



NATIONAL
ART EDUCATION
ASSOCIATION

AN OPEN LETTER

to University and College Presidents, Provosts,
Chancellors, Board Members, and Deans Overseeing
Visual Arts Education Programs

January 5, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

I hope this message finds you healthy and well as you navigate the impact of COVID-19 on your institution and communities. My name is Thom Knab, and I am President of the National Art Education Association (NAEA) as well as an elementary school visual arts teacher in the state of New York.

As institutions of higher learning make adjustments to meet the current social distancing restrictions, weigh priorities and budgets, and plan for the future, I want to reach out to you in support of a continued investment in visual arts education programming. To ensure that the pipeline for future arts educators is accessible, vast, and supported, NAEA passionately advocates that visual arts education programs and departments within your institution are not more negatively impacted than other programs and departments in these difficult economic times.

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. A well-prepared and certified visual arts educator is essential to actualizing these outcomes. Unfortunately, recent closures and discontinuations of visual arts education programs and departments in higher education have put a strain on the development of future visual arts educators. It is imperative to continue to provide these programs within institutions of higher learning to help prepare the visual arts educators necessary for tomorrow's leadership in K–12, museum, and community settings. For more information on the importance of art education programming at the college and university levels, please read NAEA's Position Statement on Pre-service Education and its Relationship to Higher Education [here](#).

An education rich in the visual arts provides a means to understand ourselves and the broader world around us, 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. However, sustaining K–12 positions requires commitment and support from institutions of higher learning to provide the necessary programs and experiences to develop future visual arts educators.

NAEA additionally asserts that high-quality university and college staff and excellent programs are necessary to foster impactful and necessary learning experiences in the preparation of quality visual arts educators. Eliminating university faculty and staff has the potential to lower the quality of the educational program and may even delay the achievement of degrees for students requiring coursework in art education as a requirement for graduation. For more information on NAEA's stance, please review our Position Statement on Supporting, Sustaining and Retaining Art Education Programs in Colleges and Universities [here](#).

It should be noted that the work of art educators involved in postsecondary instruction is multifaceted and often involves more than the preparation of preservice art teachers. Instructors of art education working at colleges and universities frequently play a role in workforce development for future museum educators, studio artists, community arts educators, K–12 generalists seeking to integrate art into their curriculum, and much more. For higher educators working with graduate students in art education, a major focus of instruction often involves the preparation of future researchers interested in the systematic inquiry into intellectual and practical issues related to visual art and design education and other social sciences. Given the multiple roles that art educators play in higher education, it is clear that reductions in funding, staffing, and course offerings in their programming would have a detrimental impact across several related fields and for the future of arts education research.

For the next generation of young people, to whom the visual arts provide a lifeline, as they did for me—I **ask you to take a stand for visual arts education and ensure that, even amid difficult budget decisions, a continued commitment to retaining visual arts education departments and programs remains a priority.**

Thom Knab

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thom J. Knab". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

NAEA President

tknab@arteducators.org