



NATIONAL **ART EDUCATION** ASSOCIATION
SHAPING HUMAN POTENTIAL

An Open Letter to Superintendents, Principals, and School Board Members: Visual Arts/Design Instruction for All Learners Is More Essential Than Ever

Dear Colleagues:

I hope this message finds you healthy and well as you navigate the impact of COVID-19 on your school community. My name is Thom Knab and I have the honor of serving as president of the National Art Education Association (NAEA) as well as being an elementary school visual arts teacher in the state of New York.

As districts address social distancing restrictions, weighing priorities, adjusting budgets, and planning for the school year, I want to reach out to you in support of a continued investment in visual arts and design education. I know firsthand that a learning environment rich in the arts is critical for every student to achieve their full potential—both socially-emotionally and academically.

During this pandemic, students of all ages have found much needed solace and support through the visual arts, as their teachers provide valuable remote learning opportunities. **Students learn to create, respond to, and make connections to the visual world around them and rely upon the arts for social emotional learning, expression, and support.** They experience the visual arts each day through their own creativity or through objects and media they encounter (e.g. product design, digital graphics, architecture). To provide the support all students require, NAEA respectfully requests that the visual arts, and all arts disciplines, be fully funded.

An education rich in the visual arts provides a means to understand ourselves and the broader world around us, to unpack history and culture, express complex ideas, formulate innovations, and generate creative solutions. These outcomes can be achieved for an entire school community simply by investing in elementary, middle, and high school visual arts teacher positions that provide regular dedicated instruction. **A modest investment in visual arts education can yield powerful results, and we know that the career marketplace has an ever-increasing need for visual, digital, and creative skills that a quality visual arts education can provide.**

In the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the arts are identified as essential subject areas within a well-rounded education. **In addition to arts-related outcomes, participation in a visual arts education can also boost other areas of academic achievement—enhancing writing quality and early reading skills, improving test scores, increasing SAT scores, and contributing to postsecondary success.** An education which includes the visual arts can bolster the outcomes of underserved students by aiding in the acquisition of English skills, increasing academic achievement of teenagers from low-income backgrounds, and expanding civic engagement. [*Why Visual Arts Ed Matters*](#), a 2019 collaborative document between Arts Education Partnership (AEP) and NAEA is a great resource for more information on the benefits of visual arts education for all students.

Schools and communities that value and prioritize the arts build a stronger culture and climate within their buildings and across their neighborhoods. In a recent national public opinion survey by Ipsos, [*Americans Speak Out About the Arts in 2018*](#), 91% of the American

public agreed that the arts are part of a well-rounded K-12 education, 72% believe “the arts unify our communities regardless of age, race, and ethnicity,” and 73% agree that the arts “help[s] them understand other cultures better.”

Whether through direct arts instruction, integrating visual art with science instruction, working on a collaborative community mural, or by gathering to celebrate the annual student art exhibition, the arts have a unique ability to build connective fibers among students, teachers, families, and local leadership. We need these connections now more than ever, especially for our students facing systemic, socio-economic, technologic, and geographic challenges.

Importantly, as you make plans for the year ahead, include your visual arts/design educator on the planning and scheduling team. These individuals are resourceful, know the majority of the student body, and are solution-oriented problem solvers. Our NAEA [Remote Learning Toolkit](#) is available to your school and district as a resource for successfully supporting visual arts education in your community at this time and in the months ahead.

For the next generation of young people like me, to whom the visual arts provided a lifeline—I **ask you to take a stand for arts education and ensure that, even amid difficult budget decisions, a continued commitment to certified visual arts educators and sequential visual arts and design instruction remains a priority.**

We appreciate your continued support as we work together to keep visual arts/design education, and all its benefits, in our students' lives. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thom J. Knab". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Thom" being the most prominent.

Thom Knab, NAEA President
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The National Art Education Association (NAEA) is the premier organization championing visual arts and design education, serving more than 17,000 members in preK-12 classrooms, colleges and universities, museum spaces, community arts organizations, and research labs across the U.S. and internationally as well as 50,000 students in the National Art Honor Society (NAHS). Find out more at www.arteducators.org