



Illinois Arts Learning Standards – Q & A

Why is arts education important?

The arts give students the fullest experience of being human, while preparing them for college and career. Through the arts, students learn critical thinking, effective communication, broad-based collaboration, and creative problem solving. They grow in self-confidence and self-direction, create meaning, and engage other cultures through learning. The arts are essential to a complete and competitive education for all Illinois students.

What are arts learning standards?

Like other subject areas, the arts have learning standards. Arts learning standards identify what is important for students to know and be able to do in the disciplines of dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts. Standards organize learning, provide guidance on the quality of education, and reinforce best practices.

Why did Illinois recently update its arts learning standards?

In 2010, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) began a comprehensive review of the state's learning standards in every subject area. As part of this process, ISBE turned its attention to the arts in 2014. Arts and media are continuously evolving, but Illinois' arts learning standards had remained unchanged for nearly two decades. The time had come to modernize the standards.

How did Illinois update the standards?

In partnership with ISBE, Arts Alliance Illinois launched the Illinois Arts Learning Standards Initiative, an educator-led, consensus-based process to update the standards to reflect best practices in arts education. The initiative's diverse, statewide Steering and Advisory Committees consisted of teachers, administrators, and teaching artists and reflected the diversity of school districts across the state.

What did the process involve?

Over the course of 18 months, work group and committee members met 34 times and volunteered more than 1,400 hours in developing the recommendations for updated standards. The process included public forums, online surveys, and extensive community outreach. On February 10, 2016, the initiative presented the recommended standards and implementation strategies to ISBE.

What did the public say about the updated standards?

After receiving the recommended standards, ISBE held the required public comment period. More than 900 Illinoisans submitted comments of support – equivalent to one comment of support for every hour of the 45-day comment period. In summarizing the commenters' feedback, ISBE noted:

The proposed standards, they said, reinforce critical thinking, communication,



collaborative and problem-solving skills, and “underscore the value of an arts education.” Further, the commenters praised the broad-based process for developing the standards that involved Illinois educators.

Have the standards been approved?

Based on this strong public support and the thoughtful work of the initiative’s Steering and Advisory Committees, the state superintendent called for approval of the arts learning standards recommended by the initiative. On June 16, 2016, the State Board voted unanimously to adopt the standards.

The following month, as the final, required step in making the updated standards official, the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR) voted unanimously to support the standards. The committee consists of 12 state legislators – six Democrats and six Republicans – and its vote served as a strong, bipartisan statement that the arts are essential to a complete and competitive education for all Illinois students.

In adopting the updated standards, Illinois is now a national leader in this key area of arts education, and other states are learning from Illinois’ success.

When will the updated standards take effect?

The updated arts learning standards will take effect starting with the 2018-2019 school year. With this in mind, the Illinois Arts Learning Standards Initiative recommended to ISBE not only the updated standards, but also a comprehensive set of strategies for implementing the standards.

Arts Alliance Illinois and its partner organizations are now putting those strategies into action. The Alliance is working closely with teachers, administrators, school districts, parents, and other stakeholders throughout the state to help implement the standards, providing educators with the practical resources and support they need.

How can I learn more?

The Alliance has created a website dedicated to the standards: IllinoisArtsLearning.org. At the site, you can review and download the standards, as well as read the initiative’s report. You can also receive updates by subscribing to the Alliance’s e-newsletter through the site.

For more information on the Alliance’s arts education advocacy, contact Jonathan VanderBrug, Policy & Research Director, Arts Alliance Illinois, at 312-855-3105 x 12 or vanderbrug@artsalliance.org.