
Committee Meeting

of

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*“The Committee will meet to receive testimony
from invited guests on issues related to arts in education”*

LOCATION: Meeting via Zoom

DATE: June 6, 2025
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Senator Joseph P. Cryan, Co-Chair
Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Co-Chair
Senator Renee C. Burgess
Senator Angela McKnight
Senator Joseph Pennacchio
Assemblywoman Linda S. Carter
Assemblywoman Carmen Theresa Morales
Assemblywoman Victoria A. Flynn
Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis
Assemblyman Erik K. Simonsen



ALSO PRESENT:

Rebecca DiBenedetti
Executive Director

Ivy Pomper
Executive Assistant

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Therefore, portions of this transcript may not be completely accurate as portions were inaudible and/or indiscernible.*

Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey



SENATE

Hon. Joseph P. Cryan, Co-Chair

Hon. Renee C. Burgess
Hon. Angela McKnight
Hon. Shirley K. Turner
Hon. Joseph Pennacchio
Hon. Douglas J. Steinhardt
Hon. Michael L. Testa

ASSEMBLY

Hon. Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Co-Chair

Hon. Linda S. Carter
Hon. Carmen Theresa Morales
Hon. Victoria A. Flynn
Hon. Michele Matsikoudis
Hon. Erik K. Simonsen

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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MEETING NOTICE

TO: Members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools

The Joint Committee on the Public Schools will meet on Friday, June 6, 2025 at 10:00 a.m., via Zoom, to receive testimony from invited guests on issues related to arts in education.

The public may address comments and questions to Rebecca DiBenedetti, Executive Director, at 609-331-2485, or by email at Rsapp@njleg.org

Issued May 7, 2025

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ASSEMBLYWOMAN VERLINA REYNOLDS-JACKSON

(Co-Chair): Becky, you want to start with the roll call first?

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Absolutely.

Senator McKnight.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Senator Pennacchio. (no response)

He is here.

SENATOR PENNACCHIO: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Assemblywoman Carter.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Assemblywoman Flynn.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Assemblywoman Matsikoudis.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MATSIKOUDIS: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Assemblywoman Morales. (no response)

I know she is here.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: I saw her.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Yes, she is here.

Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Present.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: And, Senator Cryan.

SENATOR JOSEPH P. CRYAN (Co-Chair): Here.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Sorry, excuse me.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: OK.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: I want to say good morning, everyone, again, and I am super excited to be here today with the Joint Committee on Public Schools.

And, we're going to be meeting today centering around the arts in education, which is one of my fave. I think we have some incredible partners who are practitioners in this space, and, so, we're going to hear from them today. And, we also have advocates and a student representative; retired leaders that's going to bring us full circle and talk about next steps and how we can continue to support and uplift the arts. I'm going to introduce Melanie Schulz, who is going to kick us off.

M E L A N I E S C H U L Z: Good morning, Senator Cryan, and Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Oh!

I'm so sorry. Sorry, Melanie. Senator Cryan, do you have anything you want to add?

SENATOR CRYAN: Who could possibly follow you, Assemblywoman?

Looking forward to a great hearing and certainly learning a lot more and see what we can do to be helpful. The arts matter to everybody. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

Your turn, Melanie.

MS. SCHULZ: OK.

Good morning, Senator Cryan, Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson, and members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. My name is Melanie Schulz, and I am Director of Government Relations at

NJASA, but, today I come before you as a member of the arts at New Jersey Board to discuss the role the arts play for our K-12 students.

We've been talking a lot about mental health these days, and art plays a vital role in supporting the mental health of students by providing a safe and creative outlet for self-expression. Participating in the arts also promotes mindfulness and relaxation, both of which are crucial for managing anxiety and improving overall well-being. And, arts education plays a very big role in supporting students with Individualized Education Programs, otherwise known as IEPs. Many of these students -- and, you probably know some of them -- can benefit from non-traditional modes of engagements, and the arts skills in a supportive and inclusive environment. For those with challenges in verbal communication or academic subjects, the arts can become a powerful tool for self-expression and connection. I have known more than a few of these students who struggle otherwise academically, but they just shine and have their incredible talent in the fine and visual arts, and dance and music. When these students see their abilities recognized and celebrated through the arts, it fosters a sense of community and belonging they might not find elsewhere.

I'd like to turn to the cuts at the Federal level, and I know that you're not in that space, but we are very mindful of those cuts, and they will have significant impact on the K-12 arts in education with programs like the Assistance For Arts Education program being eliminated in the House this Fiscal 2025 Appropriations Bill. And, for our part, we will continue to lobby and speak with our congressional leaders, and hope to restore at least some of these cuts. We would hope that you would join us in speaking to the members of Congress to encourage them to not make such drastic cuts.

I'm just going to wrap up, I'm going to take just a second more to say that the people who are going to speak after me are much wiser and more informed than I am. They're going to talk in detail about the importance of arts education, as well as how important the work that we would like to undertake needs your support; so, I hope you will give them the time to present their case, and that you will support us both financially, and in celebration of the arts and the students in our state.

As always, I am thankful that you are willing to have these kinds of discussions, and I look forward to our continued collaboration. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.
Thank you, Melanie.

Next up, we'll have Wendy Liscow, the Executive Director at Ed NJ.

WENDY LISCOW: Yes, that's me, thank you.

Good morning, Co-Chairwoman Jackson, Co-Chairman Cryan, and the rest of the Committee; I am indeed Wendy Liscow of Arts Ed NJ, the statewide organization that works to ensure that every single child in New Jersey receives a high-quality, sequential arts education. And, we really do appreciate that you have invited us back to speak about our work.

You may remember that a year ago, we shared with you the importance of arts education. We talked about how it supports student well-being; increases graduation rates; and reduces chronic absenteeism. We also shared the urgent need to support students who are most at risk of being left out; those in under-resourced communities; multi-lingual learners; and students with IEPs. At that time, you asked us what we needed, and we

promised to return with a specific plan. Today, we are here with that plan and a proposal to support two important initiatives. I will share one, and Mary Reece will share one later. And, we do share these plans with you with renewed urgency that Melanie started to illuminate. As you know, there are critical Federal threats to education with the proposed '26 budget. That includes a \$12 million cut to the Department of Ed., \$4.5 million to K-12. And, it removes specific contents, specific professional learning assistance for arts education, and, perhaps, little noticed, but really important, I think: It narrows the definition of core content, and it excludes arts education, which effectively is reversing 25 years of bipartisan progress.

Arts Ed NJ is also feeling the effect of the zeroing out of the funding for the National Endowment for the Arts; we lost \$100,000 NEA grant -- national endowment grant -- that we've been receiving for eight years. And, along with another major funder who's shifting priorities, we've lost 37% of our operating budget. And, that's not just numbers, it really does limit the tools and support we can offer students and educators in districts. But, despite that, we're not pulling back; we have a brand-new five-year vision plan, and we're moving forward with our partners with a data-packed plan, and to launch a high-impact arts education model school program. Because, we also are hearing from supervisors; 23% of those art supervisors in our schools are reporting program cuts this year. Forty-one percent anticipate additional cuts next year. Music teachers are being let go; supply budgets are being cut; instruction time is shrinking. So, we are requesting support to launch Phase I of a statewide initiative that will define, measure, and support high-impact, high-quality arts education. It's a concrete tool set to help school leaders make informed, equity-driven decisions about how to grow and

sustain arts programming even in tough budget climates, which we know they are all in.

So, here's what we would do in Phase I, which is '25-'26 school year. We will merge two proven research tools that we administer currently, in partnership with the Department of Ed. First is the Arts Education Interactive Dashboard that reports annual student arts participation using data from the School Report Card. And, second, the Arts Ed. Census that we administer every five years that takes a deeper dive into the data and adds these really important indicators that tell a much fuller picture about what high-quality arts education looks like. Like, the facilities; the per-pupil spending; the ratio. Importantly, we will also add de-identified student-level data, which will allow us to study important issues that we've talked about, but maybe haven't been able to prove, such as the impact of arts on chronic absenteeism, graduation rates, and social-emotional outcomes for our specific students in New Jersey. We're going to convene statewide stakeholders to determine appropriate rubrics that place schools on a realistic growth process, from maybe, developing, to exemplary, to a model school that has all five art forms. We'll create a dynamic, interactive, public-facing dashboard and website; report with policy and action recommendations; and a roadmap toolkit that will help schools work through those barriers to advancement. This is baseline work that would lead to future work in years two, three, and perhaps -- and, definitely beyond. We'll pilot the program in five diverse districts, urban, suburban, rural. We'll provide strategic planning support and mentoring. We'll scale up proven practices that some of which you'll hear about today, and recognize schools for their improvement. We may even add them an award to our Governor's Awards in Arts Education, which

is another program we co-run with the Department since 2007. And, we'll work to build momentum in public awareness about what works in arts education.

So, I hate to see that Senator Cryan has maybe moved from the screen here, because I wanted to share a story about his district in Elizabeth, New Jersey, which is probably a way to illustrate what high-quality arts education can look like. Our dashboard, that I mentioned earlier, shows that 29 of Elizabeth's 34 schools offer three or more art forms. That's a rare achievement, since fewer than 15% of New Jersey's schools offer three disciplines. The district also employs 12 certified dance educators, matched *only* by Newark. Again, a great achievement, because only 3% of our students in this state receive dance education. So, with this new program, we'll not only just uncover what is offered, we'll uncover how well it's being offered. So, are minutes of instruction sufficient? Is the curriculum sequential? Are students with IEPs equitably included? Are facilities and partnerships adequately supported by their programs? We'll also be able to help other districts replicate that success with data, planning tools, and targeted support.

So, in closing, we're asking for your support to launch Phase I of this urgent transformational work. This initiative gives New Jersey a way to protect what we've built over the past 25 years, and lead the nation in arts education innovation. Next, my colleague, Margaret El, will share a proof of concept for their approach from our state's largest district, and following that, Mary Reece will talk about a project that we're launching to support IEP learners and multi-lingual learners and answer any questions you have. I do have to apologize, our student is not able to come; they called, said last

minute that they had to attend an emergency meeting for their new job this summer, but we will share their testimony with you later.

So, I thank you for your leadership and your partnership.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Awesome.

Oh, I was looking forward to it; but, we'll have to--

MS. LISCOW: We need--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: --set that up again, yes.

Because, oftentimes, I think we have these conversations without hearing from the actual participants and the youths who are receiving it. But, we'll follow back up again.

MS. LISCOW: May I share, we do -- this is why we're particularly disappointed, too -- we have started a youth leadership program, Arts Education Leadership Program, and these students are amazing.

Every time I sit with them, they make me cry, and they're moving on to college and creating great work there, too. So, yes, we'll send you their testimonies, they have some-- Some of them had videotaped some things for you all, too.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Nice.

OK, I look forward to it. All right. We'll move on to Margaret El, Retired Director of VPA, Newark Board of Education.

MARGARET EL: Good morning; good morning, everyone, and thank you so much to the members of the Joint Committee for your attention to the importance for visual and performing arts education in our wonderful state.

My name is Margaret El, and I'm here today as a recently retired Director of Visual and Performing Art; to share a similar effort to the one that is being proposed today, that we implemented in the Office of Visual and Performing Arts in Newark Public Schools. For clarity, I'm not speaking on behalf of the District today, but speaking to the work during my tenure as an employee. The project that we initiated was named "Renew the Arts." And, leading with the moniker "Arts for every child in every school," Renew the Arts was a districtwide arts education strategy, established with funding from Prudential and Geraldine R. Dodge Foundations in 2013, to explore strategies that ensure all students receive rigorous, sequential arts program, and exposure to high-quality community arts experiences and partnerships.

The program started with eight schools, and grew to 39 schools over a seven-year period from 2013 to 2020. Grant funds were critical in the ability to hire a consultant to support research, technical assistance, data collection, and reporting annual progress among other needs. The Renew the Arts objective at its inception was to have all schools participate and complete a school arts planner, which was a self-assessment tool in the form of rubric. And, this rubric became critical to the entire process. The second objective was to award funds to schools to support two specific focus areas at that time. One of the focus areas was engagement with the New Jersey student learning standards for artistic processes via the curriculum. And, the second focus area was securing arts partnerships along with curricular goals. And, this was important at the time, because at that time, we did not have all art forms in all schools consistently, and in many cases, some schools had neither art nor music. So, strategically providing residency opportunities to schools exposed

the schools -- the students -- and administrators, to what the effect of arts education could be if these programs were fully implemented.

Next objective was to develop a school partnership map and align experiences with district curricular, and finally, to leverage resources to achieve sequential arts education. So, the pilot program commenced with eight schools and expanded to 39 schools participating over a seven-year period from 2013 to 2019. Over this timeframe, we observed growth and scheduling strategies; strategic allocation of resources to support arts classroom instruction; strategic use of arts partnerships; and increase in school-based performances and exhibits; and more -- this was really important -- school-based administrator involvement in planning for sequential arts education. From 2013 to 2019, findings from the Renew the Arts initiative helped inform a larger districtwide arts education strategy, inclusive of all 63 schools.

And, I'm going to apologize for the background noise, because I am sitting -- because I have to go into another space immediately following this. So, I'm in my car.

So, this was accomplished through revisions to the schools' arts planner, and, again, this is this rubric tool that we use. And, it included benchmarks identified--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: (indiscernible)

MS. EL: And, it included benchmarks identified under five districtwide arts education goals and is similar to what the proposed Arts Ed. Model School Program will create for other schools throughout the State of New Jersey.

The five districtwide arts education goals were the result of a comprehensive, year-long data-collection process on the status of arts education in the district. And, this included all 63 schools. Information was collected through surveys; school site visits; Office of Visual and Performing Arts data; and arts partner reporting. A suite of customized arts education surveys, which were actually modeled after the New Jersey Visual and Performing Arts survey, collected self-reported data from elementary, secondary, and specialized school principals; supervising managers of the arts; and teachers from all four arts disciplines at that time. Site visits to schools and surveys captured information about physical spaces; classrooms; performance spaces; equipment and technology in use by the arts programs.

A scheduling-- We actually developed a scheduling matrix tool that was designed to capture frequency of student participation in arts education in elementary schools, like, “How many days did Johnny actually have visual art in the course of the school year?” And, PowerSchool was used to pinpoint student enrollment in high school arts classes. The comprehensive data collection results in five overarching goals for the revised school arts planner rubric. And, those five goals were student access and participation; the second was capacity building; the third was centered around curriculum instruction and assessment; the fourth, partnership and collaboration; and the fifth -- and, what we felt was really, really important -- was infrastructure and sustaining the arts. Under each of the five goals, the school arts planner contains clearly defined benchmarks with specific indicators for a high quality arts education. Using information from the completed school arts planners, schools -- individual schools, because they were all in a different space -- identified strategies specific to their location;

projected outcomes; and identified resources needed to achieve goals on their path to high-quality arts education.

Now, while the arts education data dashboard provided baseline indicators to see where a school was, we discovered the need for additional indicators for a more comprehensive and precise view of arts education practices in Newark schools that would provide guidance in the development of school-based arts action plans. And, they all align with the census data, and a proposed new high-impact model school indicators. The most exciting news is that Renew the Arts worked. While the work continues, over the course of eight years from 2016-2024, multiple outcomes have been realized. The Office of Visual and Performing Arts expanded from *one* staff member in 2016, to now three staff members: a Director and two Supervisors currently. And, that was a hard push, but, over time, we were able to accomplish that goal. The district also, for the very first time, promoted two arts educators for newly created positions as Visual and Performing Arts Department chairs at our two largest comprehensive high schools. This is unique because, typically, school-based arts administrators are from other content areas. These positions were designed to have a person with visual and performing arts background to be the supervisor of the program specifically in our two largest high schools, which both offer all four art forms. So, there was a need, and, in many cases, there are multiple art teachers in, for example, at Barringer High School, there literally are three dance educators at that location. So, you can only imagine.

In addition to the two new Department chairs, the District also promoted two arts educators as vice principals at the elementary level. We know that at least at the elementary level in Newark Public Schools, the arts

are supervised by the -- all kinds of areas are supervised by the vice principals. So, here we have-- We're building leadership capacity with arts educators leading the way, because we know if they're running schools, that they will very clearly and intentionally support arts programming in their schools. The other wonderful thing is that all the schools were required to minimally budget for music and visual art educators as part of the school floor plan. And, I want to note here, that even during the pandemic, we did not see a decrease in our arts educators; we were actually in the process of hiring more. More students at the elementary level participated in sequential learning at both art, music, and this is because our schools saw some of the successes that other schools were having that were using good scheduling practices. Other schools began to gradually adopt some of those practices. There was an increase in middle- and high-school students actually being able to select the art form that they were enrolled in. This had not been-- Usually kids were just placed in an art form in the middle and high schools. Here they were-- Now they're selecting which one, their preferred choice.

There was also an increase in the number of visual and performing arts teacher hires, from 188 arts educators in 2016 to 245 arts educators at the start of the '23-'24 academic year. That's an additional 57 arts educators over a seven-year period. A school that may have had one music teacher got a second one so that they can focus on vocal and instrumental. So, lots of progress there. And, also, we noticed an increase across the city in schools participating in districtwide All City events. When we began this process, for example, our All City dance program, there were eight schools participating, and about 70 students. As of this past year, we had 19 schools participating, and over 290 students on stage. So, the progress

is really evident, and even to the point that this year, although I'm no longer with the district, they had to split the All City dance program because the capacity for the auditorium space just became overwhelmed, and they had to separate the high school from the elementary and middle school programs. So, that just speaks to the wonderful work that those educators are doing in their classroom. There was also a marked increase in the number of school-based art department chairs at the high school level, and vice principals at the pre-K-8 level attending -- and, this is critical -- visual and performing arts-specific professional development for school-based administrators. So, our administrators often, every month, they get professional development. But, there was no specific arts-based professional development. And, what we discovered very early on is that administrators were not aware that there were core content standards for visual and performing arts. So, they thought of it as an activity. So, we sort of like, re-- We restarted how they thought about it and how they approached the arts educators in their buildings as a result of their participation in these professional development sessions designed specifically around arts educations. So, now, it's like you could ask them like, "What are the four artistic processes?" And, they can tell you what that is, they actually *know*. (laughter)

Where, that was not the case before. So, they've all increased their knowledge of the New Jersey student learning standards, and the VPA administrative code. They're more familiar with the district art goals and are better equipped to coach, lead, and assess arts educators while developing school arts programs. So, if we can see improved outcomes and make this happen in such a large district--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Yes, yes.

MS. EL: And, yes, it's still a work in progress, but the work continues.

I ask you to imagine what it could look like if we did this across the state. And, I want to conclude by saying the possibilities are endless for what New Jersey can accomplish to ensure consistent quality and participation for every student, no matter what ZIP code, through the New Jersey Arts Education Impact Model.

And, I thank you all for your attention to this.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Ms. Margaret, I just want to say thank you, thank you for really, really hitting this out of the park.

I (indiscernible) way to cut you off, I was like, "No, I need to hear the rest, I need to hear the rest." Because, you really uplift the arts. I think oftentimes we think about it as an extra; it's a luxury. But, you broke it down in such a way where you talked about the rubrics; you talked about the outcomes; you talked about the curriculum; you uplifted the professionalism that is within the arts. And, so, I can't thank you enough for doing that. It was-- The question that I came out of it is, how many -- you can get it back to us -- how many overall staff; like you had your supervisors; you had staff; and then you had some other people underneath-- I wanted to know what that number was for the *total* district? And, I don't know if it's easier if you could -- if maybe if it's by school, or if it's by K-6, and then you have our high school numbers. I think it's interesting to know because it's intentional, making sure we have these high-impact arts education programs in the district, and you just really explained it very, very thoroughly. And, I just can't thank you enough for that.

MS. EL: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Senator Cryan, do you have any questions?

SENATOR CRYAN: My apologies, I didn't get the length of time from when you started to where we are now.

Margaret, was it 2019 you said you began?

MS. EL: No, it began in 2013--

SENATOR CRYAN: Thirteen, sorry.

MS. EL: Yes, 2013 to 2019, and at that point, we rolled it out and made it part-- Actually, what we did, we aligned it with the district's 10-year strategic plan, and we created our own 10-year strategic plan to go along with that.

SENATOR CRYAN: Sorry, thank you.

MS. EL: And, that document is actually on the District's website if you search for it; it's the Arts Education Landscape Report.

SENATOR CRYAN: Arts Education.

MS. EL: You can do it on the search on the Newark Public Schools' website.

SENATOR CRYAN: Thank you, Margaret.

MS. EL: Mm-hmm.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Love it, love it.

Thank you so much for that.

We're going to move on to Mary Reece, Director of Special Projects, New Jersey Principal and Supervisor Association, Foundation for Educational Administration.

M A R Y M. R E E C E, Ed.D.: Good morning, Senator Cryan, Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson, and members of the Joint Committee.

I, too, am very glad to return to this Committee to discuss arts education in New Jersey, a subject about which I am very, very passionate. And, to that end, I serve as a current and founding board member of Arts Ed NJ, which is a very strong partner of NJPSA. At NJPSA, I have the pleasure of serving as the liaison to the Multi-Lingual Learners Leadership Committee, as well as being a member of the Special Ed. Committee. Both groups have hundreds of members, primarily supervisors and directors, and they meet very regularly. And, in both settings, the value of arts education to both of these vulnerable populations has been discussed. We know how important integrating the arts with other content areas is for those who are learning to speak English. Including visual art, music, dance, and theater in daily instruction, assists our multi-lingual learners to better strengthen their communication skills in their new language. The arts are a natural way to celebrate and learn about different cultures. They also give students the opportunity to express ideas, their feelings, and experiences in creative ways. Incorporating arts education is a benefit to all students, not just multi-lingual learners, an environment in which students are given multiple means for expression leads to deeper, richer learning experiences for everyone.

And, at the same time, it's very true for students with disabilities. For many years at NJPSA, I have conducted an Arts Integration Leadership Institute in Princeton, for teams of school leaders and teachers. The Institute is like a retreat for those who attend. We usually have about 175 very excited, very passionate educators. And, each team creates a plan of action for the upcoming school year, which is implemented through the support of a trained

coach. I vividly recall the outcomes of a school in South Jersey one year. They integrated the arts into their special education classes that focused primarily on students with severe communication difficulties. Almost miraculously, students who had never spoken previously were excited to share, in their own words, their drawings with their teacher and classmates. It was a very, very special moment. That type of experience is what we want for every child who has an IEP. The arts are truly magical and miraculous. And, yet, we sometimes hear that scheduling all the services that are included in a student's IEP may preclude participation in the arts.

So, to assist families, school leaders and members of the child study team, we proposed the development of a guidebook, with the necessary information to find solutions and scheduling recommendations so that all students will have the opportunity to participate in any arts classes that are offered in the school. Arts Ed NJ will partner with us, NJPSA, an all-in for inclusive education to create this guidebook. At NJPSA, we've created a similar guidebook that supports the needs of multi-lingual learners who have IEPs. And, we've found this an invaluable document for educators and families. And, we will also include helpful strategies for teachers of the arts and para-professional aides. Just this past year, NJPSA teamed with Arts Ed NJ to offer a series of professional learning workshops for teachers of the arts to learn new strategies and tools for working with students with disabilities. And, what we found is, it's just really great teaching; it benefits all of us.

So, I look forward to continuing our collaboration with you on the development of these exciting initiatives, and I thank you once again for your time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much, Mary.

Senator Cryan, do you have any questions?

SENATOR CRYAN: I know I got a glance; the disability community and the arts are perfect together, so to speak.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Mm-hmm.

Any other members have any questions for our guests? (no response)

All right. Well, thank you so much. I think, Mary, you did a great job at explaining, especially, how the multi-lingual students, and even nonverbal students, how they are tremendously impacted by the visual arts before everything that happens in their space. Again, I think we take it, we're trying to be more serious about it where it's just not a bonus class, this is the part of their overall learning that -- and, it should be a part of their strategic plan. So, I want to thank you all for coming on today to be able to give us this information. Is there anything else? I know, Senator Cryan, you asked earlier about budget issues, and I think Wendy, you talked about some issues for the particular program. Mary, do you have any budgetary cuts that's happening with you, also?

DR. REECE: Well, at NJPSA, we're very cognizant of the impact that these Federal cuts on schools.

All the Titles, and IDEA, are critical in supporting the work of our excellent qualified teachers and school leaders. We're looking and listening very carefully to see what the impacts will be on schools and our members. As you know, NJPSA, for the most part, has membership of all the principals; supervisors; directors; assistant principals in the state. So, we're

receiving daily feedback from them about potential cuts. Everyone's just extraordinarily anxious, and we just don't know what the landscape's going to be like, and it's even more difficult for those of us involved in arts education, because so often it's the first thing on the chopping block. And, we strongly work with school board members and the superintendents to ensure that that's not the case.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: That's what I was going to ask.

How did you partner with the New Jersey Department of Education?

MS. LISCOW: I'll take that one if y'all don't mind.

We spend a lot of time working with the Department of Ed. Each subject matter has a supervisor; we work with Shea Murray for the VPA supervisor. We actually have seven projects that we work with them on, are the standards review; there's standards revision coming up; we've worked with them to do the 2020 standards revisions; we convened everybody at that time to help them do that work, supporting them in that initiative coming up this summer. We support them with the data dashboard, their School Report Card, and the census; they actually issue to the schools the request for all this data that we're talking about. We partner with them on the Governor's Awards; we've been working with them since 2007 to co-host Governor's Awards in Arts Education, probably the only ones like this in the nation. And, we partner with them on professional learning. So, we're really intertwined, and I think in some ways we have an opportunity to make kinds of change that the Department can't necessarily initiate as broadly as we can.

We also -- I would just say, too -- when I listened to Mary, I realized how important our coalition is; we can't do the work that we do without having the collaborative impact model. So, we work with all of the associations. We work with supervisors; we work with school boards association; we work with parents and PTA association; we work with higher ed. because of recruitment for teachers. I mean, we have teachers retiring right now, and they cannot fill those roles, so we're working with them. So, we work with everybody at the table to make things happen, because this issue is big.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Yes, I bet you're feeling that impact as well; I know with especially in the arts community, I'm sure you are.

Assemblywoman Morales, I see your hand.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MORALES: Yes, good morning, everyone.

Thank you for this conversation around arts education, because it's something that-- I work for a career technical education school district, and, as you know, a lot of our CTE programs already embed a lot of the arts and VPA requirements. We're a high school; VPA is a graduation requirement. And, for years, we've been talking about how difficult it is for us because our VPA teachers-- We don't have a lot. The VPA teachers are different than the CTE music, and theater, and dance teachers. So, a lot of times, those classes are being inundated with so many students, that their class load was so many kids in one class, that we had to discuss, "Well, these students are already meeting their VPA requirements in their CTE program, so they should be getting their credits -- their graduation credits -- because

they're meeting it through their CTE." So, I don't know if that's a conversation that you're all having because, again, there's a shortage of teachers already, and trying to fill in our school district with another VPA teacher is not going to happen, because, again, the shortages of teachers. So, we're also looking at other CTE programs that *can* meet those VPA requirements so that we can alleviate our VPA teachers from having a class load of over 30 kids in a classroom. So, those are conversations that we're having; I know that VPA is important for students; they should be engaged in an arts program before they graduate, and that's probably why that VPA became a graduation requirement. But, again, for schools that are having difficulty meeting those class loads, because we don't want to fill these classes with like, 30-plus kids, we're alleviating them by having these CTE classes meet those VPA requirements.

So, again, a little conversation around that; we're looking at other programs; I don't know what your conversation has been around this area.

MS. LISCOW: That is--

MS. EL: So, I'd like--

MS. LISCOW: Go ahead, Margaret.

MS. EL: I'd like to share a little something, and then I'll have to come out.

But, what we encouraged in our district; those programs that are arts and music related that engage with CTE; what we've said to schools is, "Make that foundational course, the first course that they take, to meet the arts requirement." So, if you're doing music technology as a CTE program, you do the first level music foundation course with them at the freshman level, and they've earned their five credits. It's out of the way; it's the

foundation to the work that they now have to do in CTE. So, we highly encourage that.

MS. LISCOW: And, this reminds me, I think that can be another indicator that we explore with this work, because when we meet with supervisors, we do find that CTE and the VPA are administered slightly different amongst each district.

And, nobody wants to eliminate the CTE approach, because that really works well for arts careers.

DR. REECE: And--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MORALES: And, the last thing that I wanted to add was, I appreciate, I think it was -- I don't know if it was Mary or Wendy -- when you mentioned the PDs, for VPA teachers; I appreciate that, because a lot of times the PDs that are happening in a school district, especially districtwide, don't incorporate VPA teachers into their PDs.

And, that has to be a separate component where we need to find what PDs can meet -- can VPAs-- Because, VPA teachers are just thrown into, "Yes, just go into whatever PD is available to you." But, it's not fair to them that they should have PDs that caters to their skill sets and their subject area.

So, that's it from me, thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

DR. REECE: Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson, I wanted to also add to the question you had about the New Jersey Department of Education.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Oh, yes.

DR. REECE: What we do, and Arts Ed NJ as well as at NJPSA and FEA, is we help them build capacity.

I have an early childhood project that I've been working on for years that takes care of the new pre-K expansion districts. So, the idea is that we want to be sure that teachers and school leaders are well equipped to deal with preschoolers as well as elementary school students, because the instruction is very different; developmentally appropriate practices are very different; and the arts are a big part of it. And, I work very closely with the Department of Ed.'s Division of Early Childhood Services, Cary Booker's shop. I have what I call a development team where I have people from the field as well as -- we have five people from the Department of Ed. on our development team -- to plan professional development year-long for schools that have the preschool, because we are so concerned about aligning preschool through grade three. And, as I said, a big part of that is the integration of the arts within the instruction as well. But, so, they rely upon us to provide the professional learning, and we do it in concert with them, and it's very similar to what Arts Ed NJ is doing with Shea Murray. And, many of the other professional organizations have those same relationships with the content area coordinators at the Department of Ed.

But, it's a win-win, for them, as well as for us, and we're able to provide the field with the kind of professional learning that they need.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Awesome.

Thank you so much for that. Anyone else? Because, I think the information we've gotten here has been very helpful to us, and making sure that we continue to elevate this, and, really, keeping an eye out on the high-impact programs; how much they cost; making sure that they are a part of it.

Senator McKnight, I see you have your hand raised.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: Yes.

I just want to say, thanks for your advocacy to all the groups that are on, and all the information that you provided to us. And, as the Chairwoman is saying, we're going to do all that we can--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Yes.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: --to keep these programs moving forward.

So, again, thank you for all the work that you continue to do and have done for a quality education; well-rounded for all our scholars. So, thank you.

DR. REECE: Thank you, Senator, it's good to see you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: And, I think, when we talk about, again, the arts, making sure that those dollars are staying in the school budgets and in our state budget as well, is really, really important.

I'm also thinking about the staff that come on, developing those new leaders in the arts space as well. How do we attract and retain good talent? I think sometimes we leapfrog over that, and we just want them to be in the schools, but it takes *a lot* to get quality staff and training that they need as well. So, I want to be very mindful of that as we push to have more teachers; let's also be specific about recruiting those art teachers as well, visual and performing arts industry into this space.

That's all I have for today. Wendy?

MS. LISCOW: Well, I just would want to say how important that is that-- One of my favorite things about the Governor's Awards is that

these are students who've gotten this great arts education, and so many of them are telling us that they want to become teachers, and a lot of our awardees have become teachers.

And, that's like, the Number 1 best way to recruit, is to have a great arts education.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Yes, but we have to support it in the budget as well, because they have to feed their families.

(laughter)

All right. Senator Cryan, you have anything else to wrap us up?

SENATOR CRYAN: Thank you all, we appreciate it very much for the insights.

Let's get it going. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: All right.

Thank you all, we'll be in touch, thank you.

Wendy, don't forget to send me the (indiscernible).

MS. LISCOW: Yes.

Thank you.

SENATOR CRYAN: Take care.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: All right.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)