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**Arts Ed NJ Issues ‘March Forward
Spring 2022 Guidance for Arts Education’**

WARREN, N.J. (March 1, 2022) – Arts Ed NJ, the performing arts affiliate for the National Association of State High School Associations (NFHS), has suspended mitigation guidance for schools designated as “mask optional” effective March 7, 2022.

The announcement coincides with the just-released March Forward Spring 2022 Guidance for Arts Education (<http://marchforwardnj.org/>), which provides the most up-to-date policy guide for administrators, K-12 arts educators, and the community at large to ensure that students can take part in arts education programs safely and effectively as schools return to pre-pandemic norms.

This update comes in the wake of New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy’s February 7, 2022 announcement (<https://www.nj.gov/health/news/2022/approved/20220207d.shtml>) lifting the universal school mask mandate for all students, educators, staff and visitors effective on March 7, 2022, as well as the February 25, 2022 announcement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) easing mask recommendations (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>)

The latest update from Arts Ed NJ includes:

1. No mitigation requirements for “Mask Optional Schools.”
2. For schools with a mask requirement, Arts Ed NJ reinforces the previous recommendations for indoor performing arts, including:
 - Masks made of appropriate material should be worn; however, wind players should mask their instruments while playing. This allows them to remove their face masks during performance only. Social distancing of three feet is also recommended “when feasible.”
 - In spaces with good ventilation, indoor rehearsal time should be limited to 50 minutes, followed by one air exchange before resuming. If there are spaces with higher air change rates, teachers may consider longer rehearsal times.
 - Proper hygiene ventilation strategies should be a priority at all times.

3. There are no mitigation requirements when outdoors for any school.

While Arts Ed NJ is careful to note that its recommendations are subject to change based on the latest CDC and New Jersey Department of Health requirements, the organization believes that when these recommendations are followed, the arts classroom is as safe as any other classroom. In addition, students will benefit most if schools refrain from adding unnecessary obstacles to learning dance, music, theater, or visual art in person.

“We are excited to see our schools begin to transition back to pre-pandemic operations across all educational programs including the visual and performing arts,” said Arts Ed NJ director Bob Morrison. “We are hopeful this new phase will bring some normalcy back for our students as they engage in these arts programs without restrictions”

Arts Ed NJ is urging policymakers to allow for a return to pre-pandemic norms for dance, music, theatre and visual arts. Studies have shown the importance of these disciplines in providing a well-rounded education. Arts education is vital because it combines intellectual challenges with social emotional learning, essential for student development. To move forward, students need to be able to interpret their world and express their emotions, something that’s more important now than ever.

But while all subject areas have suffered due to COVID over the last two years, arts education may have been hit hardest. Isolating students from their classmates and teachers negates the benefits that are unique to art education—the peer-to-peer learning that comes from shared experience; the ability of a teacher to work with students over multiple grades and to serve as role models for students; the tools for learning how subjective judgment plays a role in everyday life; a safe space to explore the gray areas that are ignored in subject areas where standardized testing thwarts creative reasoning; even the simple joy of creating something new.

“March Forward 2022 emphasizes the importance of studying dance, music, theatre and visual arts collectively and in person. Our data shows that students have missed creating together in an unobstructed way,” Morrison said. “We also believe that engaging with the community, whether by organizing field trips or bringing artists into the classroom, is both beneficial and motivating for students.”

The recommendations outlined in March Forward 2022 build upon work that began in 2020 with a task force of more than 100 of the state’s leading arts educators and stakeholders, who met regularly throughout the school year and beyond to understand the challenges for students and teachers during the COVID era.

With its March Forward 2022 guidelines, Arts Ed NJ is urging school districts to provide teachers with the professional development and classroom resources and equipment they will need to meet the specific needs of their curricula and students, citing eight key points:

Sequential arts education must return for all students in all instructional models: New Jersey Student Learning Standards in the Visual and Performing Arts were affirmed in 2020 and continue to be a requirement for all learning methods.

Arts Education programs will require the proper staffing and support to ensure continuity of instruction. This includes maintaining certified arts educators to provide sequential instruction while providing them with materials, resources and equipment needed to meet health and safety requirements.

Arts educators and administrators must be part of district planning. No group has spent more time studying the challenges and solutions of teaching the arts in the COVID-era than arts educators. Their collective knowledge will be a critical asset to school administrations and board members as they begin to return to pre-pandemic norms.

Schools must prioritize making and creating the arts together. Students have identified the loss of time making art together as the thing they most missed when forced to study remotely. When students are in school, the emphasis should be placed on creating artistic works together.

Social and emotional learning needs of students, faculty, and staff must be addressed in all aspects of instruction. Arts Education plays a critical role in supporting the social and emotional needs of students, which New Jersey's Accelerated Learning Guide recognizes as important factors for effective education by influencing a teachers' ability to teach and students' ability to learn.

Schools must address learning delays and disruptions in the arts: As with other subject areas identified in the N.J. Department of Education's Learning Acceleration Guide, resources should be provided to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the visual and performing arts, including those available from the state and federal government.

Professional development must be provided: To most effectively meet the challenges of re-emerging from the pandemic, arts educators must be provided the opportunity and necessary resources to engage in professional development relevant to their respective fields.

New Jersey cultural community resources should be utilized for instructional support. From assembly programs and field trips to artist residencies and collaborative projects, New Jersey's rich community of artists and cultural organizations play a critical role in the education of our students. As schools reopen, they should look for appropriate opportunities to bring students into contact with artists and art in the community at large.

“An arts classroom is a classroom, period,” said Morrison. “Sequential arts education is part of New Jersey's learning expectations for all students and must be maintained.”

For more information about the March Forward Spring 2022 Guidance for Arts Education, visit <http://marchforwardnj.org/>

For more information about Arts Education and Social and Emotional Learning, visit <https://artsedsej.org>

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About Arts Ed NJ

Arts Ed NJ is the unified voice for arts education in New Jersey. The mission of Arts Ed NJ is to create the proper conditions for arts learning to take place in New Jersey. Formerly the New Jersey Arts Education Partnership, Arts Ed NJ was founded in 2007 by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, New Jersey Department of Education and Music for All Foundation. Additional support has been provided by the Grunin Foundation, ArtPride New Jersey Foundation and an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional information is available at www.artsednj.org.