

# Illinois Arts Learning Standards Initiative

Recommendations for Updated  
Arts Learning Standards and  
Their Implementation

Report to the Illinois State  
Board of Education

February 2016

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VA	Served on the Visual Arts Work Group
TH	Served on the Theatre Work Group
MU	Served on the Music Work Group
PO	Served on the Policy Work Group
DA	Served on the Dance Work Group
MA	Served on the Media Arts Work Group
WR	Served on the Writing Team for the National Core Arts Standards

# Introduction

After more than a year of statewide outreach and consensus building, the Illinois Arts Learning Standards Initiative has developed comprehensive recommendations for updating the state's arts learning standards to reflect best practices. This report summarizes the process and presents the recommended standards. It also outlines practical strategies for implementing the standards successfully.

## Importance of Arts Education

The arts are essential to a complete and competitive education for all Illinois students. Students today live in a world characterized by rapid advances in technology, the potential to collaborate on an unprecedented scale, and an abundance of information. The arts equip students intellectually, emotionally, and socially to thrive in this ever-changing environment.

Through the arts, students acquire 21st Century Learning Skills such as critical thinking.<sup>1</sup> They explore a variety of symbolic codes and mediums, synthesize knowledge from subject areas as diverse as mathematics and social science, and devise innovative solutions to problems. They access new ways of thinking and learn to consider, evaluate, and value multiple viewpoints.

Arts education prepares students for success in college and career. It increases test scores across subject areas and results in higher levels of literacy. Over 70 percent of companies rate creativity as a primary concern when hiring, yet 85 percent of these companies cannot find the creative workers they seek.<sup>2</sup>

Arts education also helps close the achievement gap. Low-income high school students who have arts-rich experiences in high school are more than three times as likely to earn a B.A. They are also more likely to obtain promising employment, volunteer in their communities, and vote.<sup>3</sup>

The arts promote self-discipline, self-confidence, and self-reflection, while at the same time teaching students how to empathize with others and communicate effectively. The arts classroom is often a school's most democratic space, where students of all levels learn to respect each other's unique contributions and to work collaboratively.

Perhaps most importantly, the arts have shaped every culture. Artists produce the images, plays, dance, stories, and music that make communities unique. The arts prepare students to live in our diverse, global society by exposing them to other cultures and to their own cultural heritage.<sup>4</sup> Through the arts, students also create meaning in their lives and in the lives of others.

## Role of Arts Learning Standards

Arts learning standards “identify what is important for students to know and be able to do in the artistic disciplines of dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts.”<sup>5</sup> Standards help organize teaching and learning. They reinforce best practices in the classroom and provide updated guidance on what constitutes quality arts education.

Unfortunately, access to quality arts education in Illinois too often depends upon a student's zip code, race, or income. The Illinois Arts Learning Standards Initiative's committees kept the inequity of school resources in mind throughout their deliberations, and at the core of the recommended standards is the belief that all Illinois students deserve quality arts education.

In fact, “the central purposes of education standards are to identify the learning that we want for all of our students and to drive improvement in the system that delivers that learning.”<sup>6</sup> The recommended standards present an attainable vision of what is desirable for districts currently unable to provide the full range of arts instruction.

The updated standards therefore not only reflect change, but can also lead to change. They are an advocacy tool. They call for equity.

By adopting the recommendations, the state is acknowledging that it hears that call. “The arts' position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young what adults believe is important.”<sup>7</sup> Updating Illinois' arts learning standards affirms the value of arts education and expresses a recommitment to providing all Illinois students with quality arts learning.

## Assessment

Discussions about quality learning often touch upon assessment. The Illinois Arts Learning Standards Initiative's Steering and Advisory Committees approached their work with a shared view of the relationship between standards and assessment.

The committees view assessment as vital to supporting student learning. The recommended arts learning standards serve as an outline for developing curriculum and related assessments. The standards identify and broadly articulate the significant knowledge and skills that educators can observe and document as their students create; perform, present, or produce; respond; and connect.

Curriculum and assessments based on the standards are best developed by local school districts, schools, departments, and teachers. The choice of exact content in curriculum belongs to local communities. They are best positioned to determine the particular content related to the artistic processes in the various artistic disciplines. The initiative kept this in mind as it crafted updated standards; it avoided the prescriptive and emphasized flexibility.

The initiative recommends locally designed assessment based on authentic tasks, that is, student assignments that assess the ability to apply standards-described knowledge and skills to real-world, real art-making challenges. The initiative also supports establishing criteria and rubrics that designate higher-order thinking skills, metacognition, experimentation, deep engagement, developing personal style, and identifying personally meaningful content as key facets of assessing arts learning.

Quality arts assessment includes formative assessments of in-progress work; observations of process at various stages of creative making, presenting, and interpreting; and documentation and analysis of final works. Quality arts assessment also demonstrates students' abilities to understand and engage diverse approaches and styles of art making and to construct meaningful interpretations of artworks.



# Background & Process

Arts and media are continuously evolving, and arts learning standards must be re-envisioned to be fresh and relevant. The current Illinois Learning Standards for Fine Arts, however, are based upon a thirty-year-old framework: the National Standards for Arts Education, 1985 State Goals for Fine Arts.<sup>8</sup> Illinois last updated its arts learning standards in 1997, and technology, education policy, and artistic mediums have changed considerably since then. It is time to bring Illinois' arts learning standards into the 21st Century.



## Setting the Stage

Several developments set the stage for modernizing the standards. In 2013, Arts Alliance Illinois formed the statewide Illinois Arts Education Advisory Committee to develop a common agenda for improving arts education access, equity, and quality in Illinois. The committee identified a set of essential policy goals, including the need to update the state's arts learning standards.

The committee's work coincided with efforts at the national level. At that time, the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS) was entering the second year of a three-year process to create new national standards. The coalition consists of groups such as the College Board, State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education, and Americans for the Arts. It released new national standards – the National Core Arts Standards (NCAS)<sup>9</sup> – in June 2014.

Meanwhile, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) was conducting a comprehensive review of the state's standards overall, discipline by discipline. The ISBE Board adopted new standards for Math and English Language Arts in 2010 and for Physical Education in 2013. In 2014, it adopted new Science standards and began the review for Social Science. Attention then turned to the Arts.

## Starting the Process

In August 2014, ISBE asked Arts Alliance Illinois to coordinate a review of the NCAS and the development of updated arts learning standards for ISBE Board consideration. It also requested recommendations for implementing the standards. The Alliance contracted with Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation Consulting to provide leadership in creating the process.

As a first official step, the Alliance convened arts education leaders on December 10, 2014 to plan the Illinois Arts Learning Standards Initiative. At the meeting, hosted by the Polk Bros. Foundation, participants determined the initiative's leadership structure, outlined the process, and identified the shared values underlying the initiative.



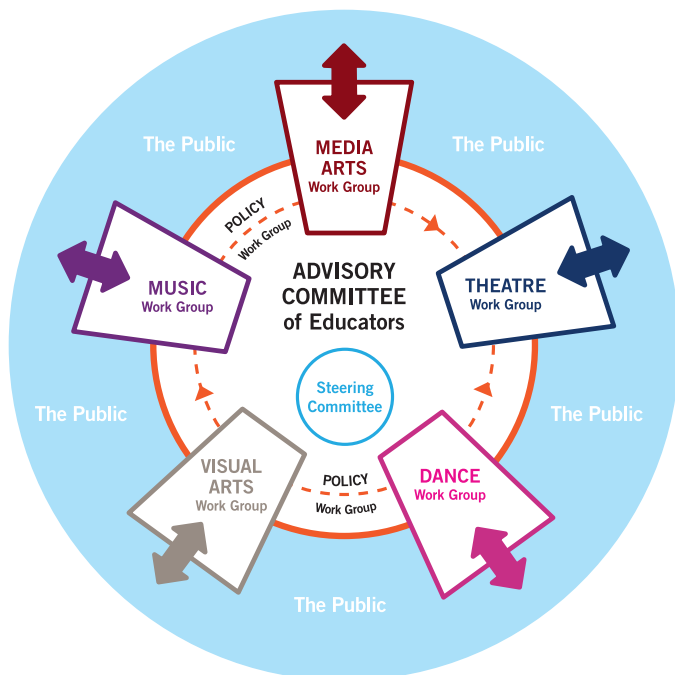
## Leadership Structure

The initiative's leadership structure for developing the standards consisted of a 17-member Steering Committee and a 26-member Advisory Committee. The Steering Committee guided the initiative's process, and the Advisory Committee developed the recommendations. Some leaders participated in the meetings of both committees, helping facilitate communication between the two.

Both committees benefitted from diverse, statewide membership. Arts and education organizations, government agencies, and funders comprised the Steering Committee. The Advisory Committee consisted of classroom teachers, administrators, and teaching artists. Each member contributed a unique perspective and education expertise rooted in practical experience.

The Advisory Committee completed the bulk of its tasks through work groups. It formed one for each artistic discipline: dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts. Several of the groups expanded to include discipline-specific experts not officially on the Advisory Committee.

The initiative also formed a Policy Work Group to address overarching policy issues and foster an integrated consideration of the standards. The Policy Work Group consisted of representatives from the various discipline-specific work groups and overall policy experts, including the four Illinoisans who served on the NCAS Writing Team.



## Four Phases

The initiative has followed a four-phase process that, when completed, will span 18 months (December 2014 – May 2016). In developing the recommended standards, the Advisory Committee and its work groups met 34 times, including more than a dozen all-day meetings, and volunteered over 1,400 combined hours.

### Phase 1 – Gathering Initial Input

(December 2014 – February 2015)

The planning group that met at the Polk Bros. Foundation in December 2014 agreed to serve as the initiative's Steering Committee. Advisory Committee members gathered for the first time on February 3, 2015 for an all-day orientation. They provided input into the process ahead and began to review the NCAS.

Each Advisory Committee member assessed the content and structure of the NCAS through an online questionnaire. At its next meeting, the committee reviewed the results of the questionnaire and identified consensus areas. It formed the work groups to address outstanding issues and to continue the NCAS review. In addition, the Policy Work Group identified six major, overarching policy issues that lacked clear consensus.

### Phase 2 – Building Consensus

(February 2015 – September 2015)

The work groups met throughout the next four months. The Dance, Media Arts, Music, Theatre, and Visual Arts Work Groups went through each of their discipline's individual performance standards in detail, carefully crafting revised language as necessary. Their discipline-specific findings informed the Policy Work Group's deliberations, and vice versa.

The Policy Work Group began by addressing the issues closest to consensus and then moved to the more complex concerns. It used a rating system to track progress toward reaching consensus on each issue. After four months of in-depth deliberations, the Policy Work Group reached consensus on all six major issues.

The Advisory Committee approved the resulting policy positions at its June 22, 2015 meeting. In addition, each discipline-specific work group received feedback on the latest draft of its recommendations. The groups continued their work over the summer, and on September 15, 2015, the Advisory Committee presented its comprehensive draft recommendations to the Steering Committee, receiving strong, consensus support.

## Phase 3 – Engaging the Wider Community

(September 2015 – October 2015)

The community engagement phase gave stakeholders meaningful opportunities to shape the draft standards, and it reinforced grassroots ownership of the process. Several of the work groups had already surveyed educators in their respective fields, but Phase 3 reached a broader audience of educators and fostered interdisciplinary discussions.

The initiative held two community forums (Springfield and Chicago) in October 2015 to gather feedback on the recommended standards. The Chicago forum included a performance by dance students from Curie Metropolitan High School. Melinda Wilson, an Advisory Committee member, discussed how she used the draft standards to shape the lesson plans that guided the students in developing the dance.

Phase 3 also included an online survey that enabled anyone to provide feedback. The survey results were aggregated and summarized, combined with findings from the forums, and shared with initiative leaders to inform the next phase of the process. Across the board, participants in the community engagement activities expressed strong support for the recommended standards.

## Phase 4 – Finalizing the Standards, Expanding Support

(October 2015 – May 2016)

Numerous rounds of editing ensued, and the recommendations went through a comprehensive quality assurance process. Eleven arts education experts reviewed the recommended standards to ensure technical accuracy and consistency. In November 2015, after a year of deliberation, consensus building, and community engagement, the initiative submitted its final recommendations to ISBE.

Since that time, Steering Committee organizations and other stakeholders have actively raised awareness of the recommended standards through in-person presentations, discussions at education events, and online articles. The initiative looks forward to presenting its recommendations to the ISBE Board. A 45-day public comment period will follow, leading to the ISBE Board's vote on adopting the standards. If adopted, the standards will go into effect in the 2018/2019 school year.

## Values

Five shared, core values guided the initiative's process of developing the standards:

### 1. Transparency

The initiative maintained openness. Partner organizations regularly provided updates through social media and newsletters. On a webpage dedicated to learning standards, Arts Alliance Illinois posted drafts of the recommended standards as they evolved. In addition, the public could access the initiative's wiki site at any time.

### 2. Inclusion

The initiative reflects the diversity of Illinois' school districts. Its Advisory Committee includes balanced representation among geographic regions, grade levels, and artistic disciplines. Over half of Advisory Committee members represent school districts in which students of color or low-income students comprise over 50 percent of the total student population.

### 3. Communication

Committee members focused on listening, especially to different perspectives and to viewpoints that challenged assumptions. The initiative fostered cross-disciplinary conversations through Advisory Committee meetings, community forums, and the multidisciplinary Policy Work Group. Work group participants shared ideas and feedback online between meetings.

### 4. Consensus

The initiative did not take votes. The committees and work groups made decisions by consensus. The initiative's recommendations therefore reflect full, strong support.

### 5. Educator Leadership

Educators led the development of the standards from start to finish. Teachers, principals, superintendents, and teaching artists – the professionals who will implement the updated standards – drove the process and served as the primary sculptors of the recommendations.

The initiative also kept *future* educators in mind by engaging the educators who are training them. In total, eleven experts from nine separate institutions of higher education participated in the initiative as committee members, work group members, or technical reviewers.



# Recommendations: Standards

The NCAS serve as the foundation of the recommended Illinois standards. The initiative finds that “a commitment to quality education, equitable opportunities, and comprehensive expectations is embedded within the new [national] arts standards.”<sup>10</sup> The initiative shares this commitment and agrees that the NCAS align with the diverse needs of Illinois’ PreK-12 students.

## Adapting the New National Standards to Illinois

The Steering and Advisory Committees did not assume, however, that the NCAS are a perfect fit, one that the state should adopt verbatim. Instead, they sought to adapt the national standards to Illinois, as necessary.

The NCAS are dynamic, intended to evolve through consideration by the states. As noted by the National Association for Music Education, a NCCAS leadership organization, “Members of the NCCAS fully expect states to spend time reviewing and revising the Music Standards to fit the needs of the music educators and music programs in their state.”<sup>11</sup> The same applies to the standards of the other disciplines.

When considering changes, members of the initiative’s work groups often repeated the motto “necessary, not just nice.” They avoided mere “wordsmithing” and documented clear rationale for why each proposed change mattered in the classroom. The result is a set of recommended standards fundamental to effective arts learning in Illinois.

## Components of the Standards

The recommended standards leave the vast majority of the NCAS unchanged, including the NCAS conceptual framework. The Steering and Advisory Committees agree that the framework organizes and presents the standards logically and clearly. It not only provides context and the bigger picture, but also enables educators to “zero in” on the performance standards of their particular disciplines and grade levels.

The framework integrates processes, knowledge, and skills. Its broadest, underlying components – artistic processes and anchor standards – transcend all five disciplines. Process components, along with enduring understandings and essential questions, comprise the next, more detailed level of the framework. They embody larger, discipline-specific concepts. Within them lie the performance standards,<sup>12</sup> the most specific component of the NCAS and unique to each discipline.

This structure resembles a matrix or table. Each discipline has its own set of performance standards, grouped according to the artistic processes. The process components appear as a column to the side, while anchor standards, enduring understandings, and essential questions form “header” rows. Each subsequent row presents a particular grade-by-grade sequence of performance standards. To view the recommended standards in this matrix form, visit [IllinoisArtsLearning.org](http://IllinoisArtsLearning.org).

The initiative’s recommendations cover the entire NCAS framework. A review of them (below) therefore provides further explanation of the framework’s various components.



# The Six Overarching Policy Recommendations

The initiative's recommendations fall into two categories: overall recommendations addressing the six overarching policy issues, followed by the recommended performance standards. The policy recommendations address (1) artistic literacy, (2) artistic processes, (3) anchor standards, (4) enduring understandings and essential questions, (5) high school levels, and (6) music strands.

## 1. Artistic Literacy

**Recommendation:** Focus on artistic literacy as the central goal of the standards (same as the NCAS)

The entire NCAS point to artistic literacy. To start its review of the NCAS, the Illinois initiative's Policy Work Group asked, "Should the Illinois standards focus on artistic literacy as the central goal?" The answer was a resounding "yes," and the initiative fully endorses the NCAS' definition:

Artistic literacy is the knowledge and understanding required to participate authentically in the arts. . . . While individuals can learn *about* dance, media, music, theatre, and visual arts through reading print texts, artistic *literacy* requires that they engage in artistic creation processes directly through the use of appropriate materials [such as paint and musical instruments] and in appropriate spaces [such as stages, dance studios, and computer labs].<sup>13</sup>

Artistically literate learners use a variety of artistic media, symbols, metaphors, and methods to communicate their own ideas and to respond to the artistic communications of others. Through participation in the arts, they develop creative personal realization and find joy, inspiration, peace, intellectual stimulation, and meaning. Artistically literate learners also cultivate culture and history, support the arts in their communities, and remain active in the arts as an adult. In fact, throughout history, artistic literacy has proven essential to individuals and communities in generating experiences, constructing knowledge, and expressing ideas, feelings, and beliefs.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Artistic Processes

**Recommendation:** Base the standards on the four artistic processes (same as the NCAS)

The recommended standards for Illinois mirror the NCAS in using the four artistic processes – (1) creating; (2) performing, presenting, or producing; (3) responding; and (4) connecting – to organize the standards in each discipline. These four processes “define and organize the link between the art and the learner.”<sup>15</sup> With the exception of the second process, the disciplines of dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts label and define the processes similarly:

1. **Creating** – Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.
2. **Performing** (dance, music, theatre) – Realizing artistic ideas and work through interpretation and presentation.  
**Presenting** (visual arts) – Interpreting and sharing artistic work.  
**Producing** (media arts) – Realizing and presenting artistic ideas and work.
3. **Responding** – Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.
4. **Connecting** – Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.<sup>16</sup>

Like the NCAS, the recommended standards break these four categories into discipline-specific components, phrased as verbs, that show students' active progression through the artistic processes. Examples of process components include “Creating-Rehearse” in theatre, “Presenting-Select” in visual arts, “Responding-Analyze” in dance, and “Connecting-Synthesize” in media arts. (For music, see the sixth recommendation, below.)

### 3. Anchor Standards

**Recommendation:** Include the eleven anchor standards found in the NCAS but change Anchor Standards 3 and 8.

The NCAS divide each artistic process into two or three anchor standards, eleven in all, which “describe the general knowledge and skills that teachers expect students to demonstrate throughout their education in the arts.”<sup>17</sup> The initiative affirms the value of the anchor standards within the overall standards framework. Because they are identical across the disciplines, the anchor standards encourage integrated learning and cross-disciplinary connections.

The initiative recommends changing Anchor Standards 3 and 8 because the terms of those two standards do not make sense for all the disciplines, particularly for media arts and visual arts (see table below).

### 4. Enduring Understandings & Essential Questions

**Recommendation:** Incorporate enduring understandings and essential questions into the standards (same as NCAS)

The recommended Illinois standards include the enduring understandings and essential questions (EUs/EQs) presented by the NCAS. The usefulness of EUs/EQs in the classroom was a common theme of the feedback received by the

initiative. Illinois educators emphasized that the EUs help them and their students focus on the significant “big ideas.” Meanwhile, the EQs provoke thought and inquiry, awakening additional questions in students. The EQs also embody the interdisciplinary nature of the arts; EQs “encourage, hint at, even demand transfer beyond the particular topic in which students first encounter them.”<sup>18</sup>

The EQs included in the recommended Illinois standards are suggested translations of the EUs into significant questions to use in structuring curriculum. The EQs are presented to students in developmentally appropriate language. Communities, school districts, schools, departments, and teachers may formulate EQs suited to the focus of their curriculum.

### 5. High School Levels

**Recommendation:** Keep the three high school levels found in the NCAS but rename the first two “Introductory” and “Intermediate” (which lead to “Advanced”)

The NCAS refer to each grade PreK-8 separately but group the four high school grades (9-12) into three levels: Proficient, Accomplished, and Advanced. Nearly all the initiative’s work groups found the names of the first two levels confusing, in part because the names imply assessment scales. Like the NCAS, the recommended Illinois standards organize the high school standards according to three levels, but the Illinois initiative recommends renaming the first and second levels to “Introductory” and “Intermediate,” respectively, to clarify the meaning and intent of those designations.

## Recommended Changes to Anchor Standards 3 and 8

NCAS (National)	Recommended (Illinois)	Rationale
<b>Anchor Standard 3:</b> “Refine and complete artistic work.”	“Revise, refine, and complete artistic work.”	The final stages of work in media arts and visual arts can involve revising as well as refining. In the NCAS, under visual arts, the EU and one of the EQs for Anchor Standard 3 specifically refer to “revising.” While adding “revise” to this anchor standard would more effectively align it with media arts and visual arts, the change would not negatively impact the other disciplines.
<b>Anchor Standard 8:</b> “Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.”	“Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work.”	In the NCAS, this anchor standard essentially represents an “intentional fallacy.” The initiative believes that it is not the goal or ability of arts interpretation to determine the artist’s intent.

Throughout its deliberations, the Advisory Committee considered not just the standards' direct impact on student learning, but also how the standards might be read from a policy perspective.

The revised high school level descriptors (See Appendix) do not equal years in school. They are broad categorizations of course levels within high school curriculum. Given this, the recommended standards refer to each of the three high school categories in the plural: "Introductory Levels," "Intermediate Levels," and "Advanced Levels." This recognizes the need for arts curriculum during all four years of high school in order to provide all students with high quality arts education.

## 6. Music Strands

**Recommendation:** Structure the music standards as one strand, rather than the five separate NCAS strands.

In the NCAS, four of the disciplines – dance, media arts, theatre, and visual arts – have one set of learning standards each. The NCAS divides the music standards, however, into five separate "strands:" General Music, Harmonizing Instruments, Music Composition and Theory, Traditional and Emerging Ensembles, and Music Technology.

The initiative's Music Work Group, as well as the Steering and Advisory Committees as a whole, recommend adopting a hybrid strand of the NCAS music standards rather than adopting all five separate strands. Over the course of its deliberations, the Music Work Group edited the General Music strand to include elements from the other four strands. It is the work group's and initiative's intent that the other strands exist as a reference for Illinois teachers to use when needed, but not serve as expected standards.

This modification of the NCAS results in clearer, concise standards that will more effectively support teachers and administrators in understanding what a quality music education program in Illinois should accomplish. The recommended single strand best promotes attainment of artistic literacy as the fiber of music programs in Illinois, while at the same time catering to the diversity of music programs across the state. In addition, the change will bring greater alignment between the music standards and the standards of the other disciplines, helping facilitate cross-disciplinary references.

## Performance Standards

In addition to the six overarching positions discussed above, the Illinois Arts Learning Standards Initiative is recommending updated performance standards. Unique to each discipline, performance standards are "grade-by-grade articulations of student achievement in the arts" PreK-12 and "translate the anchor standards into specific, measurable learning goals."<sup>19</sup>

Each work group went through the NCAS performance standards line by line in its respective discipline, adapting them to Illinois, as necessary.

**To view the recommended performance standards, visit:**

**[IllinoisArtsLearning.org](https://IllinoisArtsLearning.org)**

The site contains downloadable pdfs of the recommended Illinois standards in matrix form.

Of particular note, the Illinois Arts Learning Standards Initiative's recommendations include learning standards for the discipline of *media arts*, building on the NCAS. Illinois currently does not have standards for media arts, and in this area alone, the initiative's recommendations reflect a significant modernization of student learning in Illinois.

The Media Arts Work Group and the other work groups brought the unique needs and understandings of their respective disciplines to bear on the standards review. In the final section of this report, each work group briefly offers its own discipline-specific observations.

# Recommendations: Implementation

Developing and adopting updated arts learning standards is just a first step, albeit a crucial one. The recommended standards will only succeed if implemented effectively. This is especially true with arts learning standards because the arts represent dynamic, multimodal content.

The initiative therefore took implementation into consideration from the start. For example, the work groups completed a survey that collected their ideas of implementation strategies, and the Advisory Committee held focused discussions on implementation at every one of its meetings.

Through those discussions, as well as through feedback from the broader community, the initiative identified practical short-term and long-term strategies for implementing the updated standards. The strategies fall into four categories: (1) professional development, (2) tools and resources, (3) community engagement, and (4) evaluation of standards implementation.

## Professional Development

Arts educators and advocates across the state will need to familiarize themselves with the standards and understand them. Implementation of the recommended standards should therefore prioritize ongoing professional development for all disciplines, together and separate, particularly in the form of enhancing professional learning opportunities for arts educators.

These opportunities should include discipline-specific, regional meetings arranged by professional arts and education organizations, in-person **workshops**, informational sessions at educator conferences, and webinars. These trainings can facilitate networking, encourage resource sharing, link pedagogy and arts knowledge and skills, and teach participants how to read and interpret the updated standards.

Effective implementation will also involve deepening and expanding professional learning communities for arts education professionals at the state and local level. Through **professional learning communities**, educators can discuss and reflect on the standards and their implementation, generating feedback, ideas, and discussion.

Schools and districts can also work with arts **assessment specialists**. These experts aid teachers, curriculum directors, and instructional leaders in developing and implementing appropriate formative assessments aligned with state standards and local goals. Locally developed assessment strategies can also be shared at discipline-specific regional meetings.



## Tools & Resources

The initiative recommends the NCAS **conceptual framework** as a well-researched resource that can assist educators and community members in navigating the updated Illinois standards. In addition, the recommended Illinois standards are available as printable **matrices** for download at [IllinoisArtsLearning.org](http://IllinoisArtsLearning.org).

The initiative's work groups produced discipline-specific **glossaries**, adapted from those of the NCAS, to create a shared understanding of key terminology and to assist Illinois educators in refining and clarifying academic language. These glossaries define terms that the work groups found confusing or vague.

During the community engagement forums, educators expressed the value of student work exemplars. Representing work from students across Illinois and from each grade level and artistic discipline, **student work exemplars** would embody excellence as described by the updated Illinois standards. The exemplars would not be prescriptive; rather, they would demonstrate quality work done by students through locally determined lessons aligned with the updated standards.

These resources would be most effectively housed and disseminated through a website, a "one stop shop" for educators and the public wanting information on the Illinois arts learning standards. Similar to the NCAS site ([nationalartsstandards.org](http://nationalartsstandards.org)), this Illinois-specific **online center** would complement ISBE's website and include downloadable versions of the resources mentioned above, online tutorials, and promotional and advocacy materials that discuss the importance of the standards.

During the initiative, Arts Alliance Illinois created an arts learning standards webpage on its site. The page included updates on the initiative, drafts of the standards, and other resources. This has evolved into a new Alliance-developed microsite ([IllinoisArtsLearning.org](http://IllinoisArtsLearning.org)), on which educators can find the glossaries, matrices, and helpful links.

Tools and resources related to standards implementation must be open-ended and generative. They should provide new opportunities for interpreting and refining the standards, connecting with professional peers throughout the state, gathering feedback, and sharing locally developed assessments statewide, as appropriate for local contexts and use.

Especially in a state as large and diverse as Illinois, this calls for a dynamic website that is interactive and frequently updated. Together, these supplementary materials will help build a shared understanding of the standards. They can also create a common language for advocating for the use of the standards across the state.



## Community Engagement

For implementation to succeed, a wide range of stakeholders will need easy access to tools and resources that explain the updated standards. Implementation of the standards should involve ongoing, proactive engagement of key stakeholders, which include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Teachers and teaching artists (future and current)
- Students
- Administrators, including principals and superintendents
- Local school boards
- Parents and parent-teacher organizations
- Local, state, and national arts education associations, overall and discipline specific
- Local performing arts organizations
- Museums and galleries
- Nonprofits engaged in arts education, whether in the classroom or the larger community
- Institutions and organizations of higher education
- Curriculum experts and designers
- Arts education coalitions
- Local and state advocacy and policy organizations
- Local and state government agencies
- Local, state, and national policy makers
- Teacher unions and professional associations
- Corporations and businesses, who have a stake in a creative workforce
- Funders, such as private foundations

Examples of effective community engagement and outreach strategies include promotional and advocacy videos, which can leverage the creativity of the arts sector, and social media campaigns to raise awareness of the updated standards.

## Evaluation of Standards Implementation

The Illinois State Board of Education and stakeholders should evaluate implementation progress one year after adoption of the standards. A review should then occur once every two years, gathering programmatic feedback and modeling an effective, continuous improvement cycle.

A formative evaluation can lead to further refinement of curriculum, adjustment of implementation strategies, as necessary, and a more complete and holistic implementation that will improve arts instruction. The evaluation should look at the bigger picture, that is, measure the state's progress toward the ultimate goal of all students having sufficient access to quality arts education. Conducting such an evaluation calls for reporting requirements on arts education equity, access, and quality.

## Additional Considerations

The most important tool and resource is *time*. Teachers need more time to acquire new knowledge and to learn best teaching practices from other educators. Students need more time to engage with the arts and arts learning. In expanding time for professionals and their students, the investment in developing these updated standards will have significant academic, economic, and social impact.

This requires that Illinois value the role of arts education in the daily education of all students, regardless of their local context. It calls for proactive requirements for arts education that value creativity and innovation as a part of a complete and competitive education for all Illinois students.



# Notes from the Discipline-Specific Work Groups

The Dance, Media Arts, Music, Theatre, and Visual Arts Work Groups each brought the unique needs and perspectives of its own artistic discipline to bear on the development of the recommendations. Below, the work groups offer their observations to colleagues in their respective disciplines.

## Dance

In dance, students develop knowledge, understanding, and skills to communicate ideas using the elements of dance, including space, time, dynamics, and relationships. Students will use the body as an instrument and movement as a medium. Dance composition processes will be used to explore, organize, and refine movement for choreography and performance that responds and connects. Each year will include movement scaffolding into developmentally appropriate processes of creating, performing, responding, and connecting.

In addition, students will develop their movement vocabulary with techniques from simple to advanced skills, organized by a set of overarching anchor standards. Early experiences in dance will lead to later participation in a variety of genres and styles relevant to interests, capabilities, and practical context. Safe dance practices and technical skills will be used, relevant to individuals. Through integrated practices of creativity, choreography, performance, responding, connecting, and appreciation, students will develop aesthetic knowledge.

Students will also connect sources from history and contemporary life understanding. They will learn that dance connects to all art forms and has been created for multiple purposes. Students will examine the influences of social, cultural, and historical dance contexts, both past and present. These contexts will provide a basis for creating, composing, performing, responding, and connecting to the critical analysis of dance as an art form.

- Dance Work Group

## Media Arts

It is no “short order” to introduce a new artistic discipline into the field of arts education. Arts educators of all artistic disciplines in Illinois are excited by the inclusion of media arts into the field as described in the NCAS. The inclusion of media arts expands the reach of arts education, broadens the scope of arts teaching and learning, reflects contemporary practices in the arts, and bridges the “real-world” gap of workforce readiness for the young people of Illinois.

The Media Arts Work Group took on this “tall order,” conducting substantive surveys and reviews. The resulting standards closely mirror both the NCAS and the Common Core State Standards in a number of key areas, but they are also unique in their descriptions of the quality learning experiences students have in media arts making, production, exhibition, and reflection. In response to suggestions from visual and media arts educators, the Media Arts Work Group aligned some shifts in the standards in order to clarify what it means to be a media arts producer and consumer.

The recommended standards will give school leaders and media arts educators a road map to grow their programs, as well as a foundation on which to establish curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices for this new artistic discipline. The media arts standards will also enrich and embellish the learning platform already established by other technology-based standards that engage digital tools for the creation of artworks. Existing standards include those of the International Society for Technology in Education (formerly known as NETS Standards).

- Media Arts Work Group

## Music

The recommended music learning standards were developed to be useful to music teachers in a variety of musical disciplines and educational situations. The goal is to give teachers the tools needed to focus instruction in courses that are already taught, while encouraging innovation in developing new content. That being said, not every standard will be evident in every music class. For example, courses focused on performance will deal primarily with the standards under the artistic process of performing and will often have very little focus on some of the standards under the process of creating.

In contrast, composition courses may focus less on the performing standards than on the creating standards.

It is up to music teachers along with their school districts to develop local plans for implementing and assessing these standards. The unique and often subjective nature of the arts creates its own inherent challenges when measuring the success of artistic processes. The measurement of student achievement is affected by a student's access to music instruction, and benchmarks should be tempered in relation to that access. School districts should also use this collaboration to evaluate their ability to provide access to music education, and they should develop plans not only to improve student learning and instruction, but also to improve their students' access to music instruction.

- Music Work Group

## Theatre

The initiative's recommendations include major changes in the substance and presentation of the theatre learning standards. Theatre and education have evolved and changed since the 1990s, when Illinois last revised its standards. A major change is a movement away from tasks to the "big ideas" in theatre. Under the recommendations, Illinois' theatre standards will acknowledge for the first time the role of both creative drama and theatre education techniques.

The recommended standards place greater emphasis on theatre as a collaborative and multi-disciplinary art. This change includes teaching students to create a unified concept for their theatre pieces. The recommended standards also give greater emphasis to the making of meaning and personal connections. The concepts of social and emotional learning, such as developing empathy, are also evident.

Several rows of standards focus on technical theatre and the role of new technologies. For the first time, this extends into the elementary grades. In addition, the recommended standards give more attention to the role of research (dramaturgy) in theatre. They also emphasize the role of theatre in our communities, nation, and the world.<sup>19</sup>

- Theatre Work Group

## Visual Arts

Visual arts educators are approaching an exciting time in our state. After reviewing the NCAS and conducting several surveys, the Visual Arts Work Group found that Illinois arts educators view the NCAS favorably. As a result of the positive feedback, the recommended visual arts learning standards closely mirror the NCAS. They are not identical to the NCAS, however, because they include some changes, suggested by arts educators, to create better clarity in understanding and using the standards.

The recommended standards will assist visual arts educators in delivering quality arts education to students. The standards are designed to enhance strong arts learning in all arts classrooms in Illinois. Arts programs should be in a state of flux, always open to improvement and change in order to meet the needs of student learning. The recommended standards will give arts educators the opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their programs.

The National Art Education Association and the Illinois Art Education Association have provided information and input into the development of the NCAS and the recommended Illinois standards. This ongoing flow of information has kept the arts educators of Illinois open to the changes that are needed for successful implementation of the recommended standards. Arts Alliance Illinois has provided the guidance and direction for arts educators to embrace the recommended standards through a process that will strengthen the arts and arts teaching in our state.

- Visual Arts Work Group

# Conclusion

Arts education equips students with the nuanced perception and complex thinking vital to success in college and career. Through the arts, students learn to collaborate with others effectively, communicate clearly, and solve problems creatively. They grow in self-confidence and self-direction, create meaning, and engage other cultures through learning.

The recommendations of the Illinois Arts Learning Standards Initiative reflect these benefits and the scores of other advantages provided by arts education. The recommendations update the state's arts learning standards, incorporating best practices and clearly identifying what Illinois students should know and be able to do in dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts.

Updating the state's arts learning standards represents a recommitment to providing every student with quality arts learning. It affirms the arts as essential to a complete and competitive education for all Illinois students.



- <sup>1</sup> National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS), *National Core Arts Standards: A Conceptual Framework for Arts Learning*, 2014, pp. 19-22.
- <sup>2</sup> The Conference Board, Americans for the Arts, and The American Association of School Administrators, *Ready to Innovate*, 2008, pp. 13-14.
- <sup>3</sup> James S. Catterall, Susan A. Dumais, and Gillian Hampden-Thompson, *The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies*, National Endowment for the Arts, 2012, pp. 18-21 & 24. Also see National Endowment for the Arts, *The Arts and Human Development: Framing a National Research Agenda for the Arts, Lifelong Learning, and Individual Well-Being*, 2011, pp. 8 & 20.
- <sup>4</sup> Partnership for 21st Century Learning, *Framework for 21st Century Learning: P21 Framework Definitions*, 2015, pp. 2 & 5-7.
- <sup>5</sup> NCCAS, *National Core Arts Standards: Frequently Asked Questions*, 2015, pt. 2, retrieved from <https://nccas.wikispaces.com/Frequently+Asked+Questions>.
- <sup>6</sup> NCCAS, *Conceptual Framework*, p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup> Elliot Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, 2002, pp. 70-92, as cited in “10 Lessons the Arts Teach,” National Art Education Association, 2015.
- <sup>8</sup> Illinois State Board of Education, *Illinois Learning Standards: Fine Arts*, 2015, retrieved from [http://www.isbe.net/ils/fine\\_arts/standards.htm](http://www.isbe.net/ils/fine_arts/standards.htm).
- <sup>9</sup> The word “Core” in “National Core Arts Standards” (NCAS) does not mean that the NCAS are the same as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The National Coalition for Core Arts Standards included the word “Core” to emphasize that the arts are essential – “core” – to education. Although the NCAS and CCSS are different, the NCAS writing team considered the CCSS and took them into account when developing the new national standards. In *The Arts and Common Core: A Comparison of the National Core Arts Standards and Common Core State Standards* (2014), the College Board states, “Meaningful connections to the Common Core are found throughout all of NCAS Anchor Standards, including those associated with creating as well as those concerned with performing or presenting, in addition to responding and connecting. The arts standards connect to all segments of the Common Core, extending beyond the standards for reading to include writing, speaking and listening, and the Standards for Mathematical Practice. (p. 12)”
- <sup>10</sup> NCCAS, *Conceptual Framework*, p. 4.
- <sup>11</sup> National Association for Music Education, *State Standards Adoption and the 2014 Music Standards*, n.d., p. 3.
- <sup>12</sup> With the NCAS as the base of its recommendations, the Illinois Arts Learning Standards Initiative uses the term “performance standards” to suggest that in meeting these standards students will actively engage in making, presenting, and responding in the various art forms.
- <sup>13</sup> NCCAS, *Conceptual Framework*, p. 17.
- <sup>14</sup> Adapted from NCCAS, *Philosophical Foundations and Lifelong Goals*, 2014, p. 1.
- <sup>15</sup> NCCAS, *Conceptual Framework*, p. 11.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid, pp. 11-12.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 12.
- <sup>18</sup> NCCAS, *Conceptual Framework*, p. 14, discussing the work of Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins, *Understanding by Design*, 2005.
- <sup>19</sup> NCCAS, *Conceptual Framework*, p. 13
- Photos courtesy of Arts Alliance Illinois (pp. 7, 12, & 21), Collaboraction (p. 8), Melinda Wilson, Dance Chicago (p. 11), Illinois Music Education Association (p. 17), and Jeremy Guidry, Ravenswood Elementary School, Chicago (p. 18).

# Appendix

## Descriptors for High School Levels of Performance Standards

<b>Introductory</b> High School Levels	<b>Intermediate</b> High School Levels	<b>Advanced</b> High School Levels
<p>By the end of completing Introductory coursework levels, students have an introductory depth of understanding of key ideas, as well as an introductory extent of knowledge and sophistication of skill and technique. They are also able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the art form to be an important form of personal realization and well-being.</li> <li>• Experiment and create with fluency and confidence while building skills.</li> <li>• Contextualize their knowledge to make connections between the art form, history, culture, and other learning, engaging contemporary ideas, issues, and practices.</li> </ul>	<p>By the end of completing Intermediate coursework levels, students have an intermediate depth of understanding of key ideas, as well as an intermediate extent of knowledge and sophistication of skill and technique. They are also able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build on earlier skills and knowledge to identify or solve arts problems based on their interests or for a particular purpose.</li> <li>• Conduct research to inform artistic decisions.</li> <li>• Create, revise, and refine arts products, performances, or presentations through a focus on practicing skills.</li> <li>• Use the art form for personal expression and well-being and have the necessary skills for and interest in participation in arts activity beyond the school environment.</li> <li>• Understand art as social communication to engage in contemporary ideas, issues, and practices of the discipline.</li> </ul>	<p>By the end of completing Advanced coursework levels, students have an advanced depth of understanding of key ideas, as well as an advanced extent of knowledge and sophistication of skill and technique. They are also able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independently identify challenging arts problems, based on their interests or for specific purposes, and bring creativity and insight to finding artistic solutions through their artistic creations.</li> <li>• Conduct research to inform artistic decisions.</li> <li>• Use their personal strengths to apply strategies to overcome personal challenges as arts learners and practice their skills.</li> <li>• Use the art form as an effective avenue for expression and investigation, demonstrating a higher level of conceptual, expressive, and technical proficiency characteristic of honors level work.</li> <li>• Use the art form as social communication to engage in contemporary ideas, issues, and practices of the discipline.</li> <li>• Take a leadership role in arts activity within and beyond the school environment.</li> </ul>

The Illinois Arts Learning Standards Initiative is coordinated by Arts Alliance Illinois in partnership with the Illinois State Board of Education.



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