "No Child Left Behind." The introduction of the Common Core Standards, Personalized Learning Plans, Flexible Pathways to Graduation, increased interest in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) Education, and a new Secretary of Education appointed by the Governor, provide remarkable opportunities to galvanize interest in arts education. Given the dissolution of the Vermont Alliance for Arts Education and the elimination of an Arts Content Specialist at the Agency of Education, the Vermont Arts Council's unique role as a state arts agency means that these opportunities are also our responsibility.

We believe that the best way to improve the status of arts education is to revise our thinking about it: arts education should not just be a valued part of a complete education, but rather a critical driver of education across disciplines. In essence, to increase student achievement, we propose to systematically change the way the arts are utilized in Vermont schools. The action plan contained in this document proposes a myriad of strategies to achieve this goal.

Our five-year action plan is based on five key ideas:

1. Students and student learning are the focus of our work.
2. The arts will be valued by all members of an academic community when they are integrated into other disciplines. This approach plays to a documented strength of the arts (the arts increase student engagement regardless of learning style) and a renewed emphasis at the state level on student-driven learning.
3. Direct arts experiences with professional artists are inherently valuable, but those experiences, as currently practiced, do not regularly create sustainable, systemic change in the classroom. Too often, when a residency ends, so does the art. The Council should advocate for, financially support, and publicize direct arts experiences for students that will have a lasting impact on the ways

students are taught and learn. Sustainable, systemic change in the classroom begins with teachers and administrators, those that will shape the educational experiences for generations of students.

4. Arts integration is not at odds with a traditional “art for art’s sake” approach to arts education—rather arts integration, when done correctly, elevates the arts (and art teachers) as the best vehicle for delivering student’s learning objectives.
5. The Arts Council’s approach to arts education should focus primarily on in-school initiatives. While there are many excellent after-school and out-of-school arts education programs, our goal of achieving equity in students’ access to quality arts education, regardless of socio-economic status, demands we focus on programing opportunities during the school day.

Defining Success:

Given these tenets, the following action plan provides specific, strategic steps to increase the role the arts plays in student education writ large. The success of these efforts will be measured in a variety of ways (see Appendix D), but most notably through an annual review of arts education data provided by the Agency of Education and the Council’s Artist in Schools information (both final reports and follow-up surveys). Essentially, if our approach is successful, the number of arts professionals in Vermont’s public schools—and by extension, the number of students who take art classes in the public schools—will increase. In addition, the number of grant recipients who regularly integrate the arts into their classrooms after a residency has been completed will also be a measure of our success.

The action steps contained in this plan are organized chronologically, but can be classified and summarized as follows:

RESEARCH

- Partner with the Agency of Education to gather data on the status of arts education in Vermont’s public schools.
- Support demonstration projects that exemplify best practices in arts education in the state.
- *Redesign Vermont Arts Council arts education grant application forms (such as “Cultural Routes”) to further support data collection efforts.*
- Disseminate research and data about the state of arts education in Vermont’s public schools.

COMMUNICATION AND ADVOCACY

- *Highlight best practices and exemplars of arts education in Vermont’s public schools.*

- *Create a local arts education advocacy portal on the Vermont Arts Council website.*
- *Highlight research that demonstrates the impact of arts on student outcomes.*
- *Continue to advocate for strong arts education policies in the state of Vermont.*

FUNDING SUPPORT

- *Seek outside funding to support arts education programs in rural areas of the state.*
- *Seek additional funding to support demonstration projects and arts education research.*

GRANTMAKING

- *Invest in programs and services that expand access to the arts in Vermont's public schools and deepen the quality of these programs and services.*

OTHER PROGRAMMING

- *Continue to support the development and adoption of Poetry Out Loud (POL).*
- *Continue to support the Art Start program, increasing access to the program, while enhancing the quality of the program statewide.*
- *Review the teaching artist roster, instituting new criteria for inclusion on the roster, and incentivizing professional development for teaching artists.*

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- *Forge partnerships with organizations such as the Vermont Principals Association and Superintendents Association to improve the climate for arts education in the state.*

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- *Offer professional development and training opportunities for teachers, teaching artists, educational administrators, and others to advance the quality of arts education instruction in the state.*
- *Offer trainings for teachers, educational administrators, and teaching artists on current topics, and promote arts education networks in the state.*
- *Partner with teacher preparation programs in the state to introduce more general classroom teachers to arts education.*