
Committee Meeting

of

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*“The Committee will meet to receive testimony from invited guests
on the importance of the arts in education”*

LOCATION: Meeting via Zoom

DATE: June 14, 2023
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 Joseph Pennacchio
Senator Michael L. Testa, Jr.
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 Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
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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

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

P.O. BOX 070
TRENTON, NJ 08625
(609) 331-2485
FAX (609) 292-4912

Rebecca DiBenedetti
Executive Director
rsapp@njleg.org

Ivy Pomper
Executive Assistant
ipomper@njleg.org

ASSEMBLY

Hon. Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Co-Chair

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

MEETING NOTICE

TO: Members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools

The Joint Committee on the Public Schools will meet on Friday, June 14, 2024 at 10:00 a.m., via Zoom to receive testimony from invited guests on the importance of the 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 June 3, 2024

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SENATOR JOSEPH P. CRYAN (Co-Chair): OK, Beck,
do you want to do a roll call?

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Certainly.

Senator Burgess is on her way.

Senator Pennacchio.

SENATOR PENNACCHIO: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Senator Testa will be joining.
Assemblywoman Carter.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Assemblywoman Flynn. (no
response)

I know she's here; I see her. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: Sorry, Becky; here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: OK.

Assemblywoman Matsikoudis.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MATSIKOUDIS: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: Yes.

Assemblywoman Morales.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MORALES: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: And, Assemblyman Simonsen is on
his way.

Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson.

**ASSEMBLYWOMAN VERLINA REYNOLDS-
JACKSON (Co-Chair):** Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: And, Senator Cryan.

SENATOR CRYAN: Here.

MS. DiBENEDETTI: All right.

SENATOR CRYAN: So, thanks, everybody, for joining us, and we appreciate it very much.

I'm just going to take you through the order of today, and then we'll go ahead and get started if that works and see if the Assemblywoman has some comments in just a moment.

We will begin with TeachRock, which will be Bill Carbone -- and, Bill, I believe Gina Machado, if I said it correctly, will be joining you as well?

From Arts Ed, we'll have Wendy, Natasha, and then-- All right, that's the joy of Zoom right there.

So, from Arts Ed NJ, Wendy -- I hope I say it right -- Liscow, and Dr. Natasha -- I'm going to go with Lalla -- and Dr. Sullivan.

Then, from the Principal and Supervisors Association, Mary Reece and Peggy McDonald.

And, then, to bat cleanup will be Policy and Perspective.

I'm going to ask members if we can just go through -- unless you have something of particular concern -- if we can go through the comments and then we'll close with a conversation if that works for everybody.

So, with that said, Assemblywoman, any opening comments?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: I just want to thank the members and the distinguished guests for being here today to talk about art in education.

And, we know that it's more than just an elective or supplemental activity; that it really helps foster a holistic person, the youth. And, as we are celebrating Flag Day today, I can't help but to-- I look at Assemblywoman Morales' "We can do it" art frame back there, and I just think about all the ways that art and culture influences our communities.

So, I'm looking forward to hearing from the rest of our guests today.

So, thank you, Assemblyman Cryan.

SENATOR CRYAN: Assemblywoman, thank you.

And, Bill, I think you're going to lead us off. Bill and Gina, is that correct?

BILL CARBONE: Correct.

SENATOR CRYAN: We appreciate it very much, folks from TeachRock.

So, why don't you teach a few legislators about TeachRock and what we can do, OK.

MR. CARBONE: Well, thank you for the opportunity.

It's my pleasure to be here; it's our pleasure; we're honored -- honored for this opportunity.

So, TeachRock is an open educational resource. Just to define that really quickly, it means that we make educational lesson plans, unit plans, and full courses, all of which are available to every school and district online at no cost.

We were founded by someone many of you have probably heard of named Stevie Van Zandt. He launched our organization with a founder's board that also includes Bruce Springsteen, Jackson Browne, Bono,

and Martin Scorsese. And, as we've gone along, we've gotten a lot broader support in the music industry. Our artist council also includes Common, and Margo Price, and Marty Stewart, and Erykah Badu, and Darryl McDaniels from Run-DMC, and a host of other really major music artists who have all kind of put themselves and their names on what we do partly because it's an open educational resource, and partly because of the concept, which is that music is a gateway to all subject areas.

So, we use the sound, the stories, and the science of music to teach every subject area. So, at *TeachRock.org*, there are lesson plans that range from K to 12, and they teach -- they apply to every subject area in the school. Their standards align, so they're designed to fit seamlessly within the learning objectives of any class.

To give a couple of examples really quick, one of the things we are most proud of is a full U.S. history elective called, "An American History of Rock and Soul," that looks at 20th-century U.S. history through the lens of popular music. So, you're still dealing with the history topics -- suburbanization, the rise of the teenager -- all of these kind of 20th-century U.S. history topics, but you're doing it by looking at it through the lens of music. So, you're using Chuck Berry and The Beach Boys to look at the rise of the television; the rise of the teenager; and suburbanization in the United States, for example.

And, as you move forward, you're just using more music examples like that. And, that's a full course -- that's used, actually, all over the country. And, it's fantastic as a credit for history. It works incredibly well in mainstream situations, but we find that it's magic with populations who are struggling. It's been used for credit recapture. We hear a lot about

students who say they hate history; who don't like school; who come alive when we're using music to teach history like this.

It's also a really natural way to do DEI within school, because you're putting people of color, women, everything you can think of in America, up front and center in a joyful way. We're seeing successful people who have influenced our culture put naturally within a history setting.

We do a similar thing with math. An example I like to use is a middle school math unit that we have on our site that is dealing with when students are starting to work with ratios and percentages. They're looking at sales figures and social media statistics of Beyoncé and Rihanna, and they're comparing them against each other. And, through doing that, they're learning about how to use ratios, how to graph data, and then they're asked to go on a website we give them -- that's a secure site -- that looks at other music data to pick their favorite artist and compare *them* to Beyoncé and Rihanna. So, it's got student choice, it's got all of these things mixed together, but it's going at those objectives.

So, we've really built a wide range of material, and all of it is free, and we have 70,000 teachers registered to use the free material. But, we also do a lot of programs directly with schools, where we'll do "train the trainer" models to help implement those programs. And, that of course gives us the chance to work directly with schools and evaluate a little bit more.

And, this is when I'm going to tag in my colleague, Gina Machado, to share a little bit about the social-emotional learning program that we've been launched in a lot of places, including Asbury Park, this year, and about which we're really excited.

Take it away, Gina.

GINA MACHADO: Thanks so much for having us today, everyone.

I am going to try to keep it brief, because I am so incredibly proud of this work and passionate about social-emotional learning and advisory.

So, just some quick context. Historically, when we think about social-emotional learning-- Oh, can you hear me OK? I just heard a little noise.

A lot of time and resources is devoted to social-emotional learning in elementary school. So, you can picture this: There's a lot of curriculums available where we're teaching students how to share; take turns; identify their emotions and manage them. But, what traditional curriculum offerings suggest is that by the time students get to middle school, they have it all figured out.

But, we know -- as people who have been adolescents once in our lives -- is that it's an incredibly turbulent time. And, all of these changes that are happening in your mind and in your body, and if you expect students to come in and be ready and present for math, science, English, and social studies when they're in a state of dysregulation, it's just a recipe for frustration -- for the kids, for the teachers, the parents, the admin.

And, I think for a long time, people have just accepted this about middle school, that it's a rite of passage to pass through these painful years. But, an unexpected benefit of COVID was that it really shined a light on the social-emotional needs of young people. And, we started saying, "Maybe it doesn't have to be this way. What can we do about it?" And, so, more conversations have started happening -- even some curriculums have popped up specifically for secondary education, social-emotional learning.

But, what remains is a gap in student learning opportunities and student learning outcomes based on the kids' socio-economic status; their race; their home language; their disability status. And, it is right in line with our mission to help schools close that gap.

It's challenging work. If you think about getting an 11- or 12-year-old to the table to talk about these social-emotional skills, it's difficult. It's much more easy to get an elementary school student to engage in these topics. But, we know that we're uniquely suited as an organization to do that, because we take the TeachRock way, which is to use music as a springboard to learning, and we apply that to social-emotional wellness.

So, I'll give you a super quick example. If you think about a lesson about peer pressure -- which I'm sure we've all had at some time in our lives -- you come into the classroom, the teacher has the term on the board, maybe they define it, ask the kids to share, "When is a time you've experienced peer pressure?" and then go over some go-to phrases that you can use if you're ever in that position.

There's nothing wrong with any of that; those are all good elements to a lesson. But, the problem is there's no hook there. There's nothing to get an 11- or 12-year-old to really listen to that, internalize that lesson, and be ready to pull it out when they need it most. So, our approach is we start a lesson on peer pressure with the song, "Here," by Alessia Cara -- and, if you don't know that song, it's a song about peer pressure, and she's singing about being at a party and being around drugs and being around alcohol and saying, "What am I doing here? And, I can't wait to get out of here." So, we play that song, and we ask students to interpret the lyrics and say, "What is she singing about? Infer how does she feel." And, then we start

to shift the focus on the students and ask them to do a personal reflection. “What connections can you make between yourself and that song? Between other media and that song? Other music that you’ve heard?” And, that level of reflection that we want students to get to is scaffolded throughout the program.

So, we start with an opening circle and then we move to partner talk and then, finally, we invite them to do that private reflection in their journal. That’s just one lesson of 40 that are in a year’s worth of curriculum. Those 40 lessons are divided into five 20-minute chunks, so it’s really 200 lessons that are available to schools. They all are infused with music and this level of self-reflection, inviting students to use their voices and their experience to evaluate the world around them, allowing them to see themselves in the work.

We’re so incredibly proud of the results that we’ve seen at our pilot school. The quantitative data shows that attendance is up, level-three infractions are down. And, anecdotally, we’re just hearing that the kids are getting along with one another; the relationships between students and teachers are better; and, so, classroom behavior is better. And, because it’s an arts-based program, when you go into a school that’s doing harmony, you can just see and feel the evidence of the community that’s being built, because the art projects are on the walls and the songs are being-- I kid you not, the songs are being sung in the hallway. And, it’s just a really beautiful thing to witness, so we’re really excited to be working with the schools that we’re in now and to be growing into more schools in the ’24-’25 school year.

SENATOR CRYAN: Gina, thank you; Bill, thank you.

I can feel your passion through here.

And, by the way, there's no peer pressure in the New Jersey Legislature whatsoever, so you might have to explain that to some of these folks.

MR. CARBONE: If you guys ever want a harmony session, we'll come and-- Adults love the discussion circles, too, so it's open, just let us know.

SENATOR CRYAN: I will tell you, the best -- the only class I really remember in high school -- was an English teacher decided to teach the album, "Born to Run," and took us through, lyrics by lyrics. And, you know what? Everybody paid attention them.

That said, let me just move on. We're-- I'm going to have everybody speak and then kind of have a conversational piece, if that works for everyone, hopefully.

So, with that, Wendy.

WENDY LISCOW: Yes, if you don't mind, I want to let Mary start, then I'll pick up from there, thanks.

SENATOR CRYAN: OK.

Is that Mary Reece?

MARY M. REECE, Ed.D.: Yes; thank you.

SENATOR CRYAN: Hi, Mary.

MS. REECE: Hi.

I am Mary Reece from the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association.

I am also a founding board member and former chairperson of Arts Ed NJ.

We are very appreciative of your inviting us to talk about our passion, which is arts education. But, I should also add it's arts integration as well, and the story you just told about integrating the language arts and music is something that we support and actually have a summer institute for the past more than 10 years in Princeton to advocate for that for teams of teachers and principals to come together and learn all about the beauty of arts integration.

So, NJPSA's collaboration with Arts Ed NJ began in 2007, when the first statewide census report on the status and condition of arts education was released. NJPSA's Executive Director at the time was so impressed with the report that she asked me to serve as our Association's representative on the organization's steering committee.

Arts Ed. NJ's effectiveness was then and continues to be its collective impact model. It brings together everyone who should be at the table to advance arts education. So, at our meetings, you'll find representatives from all of the alphabets -- NJPSA, NJSBA, NJASA, NJEA, NJPSA -- all the arts organizations, nonprofits, and philanthropy.

As you know, NJPSA's membership includes virtually all the supervisors and directors of arts education programs in our state. So, along with school leaders, they are responsible for ensuring that our arts classes are rigorous, high quality, accessible to all students, and I'm very proud that today we have two of our stellar supervisors who will present this morning.

Since our initial involvement, NJPSA has worked closely with Arts Ed NJ, along with the New Jersey Department of Education, which has been at our side from day one. And, we advance many initiatives to reach

the goal of arts education for every child, every day, every school, and every year. And, some of these accomplishments include the addition of Arts Ed. in QSAC; the coordination of the revision of the student learning standards; the inclusion of Arts Ed. measures as part of the annual school performance reports; the sponsorship of several arts education summits, including this year's first youth Arts Ed. summit.

Importantly, a grade weighting bill -- which was passed in 2016 -- that requires school districts to weight courses in the visual and performing arts equally with other courses of the same level of academic rigor. And, that hadn't happened previously. So, that piece of legislation allowed the students to receive the right number of credits in their grade point average when they were taking high-level arts classes. And, then, three years ago, we established the center for arts education and social-emotional learning, which deals with many of the issues that had been previously stated.

There are many more positive outcomes and initiatives that occurred, which will be highlighted by my colleagues who will follow me.

I was a principal in Edison Township for many years, and, at that time, I witnessed the impact of strong arts programming. And, I was very proud of the levels of accomplishments our students achieved in the arts. Our faculty members of the visual and performing arts department were among the best in the state. In fact, the band director at the time was selected as a finalist for the first-ever Grammy Music Educator's Award. Sadly, this giant -- Andy DeNicola -- passed away recently.

Whether students were considering careers in the arts or participating in classes and activities to expand their creative abilities, these experiences were all high-quality and accessible to all students -- particularly

those with disabilities and multi-lingual learners. So, that's the same wish I have for every student in New Jersey -- that they have the chance to participate in high-quality, creative, joyful, inspiring, and culturally sustaining classes in all art forms.

So, I thank you very much for today's opportunity.

And, now I'd like to introduce you to my colleague, Wendy Liscow, who is the Executive Director of Arts Ed NJ.

Thank you.

MS. LISCOW: Thank you, Mary, and thank you for your comments.

And, I want to thank the members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools for providing this really wonderful opportunity to speak on the critical importance of arts education and, also, to provide a bit of an overview of the current state of arts education in New Jersey.

I came to the leadership of Executive Director of Arts Ed NJ after some time as a speech and theater educator myself in Michigan. And, then, 25 years as a professional theater director and dramaturg, and 17 years in philanthropy at the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation supporting arts and arts education. So, I am really pleased to be here with our colleagues and representatives of our coalition who are, as Mary said, are working every single day to ensure that every single New Jersey public school student receives a high-quality and aiming for sequential and equitable arts education.

New Jersey has a lot to be proud of in terms of its support of arts education. A long history of successes, yet, with these budgetary challenges and post-pandemic demands that are -- many of our schools -- are facing, we realize we have to remain extra vigilant so that we don't lose the

hard-earned progress we've made over these past 15-17 years. Our students and our communities are relying on us to stand up for arts education, keep it top of mind, and that's why we are really so grateful for your interest and your leadership to champion arts education in our state.

So, my guess is that each of you know a student or two who you've seen only light up when they're making art; or they feel a sense of accomplishment that they don't experience anywhere else; or you know someone who has learned to be an exceptional collaborator; or who started to suddenly take more interest in school and their grades improved because they started to participate in the arts. Or, maybe you noticed a student who -- or a grandchild or a child -- who has learned to regulate their emotions, or has developed new empathy or persistence; or has found their voice and a newfound sense of belonging, or a new understanding of others. I think we all know these students, and, in fact, some of you may *be* one of these students.

And, the really cool thing about all this is that research validates what you've witnessed and what you've experienced. Because research consistently has shown that students engaged in the arts perform better academically; they demonstrate better and greater problem-solving skills; and think more creatively. And, in a state that is reporting on chronic absenteeism as a key indicator, it's really good news that high school students who have enrolled in four years of arts classes have 50% less occurrences of absenteeism than students who did not enroll in the fine arts. And, this is amazing, because it's across all variables, such as race and ethnicity; enrollment in free and reduced lunch; and with multi-lingual language learners. So, this is-- The research is behind us.

And, I'd say arts education equips students with the skills they need for arts careers, but also skills that are transferrable to so many fields. I really appreciated a recent *New York Times* article, "Grown Up Theater Kids Run the World." And, as a theater kid, I love that. And, it also featured Governor Murphy, and shared his -- a bit about his background in the theater that had prepared him for leadership.

And, lastly, I think in -- really important for our current times, we agree with our previous speakers and TeachRock's program that there are indeed really powerful connections between social-emotional learning and the arts. And, as Mary said, so much so after we did this, I'd say ground-breaking crosswalk between the creative practices of arts education and the SEL competencies that (indiscernible) lifts up. We worked with Rutgers' Maurice Elias and other arts experts in New Jersey and across the nation to create this crosswalk. We then created this center, and, for the past three years, we've been training teachers and teaching artists in New Jersey, and, actually, across the nation to implement intentional, embedded SEL -- artistic SEL. And, the work has been transformation; I would love with that at some other time.

Yet, really, despite all these things we've seen with our eyes, the research says, and all these clear benefits of arts education, our data is really showing that we have much work to do to ensure that every child actually has that opportunity to participate in all five art forms. It's why we exist; it's why we have this brand new five-year strategic plan that aims to achieve this, and we're really excited about it.

So, the good news is that 93% of our schools do provide access to the arts -- that is all but 7% of our schools offer at least one art form.

However, State policy, as you know, requires schools to provide all art forms in all five disciplines, and only 11% of our schools meet *that* standard; 69% of our schools offer two art forms, and usually that is music and visual arts. And, we are finding that only 8% of our students participate in dance, and only 7% participate in theater. That's a big gap.

And, so, after -- over the past 17 years of us collecting this data through the census and through our annual school performance report, we learned that we have to actually measure access to the arts instead of-- Actually, let me change that. And, we have to measure-- Hello, am I--

SENATOR CRYAN: No, we're good.

MS. LISCOW: OK, good; all right, good, good, good.

So, instead of measuring just if a student has access to the arts, we want to measure their participation in the arts. Because, access can be interpreted as maybe just having a curriculum in place in the books, but not actually having a certified arts teacher available or courses actually being taught. It can mean that having one teacher for hundreds of students so the student time participating in the arts is minimal.

If we require participation, it means we'll have to take a really serious look at the resources in terms of hiring the needed teacher workforce, and then providing them with adequate supplies, and the space they need, and the professional learning opportunities they need to be at their best. It means we're going to have to look at scheduling and seat time to reckon with what is actually taking place in order to deliver that high-quality arts education we're all aiming for.

SENATOR CRYAN: Thanks, you're right, Wendy, and you've clearly laid that out.

I think the folks at TeachRock would tell you that they've got some of those solutions for you -- for us.

MS. LISCOW: Right.

So, I'm just going to hand this over to my colleagues, Dr. Kerri Sullivan and Latasha Casterlow, if that's OK.

SENATOR CRYAN: Thank you very much; yes, of course.

Doctor.

K E R R I S U L L I V A N, Ed.D.: Thank you, Wendy; thank you, everyone.

Good morning.

I am Dr. Kerri Sullivan, and I am here today as an educator, an artist, a school administrator, a parent, and a community member.

And, the arts -- especially theater -- have had a tremendous and positive influence on my life. Since the day I first stepped onto the stage at 5 years old, the arts have been my safe place, and they've given me purpose. Theater allowed me to be a part of a community and gave me a reason to keep moving forward. And, this was especially valuable during times of struggle in my formative years.

The arts became even more profound to me when I began to see how they could positively impact others. I have witnessed how participation in the arts creates safe spaces physically and emotionally; connects people, sometimes disparate groups and individuals. I've seen how the arts open minds and give meaning and hope; makes relevant; and offers clarity; provides purpose; and unlocks and amplifies often otherwise unheard

voices. I have experienced the power of the arts, and I have seen the arts transform lives and the world.

Right now, educators across New Jersey are struggling to support their students who are dealing with unprecedented increase in trauma; mental-health issues; chronic absenteeism; and a lack of engagement in education. While this is a challenging time for all educators in our state, the struggles are especially acute for our dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual-arts teachers, who are striving to fully and effectively meet their students' needs. Arts educators have burdens not experienced by their peers, as they have to contend with issues such as the loss of arts learning spaces and equipment; the heavy focus on standardized testing requirements; budget cuts, or funding not keeping up with inflation; and constant instructional interruptions and significant scheduling challenges.

Anecdotally, from my experience working in several school districts throughout the state, elementary students receive roughly 20 hours of visual arts and 20 hours of music instruction per year. That's the equivalent of one week -- one work week -- of arts education each school year. And, since that instruction has spread throughout the year, it makes the development of artistic, cognitive, and emotional skills -- not to mention completing projects in a fun and meaningful way -- especially hard for our littlest learners.

Add to this that elementary arts instruction often takes place in the same classroom students have been sitting in all day, or in a multi-purpose room that is large and has other classes like PE or activities like lunch going on *during* art and music class. Additionally, elementary visual and music arts teachers -- and, it's mainly those, because there were few dance

or theater educators -- often see hundreds of students each week, sometimes between multiple buildings. And, these uncondusive conditions severely limit how engaged in art -- how students can engage in art-making and learning.

But, despite these overwhelming challenges, arts teachers are still expected to effectively facilitate the learning of the New Jersey student learning standards -- just like their peers in other core subject areas who are much better positioned for success. To be clear, the issue is not that the expectation that the standards are taught -- the issue is the unfavorable circumstances that many arts educators are forced to endure.

A high school music teacher recently shared a profound observation with me. She pointed out that the arts are the only core content area that gets regularly put on display and evaluated by the public. So, we don't ask a student who is studying math to solve problems on stage in front of an audience of hundreds. Students are not required to write essays while others look on, nor do we demand that their writing be viewable to everyone. Our science teachers and students do not have to conduct experiments for the community. Yet, our artists and arts teacher are expected to put on concerts; host shows; produce plays; and participate in competitions and adjudications -- even when that is, more often than not, not the primary focus of the art standards.

So, I bring this to your attention not because we don't want to do those things -- we do. I draw attention to it to stress the critical importance that the arts play in the lives of individual students, the school, and the broader community. I bring this to your attention to ask for your

help to give those opportunities, our student artists, and our arts teachers the support that they need to thrive.

As the arts teacher -- as the arts supervisor -- for Hamilton Township School District, I was proud to recently host our elementary honors concert. This event brought together approximately 300 band and orchestra musicians from 17 elementary schools to perform at the Patriot's Theater in Trenton for an audience of over 1,200 families and community members. It was an extraordinary experience.

I had the pleasure of listening as students shared excitedly their learning experiences, telling me that learning to play an instrument was much harder than they imagined, but how glad they were that they didn't give up. I saw their beaming faces as the stage lights shined on them and they were greeted with thunderous applause, and I heard their excitement as they came off the stage, proud of their accomplishments, both individually and collectively. It was obvious that this is an experience that will stay with these students for a lifetime.

Many of those students are eager to continue their study of music as they progress in education. But, most of them won't continue to play music beyond high school. And, that's OK. The power skills that they will have developed through their music education -- skills like listening; self-awareness; empathy; collaboration; persistence; confidence; and creative and critical thinking are the skills that are necessary for success in life no matter what path they take. These power skills that students can authentically develop in their arts classes are the in-demand skills that many top employers are currently seeking. These power skills that the arts can naturally nurture are the skills we need to solve the problems of today and tomorrow.

What our students are learning in their arts classes goes well beyond learning to draw, or how to play instruments -- important skills in their own rights. In arts education, students are learning to grow and be the best versions of themselves. They are developing as humans.

So, when I think about the elementary honors concert; or the district art show that displayed astounding and personal art from our 23 schools; or the middle school wind ensemble field trip that I went on, where I witnessed students' deep drive to do well; their openness to feedback; and their thoughtful questions. When I think about the high school and middle school musical performances, where diverse students came together; stepped on stage; took a risk; and experienced success. Or, the high school senior art showcase where students proudly displayed four years of work and spoke passionately and intelligently about their artistic process, I cannot help but be astounded and moved and encouraged.

What the arts can do for individuals and communities is nothing short of amazing. But, when I think about these transformative moments, I can't help but wonder what the world might be like if we actually gave arts education the respect and full support that it deserves. How much better could things be if we truly and fully supported our arts educators and our young artists by giving them the time, space, and materials they need to thrive? If we have robust arts offerings throughout the state -- quality experiences with *all* students that were relevant to their lives and let them explore and express their authentic selves, and experience safety and belonging -- what would school engagement look like then? How many students could we get to show up to school each day? How many young people would be better equipped to handle the stresses they face and be ready

to tackle the problems they'll encounter now, and will encounter in the future?

SENATOR CRYAN: Thanks, yes--

DR. SULLIVAN: If we can make greatness happen now, despite these hardships, we can positively impact our students and communities. Imagine what would be possible with the time and resources that our students and our state deserves.

So--

SENATOR CRYAN: Thank you--

DR. SULLIVAN: --think about it.

Thank you.

SENATOR CRYAN: A lot to think about there, and thanks for the insight.

Is it Casterlow-Lalla? Do I say it properly, doctor?

L A T A S H A C A S T E R L O W - L A L L A, Ed.D.: You are saying it.

Hello, good morning.

SENATOR CRYAN: All right.

DR. CASTERLOW-LALLA: (indiscernible) to see you again.

SENATOR CRYAN: Good to see you.

DR. CASTERLOW-LALLA: All right, so, good morning, everybody.

My name is Dr. Latasha Casterlow-Lalla; I'm the Supervisor of Visual and Performing Arts for Passaic Public Schools, and I

am also the President-Elect of the New Jersey Music Administrator's Association.

Over the past 20 years, I've served as a New Jersey educator, committed to sharing my passion for arts education and supporting the mission that every student is an arts appreciator; understanding the complexities of the creative process. Whether I've worked as a music teacher, an elementary classroom teacher, a building leader, and a district curriculum specialist, the incredible lens of arts education has supported the work of making a significant impact on the lives of my students, and providing them with a chance to share their experience and choice to create in the ways that elevate their voice in the world.

Every New Jersey student benefits when an incredible learning experience, reflected in a high-quality, sequential arts education, with exposure to all five content areas -- including dance, theater, visual arts, media arts, and music -- is fully funded and supported. I am very fortunate to work in a district that elevates all five art forms and advocates for student exploration, providing eight career and technical education secondary programs.

A key component to this concept is scheduling equity. Meaning that every student has a minimum number of minutes per week to connect their lived experience with multiple art forms during every year of their education. Providing students with essential exposure to different art forms assists in connecting their learning across content areas, while introducing students to the possibilities of the \$1.1 trillion industry we know as arts and culture.

Arts education highly engages our students to apply their lived experience, their culture, and their perspectives to those foundational skills that are demonstrated as they create and they perform throughout our communities. Elevating diverse opportunities that highlight the rich cultural, ethnic, and linguistic beauty of our state in the halls of our schools is paramount to continue developing our students to the possibilities of our global economy.

Did you know that there are more than 200 high-earning careers related to visual and performing arts studies? There is a critical need to ensure that our student learners, and our families, and our communities, are exposed to the vast options that are inclusive of our general education students, multi-lingual learners, and our special-needs population. The arts can serve as a consistent learning opportunity that is inclusive of all of our students, providing opportunities for them to positively express their social-emotional learning, as well as process-based for mental-health awareness.

I have a brief anecdote of a student whose life was transformed by arts education. We had a young child who really struggled, who was on the autism spectrum. They struggled a lot with behavioral management and extreme property destruction in our school environment. This music teacher saw that there was a spark when they were in the class, and volunteered to teach that student saxophone. Not only did that student learn about saxophone, but they built it into their plan to give them additional music instruction when better behaviors were demonstrated, and their needs were met.

We took those tier-2 MTSS supports and behavioral management, and, to our surprise, all behaviors that were not welcomed in

the school dissipated in only two months. That student and a friend went on to perform at their school's talent show, and began performing throughout our entire city for our Mayor, our City Council, and our Board of Education. They remained active in the music program for the next seven years, and actually transitioned their talents to the theater program. To date, this student has now been the lead in two of our plays, in our musical is a leader; in our marching band; in our jazz band; and continues to excel. They now plan to apply for their post-secondary plan to go into music as a major, and wants to create an opportunity to help special-needs students on their journey to find music as a way to process their emotions and their thoughts when they may be in crisis. This would not be available without a high-quality sequential music and arts education.

So, our hope is that there is consideration and conversation to continue this work.

SENATOR CRYAN: I think it's fair to say, Doctor, we're all learning a lot today, and I appreciate that.

Thank you.

We've got two other speakers, and then Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson is going to take us through the Q&A piece of this.

Peg McDonald and then Mark Weber -- I don't know if it's Dr. Mark Weber -- yes, it's Dr. Mark Weber.

So, Peg, you first, then the doctor, and then the Assemblywoman will lead us.

And, thank you so much.

P E G G Y M c D O N A L D, Ed.D.: Good morning.

I am Dr. Peggy McDonald, Coordinator of Professional Learning and Special Projects at NJPSA, with a focus on special education and multi-tiered systems of support.

I have been in the field of education for many years, beginning my career as a teacher of the deaf; eventually moving to the Department of Ed., where I was eventually Director of the Office of Special Ed., and Assistant Commissioner of what's now the Division of Educational Services before coming to PSA. After integrating the arts into my own classrooms and observing the benefits the arts bring to students with disabilities over many years across the state, I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the topic with you this morning.

The arts offer a myriad of benefits to students with disabilities, fostering holistic development and enhancing their overall social and emotional well-being. Firstly, artistic expression provides a platform for self-discovery, self-advocacy, and communication. I recently spoke with a high school student -- a great self-advocate -- who told me he didn't enjoy drawing due to his dysgraphia, which is a learning disability that impacts writing. However, his experiences in school plays had given him the opportunity to form long-term friendships.

For students who-- Sorry. For students who may struggle with verbal communication or traditional academic subjects, engaging in art forms such as painting, music, or drama offers alternative means to express thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Through creative expression, students can convey complex feelings, aspirations, perspectives, as well as the knowledge and skills they've learned in the classroom. The arts foster a sense of agency and empowerment, and level the playing field by offering

opportunities that highlight student strengths, rather than focusing on their disabilities.

Secondly, participation in the arts promotes social inclusion and belonging. Inclusive arts programs like New Jersey's Arts Integration Initiative, provide opportunities for students with disabilities to interact with peers, educators, and the broader community in supportive and collaborative environments.

Yesterday, I had the opportunity to meet leaders from the Ridgewood School District and learn about their high school's unified elective classes where students with and without disability -- some with significant intellectual disabilities -- study the arts together. These interactions facilitate the development of social skills, mutual understanding, and they break down barriers and promote acceptance and respect for diversity. Through shared artistic experiences, students can build friendships and cultivate a sense of belonging that transcends physical or cognitive differences.

Engagement in the arts enhances the learning of academic content as well. Creative activities stimulate various areas of the brain, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and imaginative thinking. For students with disabilities, participating in arts-based activities can strengthen cognitive processes and boost confidence in their abilities. Moreover, the arts provide sensory-rich experiences that can be embedded in academic content and provide multiple ways of representing what a student has to learn; assessing what he or she has learned; and engaging students in sustained interest in learning. By harnessing the power of creativity, the arts unlock the potential for growth, self-expression, and personal fulfillment.

Finally, the arts provide students with disabilities with potential career pathways that highlight their strengths and talents. Access to career preparation programs in arts-related fields can facilitate successful transition to post-secondary education or competitive employment, leading to meaningful, independent participation in their community as adults.

Students with disabilities make up a significant segment of New Jersey's 1.4 million students. The most recently published data from the Department of Ed. indicates in the Fall of '21 that 17.62% of students in New Jersey ages 3 through 21 were receiving special education, with more recent data indicating an increase to 19%. This is in addition to students with disabilities receiving accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act for disabilities.

Here are a few steps that can help ensure that all of these students have the opportunity to benefit from all the wonderful programs talked about today, as well as all the wonderful programs happening in communities around the state.

Number 1: Ensure that students have access to accommodations and assistive technology and other services necessary for participation in arts education and arts programs in both their schools and communities. When arts learning standards are reviewed, involve artists with disabilities and special educators in stakeholder review groups. Provide professional development to empower arts teachers and classroom teachers integrating the arts into their classrooms with the tools and strategies they can use to include students with all disabilities in their classrooms. And, finally, empower students with disabilities by giving them opportunities to express what they need to participate in the arts, and giving them the

opportunity to experience the work of artists with disabilities in school and community programs.

So, thank you so much for the opportunity today.

SENATOR CRYAN: Thank you; thank you very much.

Mark, our last speaker.

MARK WEBER, Ph.D.: Thank you, Senator.

I am experiencing, right now, the policy wonk's worst nightmare. Just before presentation, my laptop died. But, I am a jazz musician, so I'm going to improvise my way through this.

I apologize if I cut out.

I made available to the staff some analysis that I had done, and I'll refer to it. If anybody would like a copy of that, all you have to do is email me.

SENATOR CRYAN: We'll get it over to everybody, Mark.

DR. WEBER: Terrific; thank you.

I think the other panelists have done a wonderful job of explaining why arts education is so important. What I'd like to talk about -- just for a couple minutes -- is the nexus between arts education funding and ethnic and racial equity.

Unfortunately, access to a broad and rich education including the visual and performing arts is not equally available to all students in New Jersey. Specifically, Black and Hispanic students are unfairly deprived of the same level of opportunity in the arts that white students enjoy. And, as evidence, in the first graph in that handout, using data from the New Jersey Department of Education, I show that the number of arts teachers per 1,000 students *decreases* as the percentage of Black and/or

Hispanic students increase. For example, in K-12 districts, there are 5.8 arts teachers per 1,000 pupils in districts where the student population is less than one third Black or Hispanic. But, in districts where the population is more than two thirds Black or Hispanic, there are only 4.8 arts teachers per 1,000 pupils.

Fewer arts teachers per pupil means less time in arts classes; fewer opportunities to perform or create; and fewer curricular choices in higher grade levels. In other words, in New Jersey, arts education for Black and Hispanic children, on average, isn't as broad or as deep as it is for white children. Why would this be?

The next graph provides an answer. School districts with larger populations of Black and Hispanic children have less capacity to raise revenue for their schools locally. The property values per pupil in districts with large populations of Black and/or Hispanic students are less than half of the property values in districts with small populations of students of color. When property values are lower, districts must raise up their tax rates to collect the same amount of revenue as more affluent districts. Districts with large proportions of children of color, therefore, simply don't have the capacity to tax themselves enough to provide the same access to arts education as other districts.

The purpose of State aid is to ameliorate these disparities. Unfortunately, New Jersey does not go far enough when it comes to providing Constitutionally mandated funding adequacy for students of color. I have a graph in there that shows that severe funding disparities exist between districts with many students of color and districts with few. On average, districts with large proportions of Black and/or Hispanic children do not have

enough funding to meet the adequacy targets. The State's own law, the School Funding Reform Act, says they should. On the other hand, districts with small proportions of students of color spend way over what the SFRA adequacy targets are.

We here at NJPP have shown in previous work that Hispanic and Black families pay higher effective tax rates than other families in New Jersey, yet their school funding lags, and, consequently, their students' opportunity in areas like arts education also lag. The data I'm using is from the 2022-2023 school year. In the 2025 Fiscal Year budget, Governor Murphy's administration proposed full funding of SFRA. This is important; it's an achievement that should be celebrated. However, no one should think that this means that New Jersey school children now have equivalent educations, including opportunities in the arts. The truth is that vast disparities in funding adequacy persist across New Jersey's school districts. As we documented, this manifests itself in large differences in arts education, in access to mental health services, and in many other ways.

The school funding disparities that students experience every day are a result -- in large part -- of the failure to adequately update SFRA. We've shown in our previous work the current funding formula sets adequacy targets that are too low to meet current, more rigorous standards in math and English language arts, let alone provide districts with what they need to offer to have meaningful experiences in the visual and performing arts. We *must* recalibrate the formula's funding targets as the State Constitution demands.

Our current disparities in arts education and other curricular areas -- disparities that manifest along racial, ethnic, and class lines

-- are simply not acceptable. And, I look forward to working with the Legislature, the stakeholders here, and public -- other public education stakeholders -- to address this problem and give every child in the Garden State the education they deserve, including an education in the arts.

Thank you.

SENATOR CRYAN: Mark, thank you for your thought-provoking graphs.

Everyone who wants them, we'll make sure that you get them.

Thank you to all the speakers.

And, Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson, thank you for leading us now.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Oh, awesome.

Well, I want to thank everyone for their passion, and for delivering us with such informative information.

And, Mark, you were last but very, very mighty, in talking about the funding piece that I think is very, very critical in making sure that we can do all of the programming that we talk about here, and how essential it is.

So, thank you, thank you, thank you.

I want to open the question period up to my colleagues. If you have something that you would like to add, or questions that you may for the experts that's on the call, please -- this is the time for us to have a conversation. This is our fireside chat with all of the experts here.

Assemblywoman Carter.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: Thank you so much.

Thank you to the panelists for being here today.

I am going to tell you something. It is-- When we get information, we have data, it enlightens our world to really take a look at the total picture. And, being in education myself, one of the biggest things that I see when we deal with arts education and those extra-curricular classes, they treat it as if it's not worth the major core curriculum courses, when it actually is.

And, I am a CTE teacher, and I see how our classes and your electives really are infused, and they help the students tremendously in their core curricular classes -- along with our arts education, and what the kids who are in our bands and are in the drama, in the dance, all have.

So, in saying that, can anyone share two critical factors that would transform arts education in New Jersey schools? Because, as we look at it, what is the major (indiscernible), from your professionalism in dealing with it, that you feel that we can walk away? And, I understand that funding is a huge part of it.

Also, how does -- and, I know that we talked about it, and I think it was Peg who kind of brought it up -- is the access to arts education, but how does access to *more* arts education support a thorough and efficient education?

Thank you.

MS. LISCOW: Well, that is the million-dollar question.

And, we are, in fact, actually taking some time at Arts Ed NJ to convene policy people around what would be our best lever to achieve this high-quality arts education.

What we have been talking, landing on the most -- and, I'm going to let -- defer to some of my colleagues here, too -- is really around the seat time. Looking -- finding out how we can ensure that there is more adequate seat time for arts education and protect that. And, also, be looking at what is being counted as certified arts education.

Right now, we are seeing things that the after-school play, is that meeting the standards? Is that really a theater education? So, we are very much looking at that.

We have a great new partner at the Department of Ed., Shea Murray, who is the VP -- the Visual and Performing Arts Director. We -- That position was open for about a year and a half. He's now been here about a half a -- eight months -- and he is really looking at the data. One thing that we are still looking at is -- because the QSAC data is not necessarily reporting, for example, what's happening in elementary schools adequately.

So, we are really working first to get the correct data, and the Department of Ed. is working with us to get student-level data if at all possible. Because, like, what Mark-- What you're talking about, some of that data that is really talking about the demographics is critical for us to be able to make informed decisions on seat time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you, Wendy.

Mark, you wanted to chime in?

DR. WEBER: Yes, very quickly.

Data-- Wendy, what you just said is so important, that getting adequate data is the key. Because data leads to accountability. Data

gives you feedback about whether or not the standards that the State sets are being met. And, it is the State that is setting the standards.

If we have data, then we can look and see, is the State doing its job in terms of providing the funding that's necessary? Is the district doing its job in terms of getting the personnel needed?

So, I am biased on this as a data wonk, but data leads to accountability. And, so, I think that's a very important -- and, Wendy, a very insightful -- point.

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

Senator Burgess, I see you had your hand up.

SENATOR BURGESS: Good morning, everyone; sorry about that.

I just want to say that this is a very good discussion we're having, and a very-- It is greatly needed.

But, first of all, let me just say to Assemblywoman Reynolds, Assemblywoman Carter, and Senator Cryan hello and thank you.

I just want to, basically, I would say, reiterate what has already been said, as far as how important the arts education is. I've witnessed it myself, and I know for myself, as well as working with children, how it's an outlet. It enhances personality. It increases confidence.

So, along the lines of what Assemblywoman Carter had already stated, I, too, would like to know what you've already begun to answer -- what actually helps, going forward, rather than going back in the past with today's kids and what we have to work with, budget-wise, what can

we do to enhance what we have to work with? Because the arts is very important.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

And, Dr. Sullivan, I saw you had your hand up, too; that you wanted to weigh in on it as well.

DR. SULLIVAN: Sure; thank you.

Just echoing what was said, I think the data is critically important, as well as policy around seat time, to make sure that students are getting the time with qualified arts educators.

And, I think developing an understanding of how the arts have a lot of value for their own sake, but they can also really help a lot of these issues that we're facing now. I know TeachRock talked about the social-emotional connection, and that's something that the arts can authentically do. Schools right now are spending a lot of time and resources looking at different social-emotional programs, and trying to bring things in, for something that the arts do authentically. And, that learning can happen concurrently to the arts education.

And, so, it really, I think, impacts students in a much more profound way, and a much more authentic way. So, I think developing that understanding of all the arts can offer and how they can really help us with a lot of the issues that we're facing today.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: So, thank you, Dr. Sullivan.

Senator Cryan, I saw your hand up?

SENATOR CRYAN: Thanks.

I wanted to follow up a little bit with the folks from TeachRock on a couple things, and then just one other broad question.

How does it work? You've heard the concerns about cost, and I can't help but note you used the word "free" a couple times in your comments. So, how does that actually work? You said 70,000 teachers are signed up. Do they request? Like, you mentioned the 20-minute blocks, and that sort of thing.

Can you kind of help us understand the process a little bit better, if that's all right?

MS. MACHADO: Yes, of course; thanks.

I was waiting for my turn to jump in, too, to just share that.

While it's important to think about increasing the number of stand-alone arts periods available in schools, that takes time to get there; to change a school's schedule; to increase the teaching staff. They're all things we should be doing, but it takes time.

An immediate solution is to connect teachers with a high-quality open educational free resource that they can use to bring the arts into any classroom that's in the schools. You know, how you mentioned that you still remember that English teacher that used music to teach lessons.

And, so, the way TeachRock works as an open educational resource is that all of the lessons on the site are free and available to teachers. And, we say we have 70,000 users, it's because you just have to make a free account on the site, and that helps us track which lessons are most accessed, that helps us decide what are we going to spend time developing next.

When we talk about the Harmony Student Wellness Program specifically, the SEL program, there's kind of two ways schools can engage with that. The curriculum in itself is free and available to all teachers in all schools. If a school wants to partner with TeachRock and get ongoing professional development and support, then that is something that we do charge a small amount for, for our time flying out to the schools and supporting them. But, for a school that has no available funds at all, they can still access those lessons and deliver them to students every day. And, that's true of any of the curriculum for any of the classrooms -- the English, the math, the science, the social studies.

And, every time I sit in a content-development meeting, and we spend 20 minutes debating a question or a prompt for students, I feel really proud of that work, because being a teacher and being a curriculum developer are two very different things. And, to expect teachers to do both of those jobs simultaneously, full-time, is wild. That's why teachers are struggling. They *need* high-quality instructional materials so they can focus on what's important, which is delivering those lessons and making connections with their students.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON:
Awesome.

SENATOR CRYAN: Thanks.

One other piece with that, that I just want to understand, is there's a lot of statistics that folks brought to us in terms of the value of the arts. I'm struck-- Look, I think one of the quiet -- the dirty secrets we don't talk about enough now -- is absenteeism. It was mentioned that we

have to rate it, I mean, there's schools in my district that have north of 20% absenteeism rate post-COVID. It's significant.

In the data you sent over, you talked about the ability to - and, it was mentioned by -- not alone, by other speakers as well. Can you just kind of talk about that a little bit, in terms of mental health or absenteeism, or if anybody else could, in terms of impact? That would be appreciated. And, then I'll stop.

MS. MACHADO: Yes, I mean, so there are statistics that show that if students have just one meaningful connection at school -- just one teacher that they feel safe and that they can trust -- safe with, and that they can trust -- their attendance will increase. And, so, that's a direct-- That is the rationale behind why we see a decrease in absenteeism with schools that use the harmony student wellness program.

Because the program, the kind of cornerstone of it, right next to music, is the circle practice. So, we are -- even right now -- we're all looking directly into our computers. It is a lost art to just sit down and look somebody in the eye and have a conversation and have a connection. Kids will use their phones to like, DM the kid next to them. There's no -- they don't even know how to communicate anymore. So, what we're doing with this program, and using music to open kids up to, is just getting them to look at one another and to talk to each other.

And, when I have an opportunity to go into schools and I say to kids, "How has this program changed how you view your teacher?" They'll say things like, "Well, I never knew Ms. Robertson was funny. I never knew she was like that; I never knew that we liked the same music, or that her taste in music was terrible." Whatever it is that they say, we're fostering

those connections and relationships are the absolute key to increasing attendance in school; to increasing academic performance.

And, I think that's why we see so many schools researching SEL programs, because they know that it's needed.

SENATOR CRYAN: Thank you; thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much.

I see Assemblywoman Matsikoudis, you have your hand up. You're ready to speak--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MATSIKOUDIS: I do, I do.

Thank you very much.

I just-- I cannot speak highly enough and thank everyone who has come here and spoken to us today. There's just, to me, in my opinion, so many facets to this.

When I think about-- You tend to go back to your own education, and educational upbringing. And, you talk about a class that you remember. I can remember a music class where we had to dissect a song -- any song, it was our favorite song at the time, and I just, I can remember it like it was yesterday, listening to the different parts of the song and the words and how the music made us feel. And, things like that make you feel really good.

I mean, I was the kind of kid who was into the glee club, the orchestra, the musicals. That's kind of where I spent a lot of my time in school. And, I look at my kids who are-- In addition to sports they did marching band, and things like that. And, the things that I think about, I think about it from a lot of different directions. So, I think about it from

how the arts can help improve test scores because we know that's factual -- by 13%. And, then I think, also, about how it helps with critical thinking and recalibrating focus.

Also, I think about the special-needs community, and it allows them to connect and share in ways that they may not otherwise would have with others.

And, the one last thing -- and, we talk a lot about this in the education sector -- everyone keeps talking about kids' mental health, and it is just so, so important. And, art therapy -- creative art therapy -- whether it's music, drawing, whatever it is, can help to treat mental-health conditions. And, what I think is so telling about this, if we were to have-- If we were to have this in the schools, this could be helping kids who may not even be on our radar.

So, we can be helping in ways-- Our schools could be helping in ways that they may not even be seeing. So, I think all of that is important. I think it's important to have arts in the community schools. It's just important everywhere.

I am a *huge* proponent of the arts; I cannot say it enough. I love everything I heard today, and whatever I can do to help, seriously, get in touch with me.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN

REYNOLDS-JACKSON:

Awesome.

Thank you, Assemblywoman.

Wendy, I see you have your hand up.

MS. LISCOW: I was going to let Dr. Casterlow-Lalla and Mary go first, because I was going to change the subject to another--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: OK, OK. Dr. Lalla.

DR. CASTERLOW-LALLA: Thank you so much.

The thing I was going to mention, when Senator Cryan mentioned the chronic absenteeism -- there is a really special piece about the arts that I don't know that people often see. People love seeing the product. And, our students across the state do an amazing job delivering said product.

But, there's something about the process and the connection that our students make, not only to the educator providing that high-quality instruction, but to their peers. And, there becomes this community that is developed amongst these artists, whether it's dance, theater, visual arts, media arts. And, that is one of the key components that we're hearing from our students that keeps them coming to school.

And, it's the accountability not just to the school and the learning and the diploma, but it's to one another. And, so, that's a huge piece that we don't talk about, that sometimes it's not data-related around, but that is a key component.

I will tell you that from my days many, many moons ago as a marching band student, I am still in touch with those 150 kids. We still are all connected from, now, almost 30 years ago, supporting each other in life, even if we don't see each other. And, so, that's one of the key components that the arts creates. Because, I get to see who you are from an authentic perspective. I get to see your heart; I get to see what's your why, and your day-to-day practice. And, then, that connects to say, "I'm not going

to leave you behind; I need you to come to school; I need you to do your work; you need to be academically sound so we can all participate and we can keep doing this thing that we love doing.”

And, that is one of the key components that arts education creates. And, I’m not saying that ELA or math or science doesn’t do that. But, I don’t know that it gives an opportunity for a child to show up who they are authentically and to be accepted, welcomed, and encouraged to continue growing.

So, that’s a really key piece that we need, and having additional time to do that would help our students remember the core and really connect to what’s futuristically for them, which is living out the passions that they enjoy.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Very good.

Yes, I’m a Y kid, too, and I love the theater; art; dance; culture. I remember being on punishment, I couldn’t go, and I climbed out the window because I wanted to go; I had to go to rehearsal. We had an upcoming play, I had to go! And, so, she forgave me, but the play must go on.

So, Dr. Mary, I see you wanted to chime in, too. Is it on the same topic?

DR. REECE: Yes, it is.

First of all, I certainly agree with Mark in that we have to look at our funding formula. But, you hear that from everybody who comes to your table, so.

The other piece of this is to implement QSAC with integrity. For districts that are receiving a review by the Department related to QSAC, the Department rep should be looking at, are the arts being implemented with fidelity in all art forms? And, that should be an indicator. So often that doesn't-- That doesn't even come to the table. And, it should, because it is one of the student learning standards, as we've said before.

But, to talk with Assemblyman (*sic*) Cryan's issue about chronic absenteeism, I've been involved for the past six years with a project funded by the Princeton Area Community Foundation around chronic absenteeism and student engagement. And, I work primarily with a school in Trenton, whose principal is a strong advocate of arts integration. And, it has transformed her school in terms of student attendance. Every morning they start with a morning meeting that's around the arts. And, it could be the teachers performing; students; students *and* teachers performing; the principal gets up there and performs.

And, they were receiving a visit by a Department person one morning, and she came in and she said, "Why are these kids running down the street to get to school?" And, she said, "Because, they want to be here for our morning meeting." Because, it's just so spectacular. It gives them joy, as do the other classes that are provided in the school that are all integrated. So, it's language arts in the arts; it's math in the arts; science in the arts; etc.

They also incorporate a lot of work around mental health -- particularly around healing-centered engagement. And, it has made a significant difference.

One other quick story I can tell about that school -- I was there for lunch when they were having an assembly during lunch. And, they had a student who had no arms -- who has no arms and legs. He was up there dancing with all of his classmates. So, the arts certainly gives access to so many who might not feel comfortable in other classroom environments.

So, my hope is that if you embrace all of this, perhaps we could think about doing some type of research study to determine whether the standards are really being implemented in the visual and performing arts. Are we-- Are we including students with disabilities? What about our multi-lingual learners? Somehow we need to get, as Mark said, more data. And, if we could be looking at this from a holistic point of view for a state, I think it would be a model for the rest of the states in the country.

So, thank you.

MS. LISCOW: And, we do-- Oh, may I jump in?

We do have an annual census; every five years, we have a census research project for 2026 that it would be fabulous to be able to ask more detailed questions.

And, I agree with you, Mary, too, about the QSAC, if we could-- I feel like there's sometimes a disconnect between the standards office and those questions, and if we could really look at those for the arts then be able to present it to the county supts. so that they understand what is required, it would be fabulous.

The other issue I really did want to make sure we at least lift up -- and, I'm sure you've heard this from others -- is that we do need to look at teacher recruitment and retention in the arts. As with all subjects, but, we have to look carefully as we start to increase the demand for the arts

teacher, we have to be training those arts teachers and getting more art teachers. We are seeing the data -- some schools -- the art teachers are still at the same level; some are seeing reduced applicants, but, also, to be able to look at, like, the elementary school teachers allowed to use -- to teach art, but they are not required to get any training in arts education in their college preparedness to be a certified teacher.

So, these are some major disconnects that we-- These are loopholes, *per se*, where I think we could be improving the quality of arts education for our youngest kids.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

Peg, I see you have your hand up?

DR. McDONALD: Yes, thank you.

I just wanted to add onto the research aspect -- and this is in response to, Wendy, some of the things you said, as well as Mark -- that two other factors that can be influenced here and are critical -- again, with the chronic absenteeism umbrella -- we talk about, if you're not in the classroom, you can't learn. These are two other factors that influence that student's learning.

And, that is office conduct referrals and suspensions -- in-school and out-of suspensions. So, if in any research those two data points specifically have impacted students with disabilities more recently and, anecdotally, hearing from districts that students who never disrupted the classroom before are now causing disruptions and removed, and often refer to special ed., that adding those two data points may also point to the positive benefits of the arts and provide, also, models through this research for

districts to implement to address not only the learning standards, but also those two factors.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you; thank you.

Mark.

DR. WEBER: Thank you.

It's-- This idea of teacher recruitment I think is really, really critical. We hear all the time about the lack of recruitment of STEM teachers -- science, technology, engineering, math. We hear far less about the need to recruit teachers who are competent in the visual and the performing arts.

I've done some research on this. If you look at the proportion of student teachers who are studying to become teachers, what they are -- what their competency area is -- we do tend to over-produce elementary teachers. There's a reason for that -- we need a lot of elementary teachers. But, we tend to under-produce music and arts teachers almost at the same level that we do in terms of math and science.

I've had a lot of student teachers over the years. I will say that the ones I've had have been exceptionally well-trained. Rutgers does-- I've had several from Rutgers; they do a great job. I just don't think we have enough of them right now, and we need to think about that within the context of recruiting teachers in general.

I'd also add that -- and, I kind of put on my hat as a music teacher and as an analyst of school funding at the same time here -- arts teaching is highly fiscally efficient. You as a chorus teacher can teach a large

group of children in the same way that you can't teach a large group of children, say, in English language arts. That's an area that benefits from smaller class sizes. Orchestras are better when you add more kids; theater companies are better when you add more kids.

So, we should not get caught in this idea of the arts being an extra, as something superfluous. It's actually a fiscally responsible choice to add arts education to the curriculum.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you, Mark, you bring up a very good point, and I think I said that in my opening statement that art is a part of the standard; it's not a supplement; it's not an extracurricular type of thing. This is really foundational for our educational process.

So, I don't see any more hands.

Senator Cryan, do you have any final (indiscernible) you want for us today?

SENATOR CRYAN: Just a grateful thank you.

This may be secondhand to some of you, but I learned a whole lot today, and thank you.

MS. LISCOW: Is there any information, or any remaining questions? I could flood you with information, so, as follow up, is there anything that would be helpful to this group?

SENATOR CRYAN: I know Mark Weber's information is incredibly helpful, and now, at least for me, I understand the TeachRock.

If you've got points that we've missed, please send them over, and we'll make sure everybody gets them.

MS. LISCOW: All right.

Thank you so much. We really appreciate this opportunity, and your enthusiasm, and I hope we can, as we bring our committees together to talk about what are the really good levers, I hope we can be invited back to share those new levers with you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON:
Absolutely; absolutely.

Well, thank you so much, everyone, for all of the information that we have here.

You're going to get more questions. After I hang up on these calls, in these hearings, you always have questions afterwards. "Oh, I wish I would have said this, this, and this." So, look forward to your emails being flooded with additional questions and information.

But, I thank you all for sharing your knowledge with us, to try to make our education department -- our arts and education -- a better program.

So, thank you, and have a great day.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)