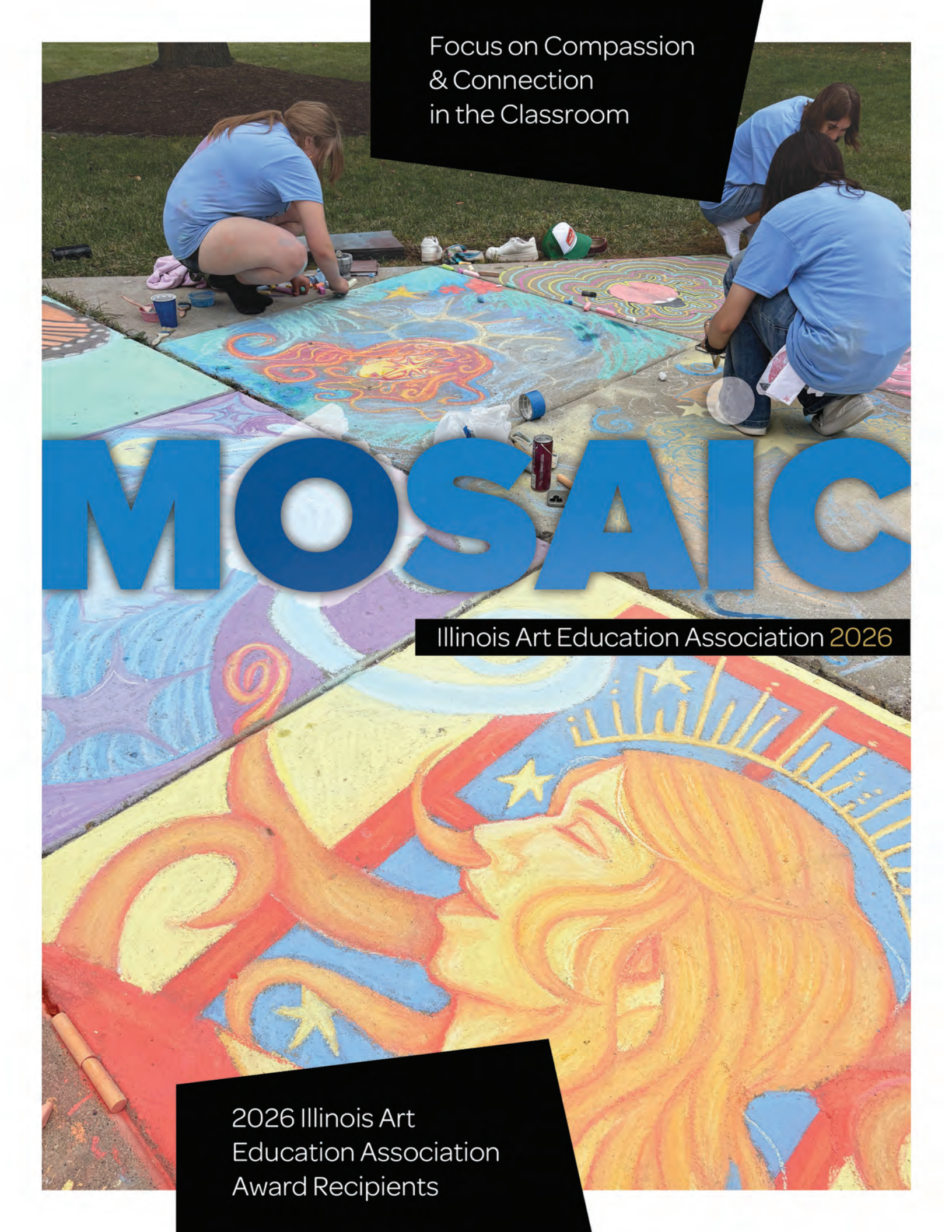


A photograph of three students in light blue t-shirts and jeans painting a large, colorful mural on a concrete sidewalk. The mural features a large, stylized sun or face in the foreground with vibrant orange, yellow, and red colors. Above it, there are blue and white sections with stars and a rainbow. The students are crouched on the sidewalk, using various art supplies like paint cans, brushes, and a palette. The background shows a grassy area and a tree.

Focus on Compassion
& Connection
in the Classroom

MOSAIC

Illinois Art Education Association 2026

2026 Illinois Art
Education Association
Award Recipients

Over and Over the Edge

Lesson Plan for Grades K–5



Step 1: Create a stencil by drawing lines and cutting edges.



Step 2: Apply color from tempera stick onto and around stencil edge.



Step 3: Use a wet wipe to move color from stencil to paper. Repeat over and over, moving stencil each time, to create new patterns and colors.

Repeating lines create patterns, shapes, and a variety of colors with the help of an ordinary wet wipe!

CHECK OUT NEW lesson plans and video workshops for students of all ages at DickBlick.com/lesson-plans.

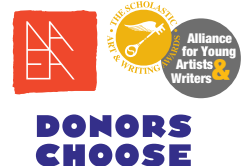


SCAN TO VIEW
LESSON PLAN



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MOSAIC

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2026-27 Student Art Show
Above piece by Samantha Christian
Grade 11, Oswego High School, Oswego
Art Teacher: Michael Jon Skura



Northwest
Council Spring
PD Event



IAEA Membership Retreat

The purpose of the newsletter is for Communication and as a forum for the expression of ideas. The IAEA encourages contributions of articles or description of activities related to art education. Opinions expressed by the authors may or may not represent the views of the Association, its members, or its governing body.

We welcome carefully proofread articles and good quality photographs. The Illinois Art Education Association publishes annually. Current and former issues are available online at www.ilaea.org. Cover image courtesy Lindsey DiLeo and Wendy Guss. See pages 16-17 for more information.



Illinois Art
Education
Association

Submission Deadlines:

Print submissions due
February 1st

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President's Message 2026

From IAEA President, Kerry Parrish (she/her)

IAEApresident@ilaea.org

My journey with IAEA began with a connection. I reached out because I wanted to share my NAEA School for Art Leaders experience with other Illinois art educators. That simple act led to a conversation with the IAEA president, who told me, "There's someone I think you need to meet."

That someone was Jen Wargin.

That connection started my journey with IAEA and helped me see that IAEA provides more than professional development. It creates opportunities for us to learn, create, lead, connect, and support one another.

Soon after that conversation, Jen and I became co-editors of MOSAIC, and somewhere along the way, she became the friend I didn't know I needed.

Connections and collaboration have always been my jam. But my time with IAEA has taught me that connection is about more than networking. It is about showing up for one another with curiosity and compassion. It is sharing what is happening in our classrooms, talking about our own creative practices, asking questions, and being willing to learn from one another.

Those connections have also brought me back to my own artmaking practice. They have helped me rediscover the importance of being curious, not only as an educator, but as an artist. When we make space for our own creativity and growth, that energy finds its way back into our classrooms and our students.

I hear stories like mine throughout IAEA. One introduction, one conversation, or one invitation can open a door we didn't know was there. Those connections ripple outward, impacting our classrooms, our students, their families, our communities, and art education across Illinois.

So, who might need an invitation from you? Whose idea needs to be heard? Who could use some encouragement? Maybe you can be the person who says, "There's someone I think you need to meet."

Someone did that for me, and it changed my path.

Our impact begins with one another.

Kerry Parrish

President, Illinois Art Education Association





President-Elect's Message

Eryn Blaser (she/her)
IAEA President-Elect and
Middle School Visual Art Educator

VicePresident@ilaea.org

As the summer comes to a close, I hope you were able to find time to fill your cup with joy, relaxation, time with family and friends, and moments of reflection and balance. Time to find our center and rejuvenate our batteries to get a fresh outlook on many aspects of our lives. It was wonderful to see and hear about the different events, opportunities, and art making experiences many of you have shared throughout the summer time. The happiness of connecting with others in your community, sharing your expertise and knowledge, as well as having time to go at a different pace was great to observe.

With this recharged spirit we bring this energy into the start of a new school year. The ideas, thoughts, and elements that happened to us throughout the summer we bring forth in our classrooms to share in the collective community with our colleagues and students. Community – that sense of belonging, feeling welcomed, heard, and seen, working together for the bigger cause and celebrating each other for what special gifts and talents we bring to the table. When support is needed we rally around, uplift, and help to guide and share from experiences and knowledge we have gained from others along the way. For me, the IAEA community has been a huge part of my life for almost two decades. I am honored and appreciative of all the wonderful individuals I have met, learned from, have been inspired by, collaborated with, and have shared a common, connected bond for the passion, drive, and love of Arts Education. Several Arts Educators have shared their stories, knowledge, and expertise through presenting a session or workshop, showing up to meet-ups, volunteering time at the conference, submitting a lesson plan or article, submitting a student's art piece into an exhibition, or stepping into a leadership role. It has been truly amazing to see individuals of this organization flourish and grow.

I have an ask for our members. I'd love for you to invite a friend, colleague, an Art Educator or Museum Art Educator in your community that might not know about the Illinois Art Education Association to an event, meet-up, the conference, or share our social media or website information with them. Also, if you are a member we would love for you to share your expertise. Don't hesitate to reach out. Are you curious about presenting but might be a little hesitant to do so? Or do you have a great lesson that you would like to share through a workshop in your region? Would you like to know more about how to get involved in a leadership role or support with advocacy, conference, social media, or other roles on the board? There is a space and place for us all! Your stories, knowledge, and creative ideas are important. Stay connected, committed, and curious! I look forward to seeing you all at the conference in the fall!



From the Editor

Kathleen Tieri Ton (she/her)
MOSAIC Editor and
High School Art & Design Educator

MOSAIC@ilaea.org

Art education is unique work, whether it is occurring in schools – public or private, museums, community spaces, homes, or studios. Our work as art educators is created through spaces and relationships, images and materials, conversations and examples. We curate spaces and cultivate risk. We teach about histories and techniques but also about feelings and perceptions. Through art and design, students are learning about their world and how they relate to it. It is not news to us, who are engaged in the work, that every possible topic can come up in the art classroom.

For this issue of the MOSAIC, I posed the topic of Compassion & Connection in Art Education. This topic felt important as we might collectively reflect on the past few years of our professional lives and the numerous changes spanning content and context. What challenges division and fear? What has the power to inspire compassion, empathy, and connection? The arts, of course.

From little moments of making to sustained practices, artists young and old have their hands and minds on all that makes us more human. When we get pulled in a million directions, doing the work no one prepared us for, it can be hard to remember how powerful our impact is on our students, our communities, and ourselves. Throughout this issue, I hope that you are reminded, inspired and empowered with the possibility of compassion and connection possible in our work and our IAEA community.

Support for every part of **TEACHING ART**



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Get Inspired



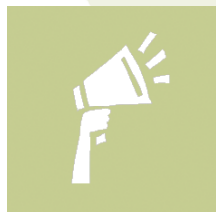
Advance

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artofed.info/illinois-iaea

Scan this QR Code or [click here](#)
for Frequently Asked Questions
about Advocating for the Arts.



State of Arts Advocacy in Illinois

Brought to you by the IAEA Advocacy Team

advocacy@ilaea.org

Illinois is at a pivotal stage for arts education policy, influenced by the state's Fine Arts Seal of Excellence, HB 4334, and High School Visual Arts being an Emerging Activity with IHSA!

The Fine Arts Seal of Excellence is an initiative that further elevates the importance of creative learning, making it evidence of college and career readiness rather than just an extracurricular more will follow this upcoming Fall.

Arts educators are encouraged to participate in advocacy events, share impactful stories, and collaborate with administrators. The current environment, marked by bipartisan backing and new policy initiatives, provides a strong foundation for embedding and protecting arts education in Illinois for the future, ensuring students have access to robust creative learning opportunities. One in particular is HB 4334; House Bill 4334 sponsored and introduced in January 2026 by Rep. Rick Ryan. HB 4334 will eliminate HB 2170/Amed3, which hurts Illinois students by creating a "bottleneck" in student schedules, leaving little room for elective courses like music, theater, and visual arts.

Several years ago Illinois lawmakers passed HB2170, making it a two-year graduation requirement in foreign language (HB 2170/Amend 3). As mandatory core requirements increase, students are forced to choose between subjects, often resulting in fewer educational opportunities for arts and other electives.

HB 2170/Amendment 3 Requirement Hurts Illinois Students and Schools.

- **Reduced Elective Time:** Increased state mandates for foreign language and lab sciences limit the capacity for students to take elective classes.
- **Declining Opportunities:** With limited time slots, enrollment in arts courses (such as choir, drawing, and digital art) has dropped, leading to the elimination of specialized courses.
- **"Invisible" Arts Programs:** If the arts are not ranked or formally recognized in new school performance reports, they risk becoming optional, further hindering district investment.
- **Focus on Core Over Creativity:** ISBE members criticized the prioritization of two years of foreign language over subjects like music, art, and career-technical education (CTE) in an already constrained school day.
- **Teacher Shortages:** Schools already struggle to find qualified staff for the required subjects, making the expansion of mandatory courses (like foreign language) impractical.
- **Impact on Career Education:** The increase in rigid, mandatory courses conflicts with efforts to provide career-technical education (CTE) and pathways for students interested in arts careers.

HB 4334 will eliminate HB 2170/Amed3. We strongly encourage you to support HB 4334.

The Visual Arts are now an emerging Activity with IHSA! **The deadline is early Nov. 2026! Here is the [link](#)** to share with your Activities/Athletic Director to register your High School.

- Is this registration just to collect data and gauge interest? **Yes.**
- Is my school obligated or committed to anything after registration? **No.**
- Click on the hyperlink at top of page to get more questions answered.



Where Are My PD Hours?

*by Joan Mills (she/her)
Professional Development Coordinator*

prodev@ilaea.org

Did you attend a Professional Development Hour (PDH) eligible event and wonder how to receive your hours? Illinois Art Education Association uses digital attendance records and the PD+ system to record and award PDHs.

Once attendance has been verified, your PDHs are posted in PD+ for registered participants. To receive credit, you must complete and submit the event survey in PD+.

To access your survey and hours:

- Log into your ELIS account
- Select PD+
- Click the bell icon for notifications
- Complete and submit the event survey
- ELIS will also send a survey notification to the email address associated with your ELIS account.

After submission, your PDHs will be posted to your account.

Need documentation? Evidence of Completion forms are available directly in ELIS next to the recorded professional development event.

Contact prodev@ilaea.org for questions.



Youth Art Month

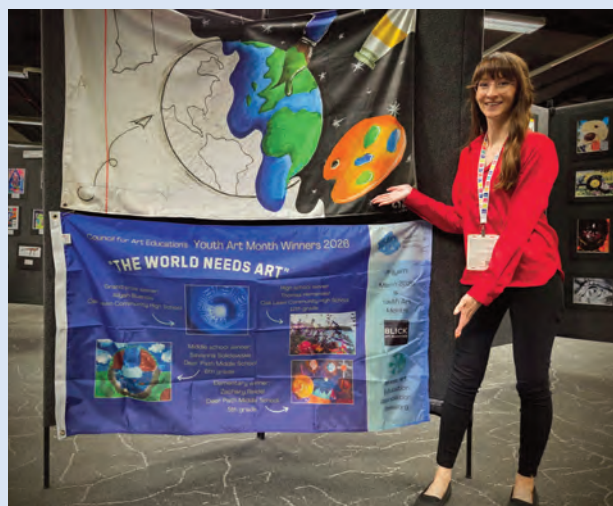
from IAEA YAM Coordinator, Ailysh Cooper (she/her)

youthart@ilaea.org

Youth Art Month is an annual event, traditionally held in March, to celebrate visual arts for youth in grades K-12. Youth Art Month is designed to emphasize the importance of art education for all children, encouraging support for quality school art programs, and promoting art material safety. The Council for Art Education (CFAE) is the national sponsor of Youth Art Month, in cooperation with the National Art Education Association.

How can you get started participating in Youth Art Month?

- Participate in the Art Contest sponsored by CFAE.
- Invite local artists to visit and share at your school.
- Ask your administration & school board to recognize and promote Youth Art Month
- Host an art festival at your school/in your community
- Partner with local businesses/organizations to present students' artwork
- Host a potluck breakfast to recognize outstanding student artists at your school
- Create a bulletin board for your state's theme
- Follow Youth Art Month board on Pinterest for more!



The 2026/2027 Youth Art Month theme is “My Community, My Story.” For information on participating in the 2027 Contest, stay connected with IAEA and visit <https://councilforarteducation.org/youth-art-month> for great resources. Reach out to Ailysh Cooper, IAEA Youth Art Month Coordinator, at youthart@ilaea.org for more information.

COLLEGE *for* Creative STUDIES

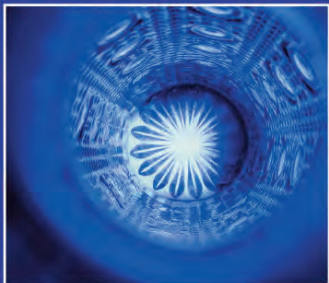
Council for Art Education's Youth Art Month Winners 2026

"THE WORLD NEEDS ART"

Grand prize winner:

Aliyah Buendia

Oak Lawn Community High School



High school winner:

Thomas Hernandez

Oak Lawn Community High School
12th grade



Middle school winner:

Savanna Sokdowske

Deer Path Middle School
6th grade



Elementary winner:

Zachary Reidel

Deer Path Middle School
5th grade



Illinois Art
Education
Association

#ilyam



March 2026 is Youth Art
Month!

Illinois Art Education Association: ilaea.org



Professional Learning Networks

What are Professional Learning Networks?

PLN's are necessary! They exist on a wider scale, presenting grade-level specific opportunities to connect, learn, and grow from the perspectives and processes of others. Now more than ever, we need OUR people. Here is another way to find them!

High School Art PLN



Reinvigorating Conversation in the Classroom

by Aaron Cummins (he/him)
IAEA High School Art PLN
Prairie Ridge High School

hs@ilaea.org

Have you noticed that student interaction and conversation has gone down in your classes? This topic came up when I asked teachers how their year was going. Students seem to be struggling with engaging with their peers or just avoiding interaction with their peers all together. Student interaction is a key part of the art classroom because it encourages idea development and is a key part of the feedback process of critiques. Whatever the cause, students have now become more comfortable talking with machines than with direct human to human conversation. To address this, here are a few ways to encourage person-to-person interaction and conversation in the classroom:

- 1. Bell Ringers:** Bell ringers are usually done at the beginning of class and have students pair up to discuss a quick fun topic in under three to five minutes. This quick activity is low risk and sparks interaction over simple topics related or unrelated to class. Some common bell ringers are: this or that, would you rather, or pair share. This or that involves showing students two opinions (for example, 2 artworks), and they have to choose one and explain their choice. Would you rather asks students to choose an option they would rather do between 2 extreme choices. Examples of this could include topics like would you rather eat worms or cockroaches. A pair share has students share quick responses with a partner over something that has happened recently. An example of this could include one highlight from your weekend or your favorite school lunch item. The goal of bell ringers is to get the students practicing person-to-person interaction and building familiarity with the people in the class.
- 2. Walk and Talks:** Walk and talks are similar to bell ringers in that they have students pair up to discuss topics, but they involve leaving the classroom and engaging while they move around. This activity does take more time and planning, but the change in environment does help some students open up more with their peers.
- 3. Paired Brainstorming Swap:** Paired brainstorming swap has students individually start brainstorming ideas for a project, and then pair up and exchange papers so that a partner can add to and ask questions related to their ideas. This strategy forces students to explain their ideas and deal with feedback from someone else in the class. Students are encouraged to ask clarifying questions or address "have you thought about this...?". The goal of this strategy is to get students comfortable discussing art and to expand students' ideas.



IAEA Elementary & Middle School Art PLN

Scan this QR Code
or Click Here
to view our
Illinois Visiting Artists
Contact Database.



Lines, Zines, and Visiting Artists

by Theresa Fantana (she/her)

IAEA Middle School Art PLN, IAEA Interest Groups Coordinator, and IAEA Social Media Manager

el@ilaea.org

This year, the IAEA Elementary and Middle School Professional Learning Group hosted both an online webinar and an in-person meetup. Our online session, a fun elementary PLN called “Lines & Zines,” was a hit! We showed teachers how to use lines in creative ways — such as neurographic art, bilateral drawing, and emotional descriptive art. Then, the talented Karen Schaschway Brinker (@brinker.maker) taught us the many ways zines can be incorporated into the classroom. We loved learning the history of zines, then getting to fold, cut, and create alongside her to make our own zines to share. They are perfect for the first week of school, stations, vocabulary review, or even as a standalone lesson.



Our in-person meetup regarding bringing visiting artists into the classroom was also a huge success. I’m a big believer in being in the right place at the right time, and that certainly happened during Lisa DeLuca’s and my presentation at the IAEA Conference. A representative from the *Illinois Arts Council* happened to be in the audience and provided teachers with information on how to secure funding for visiting artists.

If funding is holding you back, please reach out to them! If you simply aren’t sure which artists to contact, I’ve created a spreadsheet of Illinois artists whom I have worked with or know of personally. Reach out to me if you’d like access.

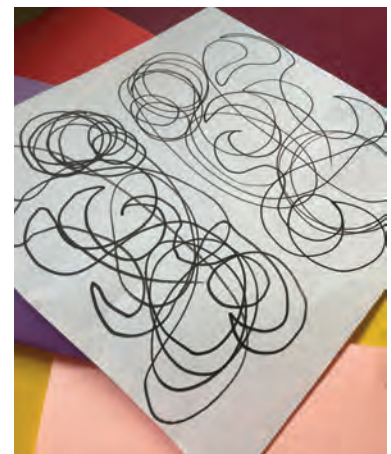
Why Bring Visiting Artists into the Art Room?

If you’re on the fence, here are a few reasons why I believe these visits are so vital:

- **Real-World Connections:** Students see how art exists beyond the classroom as a career, a form of communication, and a way to engage with the community.
- **Diverse Techniques and Perspectives:** Visiting artists bring unique styles and processes that may not be part of the standard curriculum, broadening students’ creative vocabulary.
- **The Creative Process in Action:** Watching an artist work helps students understand that art-making involves experimentation, persistence, problem-solving, and even “messing up” or hating their art at times. My favorite is when they teach the students how to overcome those challenging art moments.
- **Inspiration and Representation:** Meeting someone who makes art for a living makes the field feel more meaningful and attainable. I’ve noticed that after a visit, students are often re-energized to pursue their own ideas.
- **Community and Culture Building:** These visits strengthen the relationship between the school and the local arts community. They also build community in your school and allow for connections to all kinds of diverse artists and culture representation.

Keep creating and creating those creators. I look forward to seeing you all at future online and in person events!

@MrsFontanasArtRoom on Instagram;
Mrs. Fontana’s Art Room on Facebook



Regional Councils

What are Regional Councils?

Regional Councils provide opportunities for educators to come together in their local regions for professional development, social gatherings, and advocacy efforts. Get to know the other arts educators in your area and enhance your practice. Contact your Regional Council leadership if you have an idea for an event or want to share programming in your area and be sure to stay connected with dedicated Facebook groups.

Council FAQ

How do I know which council is right for me?

Councils are determined regionally in the state by county. Check out the map on the IAEA site.

Can anyone plan an event or social outing?

Yes, any member can! The council depends on the input of its members, who best know the variety of activities and opportunities in their area. Submit an event request or contact your council leadership.

How should I let IAEA know what's going on in my area?

Post on your council's Facebook group or contact your council leadership.

Northwest Council Report

Lisa Jimenez (she/her)

IAEA Northwest Events/Middle School Art Educator RPS205

NWevents@ilaea.org



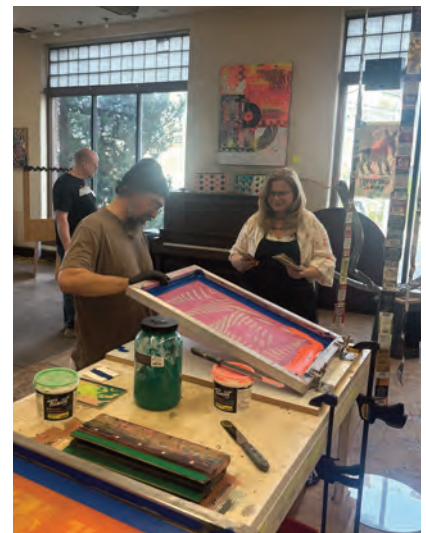
Spring brought together art educators from the Northwest region to experience Rockford's vibrant arts community. The NW region organized a PD event for thirteen art educators to experience the art scene firsthand, in the end leaving them inspired.

The afternoon started with a thirty-minute docent-led tour of the Rockford Art Museum's permanent collection. Next, we headed to the studio of the Fatherless Print Posse for a behind-the-scenes visit and surprise hands-on demo. Participants got to learn about their collaborative screen printing practices and printed on sketchbook covers as part of a make-and-take portion of the event. The tour ended at the studio of Brett Whitacre's space. Here participants got to learn about his reverse painting process on glass, his numerous murals, and life drawing community classes he hosts. These three stops on our tour coincided with the Rockford area arts council's spring Artscene event which features over 50+ galleries. Many participants chose to continue after our tour concluded and explore these art-filled spaces.

This powerful guided tour experience gave art educators an afternoon filled with contemporary art, studio visits, and most importantly a chance to connect with fellow Illinois art educators. Stay tuned for more exciting events in the Northwest region.

Want more information about the featured stops on the tour? Check out the following sites; Rockford Art Museum, Free daily admission <https://rockfordartmuseum.org>

Fatherless Print Posse <https://wearefatherless.com> and Brett Whitacre [@brettwhitacreart](https://brettwhitacreart.com).



South Council Report

Jody Paulson (she/her)

IAEA Southern Council Vice-President

SouthernVP@ilaia.org



Making Southern Connections

The South Council identified **making connections** as their 2025 goal. Leadership literally embraced this concept in June 2025 with the marriage of Lexi Hughes, our Events Coordinator, to Cole Moore, our Communications Officer! Congrats to the Moores!

To meet our goal of connections, the South Council continued the task of updating our member and prospective-member database. We reconnected with members who have not been active in recent years and invited many who had not yet done so, to join the IAEA. We are committed to uniting the St. Louis Metro East region in Illinois with the Southern Illinois region aligned with Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Hopefully, 2026 will see us as a region united!!

As in years past, the South Council hosted the Southern Illinois Art and Design Educators Conference at SIUC. For our goal of connections, the conference organizers targeted our northern neighbors by inviting workshop presenters and conference participants from throughout the state to join us. Thank you to those who made the trip south for the Creative Clay + Conference! It was an exciting conference. Our luncheon speaker was the recently awarded Golden Apple recipient, Josh Shearer who told his personal story titled, "Hard Work and Bad Judgement: One Man's Quest for Equity in Visual Art, Design, and Media in Illinois Public Schools." Our keynote speaker was the internationally known ceramist and children's book illustrator: BETH LO! An exhibition of Beth's work was

on display in the Sharp Museum during the conference and her keynote lecture titled, "A Chinese Immigration Story in Porcelain," referenced these works and the family history they were based upon. Beth Lo was brought to SIU through the monetary support of our regional partners: the SIU Sharp Museum, Artspace Southern Illinois, SIU Ceramics, SIU Art and Design Education, and the Illinois Art Educators Association. We are thankful to all the contributors who helped make this incredible event possible and the strength of our Southern Illinois connections.





iaea member contribution



The Secret is the Students: Why Connection is the Best Curriculum

Theresa Fontana (she/her)

Art Teacher, IAEA Middle School Art PLN, IAEA Interest Groups Coordinator, & IAEA Social Media Manager
el@ilaea.org | Facebook: Mrs. Fontana's Art Room | Instagram: @MrsFontanasArtRoom

The secret to engaging students lies in the students themselves. I have taught art education in various school districts and grade levels. Beginning with a year in high school, then 15 years in K-5, and now working with 5th-6th graders, I have found that with the differences, my “teaching secret” holds true no matter where I am.

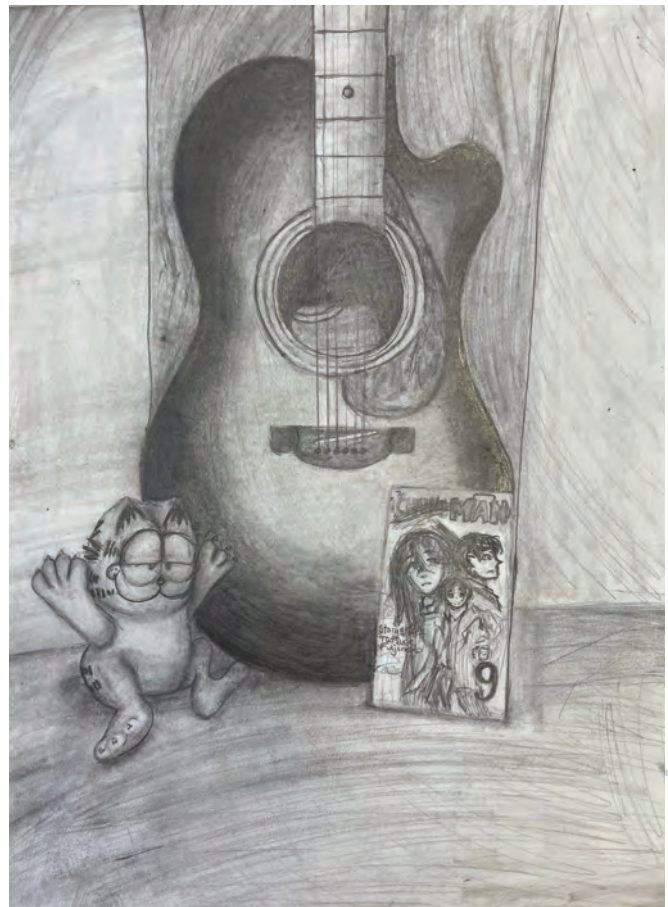
Many of you know that making connections is key to teaching, but my secret is instilling those connections directly into the art lessons and curriculum. This approach provides ongoing opportunities for you to learn about each student. Not only that, but it gives them the creative voice they desperately need in this crazy world. Sure, a YouTube video can teach a student how to paint a still life, but it doesn't connect that skill to the student's personal life. That is where we come in, and you can apply this approach at any age level. Connecting to students fixes tricky behaviors, it changes students' lives, and it even changes your own!

One of my favorite lessons is an **Object Self-Portrait**. Every student must choose objects that symbolize who they are – things they cannot live without or objects that are special because of who gave them the item. Bam. They get to choose and take their own photo of the objects instead of struggling through a boring still life that everyone else is also drawing. I have found that sometimes when all are drawing the same subject, they will start to doubt their own artistic abilities. Instead of comparing themselves to others they have their own independent art show because they are working on their subject matter they chose and photographed.

As the teacher, you are front and center. While they work, you can chat with them about what they chose and why. You can build relationships based on shared connections or the stories behind their objects. You become their art mentor, helping them learn the tricks of lighting, value, highlights, and that magical cast shadow that brings art to life. You can even just be a listening ear. Many students are talked at all day long; in art, you get to be the listener. Students crave connection, and when you give them that, they respond in magical ways. They are more polite, they care, they try, and they end up producing amazing artwork! A student once told me, “I love that you actually sit and talk with us.”

So, next time you are designing a lesson, consider how it gives them a choice or a voice. Our hallways should reflect our students' identities, not replicas of our own art or experience. How can your prompts allow you to learn alongside and connect with your students?

- **A still life** can be their favorite candy, treat, or objects that symbolize who they are.
- **A boring landscape** can be altered by allowing them to use photos of places they've been or places they dream of going.
- **A design concept** can reflect ideas no one else has ever thought of. If they could invent a car, a toy, or a planter that doesn't exist yet, what would it look like?
- **A portrait** can be one of their family members, teachers, or coaches.





Community Connected Fiber Arts

Eryn Blaser (she/her)

IAEA President-Elect / Middle School Visual Art Educator

presidentelect@ilaea.org

This lesson was focused on Fiber Arts with my sixth grade students. We had discussed as a class what fabric meant to them. Student responses included texture, comfort, color, making a statement, fashion, or they shared made with fabric: blankets, clothes, shoes, furniture, or interior of cars, and so on. One response was connected to our statement in what we want to wear, tradition, and history. Yes!! We also talked about how fabric is a protective material when we wear it in many different situations. We talked about contemporary fabric designs of today in what designs they see within the fashion they wear or see in stores. The young artists then went on a physical and digital scavenger hunt of fabrics from all over the world in small groups. It was wonderful to see the excitement and energy in the room as they found out where different fabric designs and fabrics were from.

As students started to plan their fabric designs, patterns, and motifs, a few students brought in fabric pieces that their families had at home, such as tablecloths, shirts, scarves, and fabric beads. Some artists decided to connect their inspiration to contemporary patterns and designs, while others looked to traditional designs from different countries. Students learned about what different patterns and designs represented if they were able to find this information. Student artists were able to draw using fabric markers or pencils, fabric paint. They could use felt, fabrics of different kinds, yarn, or embroidery flosses. Several artists wanted to learn how to sew. We had a day where student artists who might have a little more practice with this skill helped students who never sewn before. I was in the middle handing out needles, knotting, starting them off, but the support they all gave each other was wonderful to observe.



This spirit and support continued through the creation of our clothes. Observing students sharing ideas of embellishing, adding different techniques and materials fueled pushing these pieces to their fullest potential. You could see the lightbulbs going off in ways they could add more to their art pieces. One of the project requirements was to include at least two different materials and techniques that were connected to our Fiber Arts exploration within their art work. Some artists wanted to use every material and technique, especially when it came to embellishments with beads and yarn. In the end, we had our class discussion and critique about the work that was created. Students shared this sense of feeling a part of the larger community

and that they had learned about other cultures and the importance of certain garments, colors, and designs. When we go to a store we can observe that many garments have different designs and patterns. Some are eye-catching and bright, while others are simple and lighter in color. They shared that they are paying attention to these details when they go shopping. Students share thanks and gratitude for the comments and insight they received from each other. One artist shared how much they enjoyed working with fabric and all the different materials that could be used. They also shared their excitement of learning a new skill of sewing and that it wasn't as difficult as they had thought. There was this understanding that fabric is a universal material that everyone can share a story about. It was powerful for students to share their stories through their art making, exploration, and final art pieces. Many of them learned techniques and skills that they never experienced before.



Collaboration & Connection: Our Ofrenda Tradition

Jenny Raia (she/her)

District 97 Oak Park Elementary Art Teacher & Department Chair

IAEA Elementary Art PLN

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In the Fall of 2020, when we were at home for remote learning, my good friend Liza, the Spanish teacher at my school, and I were commiserating about the Zoom teaching situation and how we missed being with the kids at school. I had been doing my best to create engaging virtual art lessons and experiences for my students, but still felt disconnected, as we all did, from our school traditions and community. Liza and I decided to collaborate for Hispanic Heritage Month, and we began to design a lesson that could be done over Zoom about the monarch butterflies and their migration to Mexico. That same week, during Spanish class, the kids would learn about immigration and the traditions and symbolism of Dia de Los Muertos.

After an introduction to the science of monarch migration and the importance of the monarch as a cultural and artistic symbol, I demonstrated how to draw half of a monarch and do a simple black crayon transfer in order to make it symmetrical. I showed the kids how to hide a secret message in the patterns of the butterfly's wings and how to use an orange marker and wet paintbrush to fill in the color. I then asked the kids to display their finished butterflies in their front windows in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month. As I shared this project with Liza, an idea came up that we could do a community ofrenda, a traditional altar to celebrate our ancestors and honor lost loved ones, outside of the school entrance. It would be a way to bring our students, families, fellow teachers and



staff together during that very challenging time.

Liza had grown up celebrating Dia de los Muertos, and it is a big part of her cultural identity, so I deferred to her when it came to planning. She gathered all of the traditional elements and reached out to families and staff to ask for pictures that could be included on our Longfellow Ofrenda Altar. We decided that I would paint monarch decorations that would connect to the project the students had done in art class. I got to work painting a kaleidoscope of monarchs onto outdoor-friendly, shiny grocery delivery bags that I had saved for just the right project.

When it came time to set up the ofrenda in November 2020, Liza and I saw each other in person for the first time since the pandemic started. It was such a powerful experience to create the display together that first year, and it was extra meaningful because many of the photos displayed were of special people our community had lost to COVID. We immediately knew that this was something that would become an annual tradition.

Each year since, we work together to come up with a theme, and I plan an art project for the students to do that will be displayed alongside or as a backdrop to the traditional ofrenda Liza organizes. For example, one year the theme was "El Amor Nunca Muere" or love never dies. I introduced the students

to Latino artist, Justin Favela, who works in the traditional *cartonería* style of papier-mâché sculpture. I then had the kids make hearts using colorful layers of tissue paper and hung them in the window behind the altar.

In 2023, our school suffered a tragic loss when one of our kindergarten students died unexpectedly. We gently asked the family if we could dedicate the ofrenda that year to his memory, and they agreed to allow us to honor him in this way. I created props of the beloved student's favorite things and watercolored large sheets of paper that Liza had students cut into hearts to hang on the fence near the ofrenda with handwritten messages of love and support. The parents and sister brought their extended family to view the ofrenda and held a small memorial service. It meant so much to them during an unfathomably difficult time. To this day, that experience remains in my heart as the most important thing I've done as a teacher.

We've gotten so much positive feedback about the ofrenda each year, have been included in a community wide ofrenda walk, and featured in the local press. It's truly become part of our school's identity as a learning community. The ofrenda continues to provide space for remembering and honoring loved ones who are no longer with us. Our collection of framed photographs included on the altar has grown over the years and though it is heartbreaking to witness so much loss, it is comforting to have a caring community offering support and a common language to talk about it. I'm truly grateful for this continued collaboration.





Chalk the Walk: Authentic Assessment Through Public Artmaking

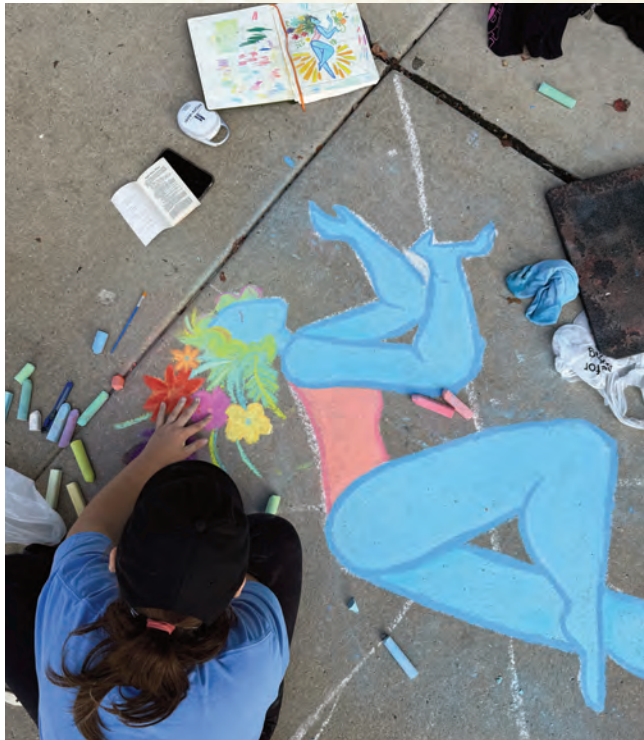


Lindsey DiLeo (she/her)
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School District 155 has emphasized authentic assessment and community-centered learning experiences while also exploring pathways that help students envision and prepare for their postsecondary futures. In alignment with these district-wide goals, the Cary-Grove High School Art Department hosted its first annual Chalk the Walk event, providing students with a collaborative, real-world artmaking experience grounded in professional practice.



The project began with an introduction to the work of Cary-Grove alumnus Brigid Higgins, a professional chalk artist whose career served as both inspiration and a tangible example of creative pathways beyond high school. In the classroom, students developed preliminary sketches and explored grid and scaling techniques to prepare for large scale sidewalk compositions. These foundational skills supported the transition from small format planning to large scale public installation.

Students then participated in an in-school field trip experience, during which they were given a full day to complete their chalk drawings along the school's main entrance walkway. This highly visible, public setting allowed administrators, staff, students, and visitors to observe the artmaking process in real time, closely mirroring the experience of professional street and public artists. The process required students to problem-solve collaboratively by mixing chalk to achieve specific colors, proportionally enlarging their designs, and coordinating with peers whose compositions bordered their own. Attention to spacing, transitions, and visual continuity encouraged students to consider the collective impact of their work rather than focusing solely on individual pieces.

The completed installations transformed the space into a temporary outdoor gallery that celebrated creativity, collaboration, and community. Chalk the Walk functioned as an authentic assessment by requiring students to apply technical skills, work effectively in teams, and present their artwork in a public, community-focused environment. Most importantly, the experience provided students with insight into professional artistic practice, reinforcing the relevance of art education in preparing students for future creative pathways.





Supporting Academic Integrity Through Art Making

Grahame Wilkin (he/him)

NAHS Coordinator, Visual Fine Arts Teacher, Aurora Christian High School

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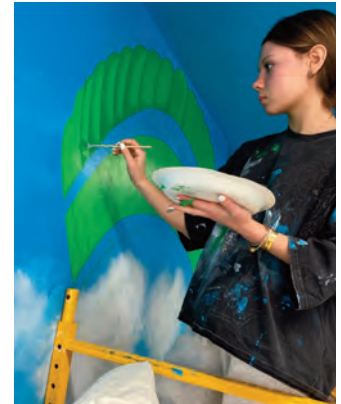


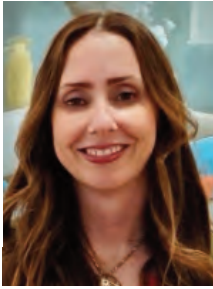
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or [Click Here](#)
to view video
on Instagram

Why take the time to paint a mural for the community? Can it really make that much of a difference? Using our artistic gifts to serve the community has been an unparalleled opportunity; one that allows us to see the direct impact of our passion and creativity in others' lives.

In the first week of April 2026, we finished a mural at the Mutual Ground Domestic Violence Center in Aurora, Illinois. We transformed the entire children's room, painting it with an endless sky filled with hot air balloons. The room was changed from a dark beige small space to a place that a child would enter with wide-eyed wonder. Walking into this room gives the kids a safe wide open space that was made by our students. This mural will touch the lives of children that play in that room for years to come.

For the students who painted the mural, the experience was just as powerful. They were able to see firsthand the genuine appreciation of their efforts. Employees and residents alike lit up watching the student progress. The shelter could never afford a mural on their own, but because of our service, we were able to make it possible. As the city of Aurora has taken notice of our work, we are being flooded with new opportunities to serve through the Arts. With each project, we are reminded that art doesn't just decorate a space; it can transform it and the people within it.





Mirror, Mirror on the Wall – Who’s the Fairest of Them All? Answer: EVERYONE!

Nancy Heuser (she/her)

Elementary Art Educator, Orland Center School & Park School

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Art has the power to inspire, express ideas, and spark reflection. In my classroom, I teach students that perfection does not exist and to embrace love for themselves and for each other. One of my lessons that focuses on these core concepts involves the mixed-media masks created by contemporary artist, Kimmy Cantrell. Cantrell’s abstract, asymmetrical masks challenge traditional views of beauty. His unique and expressive sculptures combine traditional African art forms with modern materials and found objects. His use of mixed-media allows his sculptures to have a modern flair, while honoring his past influences and love of abstract art. Cantrell states, “I want to show the beauty within flaws. Imperfections tell stories that are far more compelling than perfection.” Not only does this belief help students to reflect on their own unique facial features, but it also allows students to make connections to each other. When finished, I hope students discover something magical about



themselves and their fellow artists. Taking it one step further, I also hope they take their newfound knowledge and reflect. New insights can help them grow as caring, accepting people, while also developing as intuitive artists.

I had the honor of teaching this lesson at Art Camp this summer. Over fifty students in grades first through eighth attended the camp. I had to differentiate the lesson for younger students, making steps simpler, while allowing older students to explore more choices of supplies and techniques. Each student created an asymmetrical mask that expressed their personality and it was amazing to see all the different masks made. Having an array of materials, such as cardboard, fabric, paint sticks, yarn, wire, oil pastels, and paint, allowed students to explore their imaginations and use materials not often available to them. It truly was an outstanding experience and I encourage everyone to take this magical journey!





Showcasing The Power of Creative Intelligence

Chris Sykora (he/him)

ArtConnectED Executive Director & H.S. Educator

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Back in 2012, two art educators were sitting around talking and asked a question that changed everything: “What if we could create a state-level competition for high school art students on a stage worthy of their talents – where they could be recruited by colleges, similar to how athletes are for their athletic performance?”

That question became the spark for the Illinois High School Art Exhibition (IHSAE). It started as a ragtag team of five teachers with a big vision, supported by the Illinois Art Education Association. Early on, most galleries couldn’t see the potential, but Sergio Gomez at the Zhou B Art Center in Chicago saw it immediately. He said “yes,” and opened the doors to thousands of passionate students. Today, the IHSAE has grown so much that it partners with the Bridgeport Art Center to fill five floors with exhibitions, college fairs, and awards ceremonies each year. In addition, the Central Regional Exhibition has been added to annual programming, serving students and teachers in the middle and southern parts of the state.

What started with a few volunteers has evolved into ArtConnectED, a thriving 501c3 nonprofit with a team of 30 other dedicated teachers who believe in a core value to keep the organization “created by teachers for students” which has driven their success – cultivating the professional buy-in and support for big ideas to work at the scale they imagine. The mission is simple: enhance the creative educational landscape for student and teacher artists, while highlighting and reinforcing the power of art in their lives. The results speak for themselves. Since 2013, the IHSAE has facilitated over 1 billion dollars in scholarship offers and awards. They’ve built massive partnerships with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Illinois Art Education Association, Illinois State University, and BLICK Art Materials and added instrumental programs like Mini Portfolio Days where students get one-on-one reviews and connections with college reps.

Over 1,000 students, their families, teachers, and friends make up the 4,000+ annual attendees of the IHSAE main event. It’s an art extravaganza with large-scale student exhibitions and contests, a vendor and career symposium, and multiple college fairs now held at The Bridgeport Art Center. Each exhibition has a specific focus. The Senior Scholarship Exhibition is one of the premier events which showcases mastery across an entire portfolio and represents the main vehicle for tuition scholarship offers.

Beyond the Gallery: The Art Throwdown

While the scholarships and exhibitions are life-changing, there is another program ArtConnectED facilitates that is just pure energy: the Art Throwdown.



If you haven’t seen a Throwdown, you’re missing out. It’s a real-time artmaking competition that focuses on creative problem-solving. The goal was to show parents and the community the “creative intelligence” we see in the classroom every day. It’s one thing to see a finished painting on a wall; it’s another thing entirely to watch a student artist respond to a challenge under pressure. In the virtual challenges, you’ll see parents holding studio lights or supporting props, their faces beaming with pride. One parent said, “this is a truly unique way to share my

daughter’s gift with the world. I didn’t even know how she made the things she makes... thank you for sharing this and inspiring her to do even more.”

The Throwdown became a linchpin for the organization during the coronavirus lockdown. Because it could happen over Zoom, it kept students connected and competing from home. That success led to permanent virtual expansions. Now, ArtConnectED hosts at least three virtual events a year – focusing on Illustration, Photography, and Design – which allows students who live too far from Chicago to participate. Anyone can tune into YouTube and watch these young artists work in real time.

Bringing the Heat to the School Day

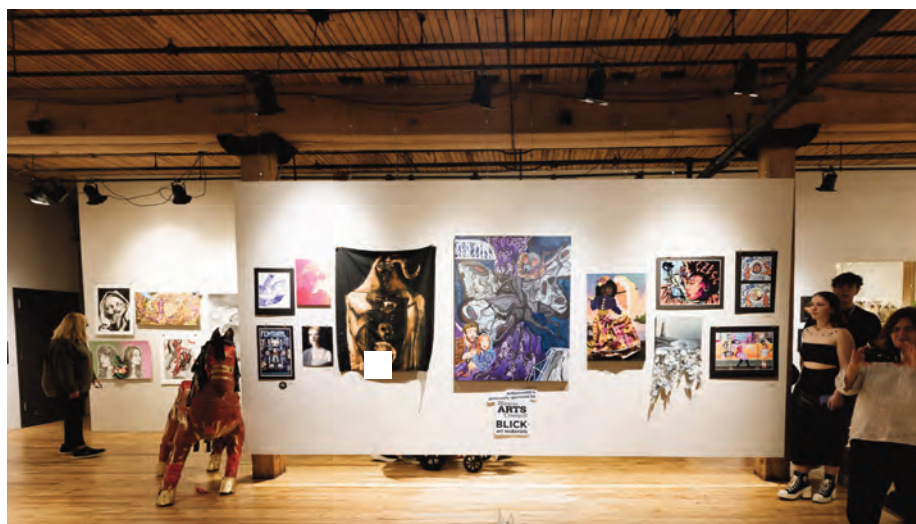
The newest evolution of the Throwdown is taking it directly into the school day. The idea is to let a student’s peers witness their creativity in action. Schools live-stream the process on YouTube, as selected students receive a prompt and have 120 minutes to plan and create their visions.

To give you an idea, one recent 3D cardboard challenge prompt read:

“You have been approached by Lady Gaga, Doja Cat, or Katy Perry to create a model of the weirdest tiered cake (think wedding or birthday cake). It must be at least 3 feet tall. Consider texture, pattern, positive and negative space, unique forms, and a creative theme. It must be made completely of cardboard and be monochromatic. You may use any adhesives, but they should not show in the final product.”

It’s intense, it’s fast-paced, and it’s a brilliant showcase of what happens when you treat young artists like the elite performers they are.

ArtConnectED is proving that when you give students a stage worthy of their talents, they don’t just meet expectations – they shatter them. Whether it’s through a billion dollars in scholarships or a 120-minute cardboard challenge, they are making sure the world sees the power of art.



Photos courtesy Trevor Holloway Photography



Illinois Art Education Association 2026 Award Recipients



Ann E. Ossey

Illinois Art Education Association **Art Educator of the Year**

Ann Ossey is a visual art educator with more than 21 years of experience inspiring students to discover their creative voice while developing the technical, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills that prepare them for life beyond the classroom. She currently teaches at Wauconda High School, where she serves as the Art Department Professional Learning Team Leader and co-sponsor of the

National Art Honor Society.

Throughout her career, Ann has championed innovative, student-centered learning by integrating ceramics, metalsmithing, digital media, and STEAM experiences into the visual arts curriculum. She has secured more than \$35,000 in grants to expand opportunities for students, led district-wide curriculum initiatives, and mentored colleagues through professional learning

communities and nation-wide networks. Her commitment to educational excellence contributed to Wauconda High School earning the Illinois Art Education Association School of Distinction designation for 2024-2026 and 2026-2028.

Beyond the classroom, Ann is a practicing mixed-media artist whose work explores storytelling, resilience, and human connection through ceramics, jewelry, paper arts, and sculpture. She believes that art has the power to help people better understand themselves and others, and she strives to create learning environments where every student feels seen, valued, and capable of creative success.

Ann is passionate about fostering curiosity, building authentic relationships, and empowering the next generation of artists, makers, and creative thinkers.



Nancy Heuser

Illinois Art Education Association **Elementary Art Educator of the Year**

Nancy Heuser is an enthusiastic elementary art educator who loves to spark joy and a love for art in her young students. As an art educator at Center and Park Schools in Orland School District 135, she introduces students in kindergarten through second grade to the magical world of art history, artistic exploration, and self-reflection. Nancy's educational goal is to guide students in their artistic journeys, create a safe

classroom environment, and develop a

diverse curriculum that emphasizes self-discovery, personal expression, and cultural connections.

For almost thirty years, Nancy has developed an enriched curriculum that offers her students a diverse palette of knowledge and cross-curricular opportunities. By using the Illinois State Standards and establishing learning targets within her lessons, she can build foundational, artistic, and critical

thinking skills so her students can create, reflect, and take ownership of their artistic journeys. Nancy is always telling her students, "You can never make a mistake in art, and always challenge yourself – it is how your brain grows." It is those philosophies that help her students flourish as artists and expand their artistic abilities.

Within Nancy's classroom is a true sense of compassion, kindness, and empathy. It is her mission to cultivate an environment where students feel seen, loved, and safe. Those building foundations create a community that respects diverse perspectives and encourages self-expression.

Nancy's love of community also extends to where she lives. It is important to her that she makes a difference in all aspects of her life. To name one example, she is a Trustee at the Orland Park Public Library. This role enables Nancy to have a voice within her community and fosters connections with other Orland Park organizations. When Nancy is not volunteering her time, she can be found in her art studio, happily painting or reading a good book.

2026 Illinois Art Education Association Award Recipients



Sarah E. Wain

Illinois Art Education Association

Secondary Art Educator of the Year

For 14 years, Sarah Wain has brought passion, artistic excellence, and leadership to public art education in Illinois. A graduate of William Jewell College (B.A. in Art and Education) and North Park University (M.A. in Educational Leadership), Sarah currently teaches studio art and art history at Lane Tech College Prep in Chicago.

At Lane Tech, Sarah leads a thriving AP Art History program, consistently growing enrollment while driving student scores to record highs. Dedicated to creating an inspiring environment, she spearheads student-led public art initiatives, including a project with her Contemporary Painting classes that has adorned the school walls with over 20 original, student-made murals. As an Arts Teacher Leader for Chicago Public Schools and a member of Lane Tech's Instructional Leadership Team, Sarah actively mentors peers and leads professional development across the district.

Outside the classroom, Sarah is an accomplished painter specializing in realistic oil painting and wildlife illustration. Her work exhibits in galleries throughout the Midwest and sells online. She accepts the Illinois Secondary Art Educator of the Year award with immense gratitude for her students, colleagues, and community.



Lisa P. Jimenez

Illinois Art Education Association

Middle/Junior High Art Educator of the Year

Lisa Jimenez is a middle school art educator and artist born and raised in Rockford, Illinois. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Art Education from Northern Illinois University and a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction from St. Xavier University.

This is her twenty-third year teaching art, with the last five years spent teaching grades 6-8 in District 205 at R.E.S.A. Middle School.

Over her career, she has taught grades 6-12 in Illinois, always focusing on showing students the power that the arts have to create opportunities and change lives. She believes all students deserve to feel and experience joy while given a safe space to create. She strives daily to provide students with a quality art

Kat Alice Tae

Illinois Art Education Association

Museum Art Educator of the Year



Kat Alice Tae is an interdisciplinary artist and educator in Chicago. She graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with a Bachelor of Fine Arts with Emphasis in Art Education and Illinois Professional Educator License in K-12 Visual Arts. Kat taught Sculpture and AP Studio Art at a selective-enrollment high school in Chicago Public Schools for five years before transitioning into museum education through the

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago's Teacher Institute program.

As a teen programs educator at the Art Institute of Chicago, Kat expanded opportunities for teens at the museum by creating Third Space – a series of free, recurring, and non-committal art making opportunities for teens inspired by the museum collection. She also co-leads Teen Council – a paid internship for a diverse cohort of high school students who work with museum staff to develop programs and resources that make the museum a more welcoming, accessible, and relevant space for young people. Through collaborative decision making and development of leadership skills, Teen Council produces Exuberus – the museum's annual free teen night that brings together hundreds of students, performers, teaching artists, and partner organizations to celebrate teen creativity and community in Chicago.

education program that builds confidence, problem-solving skills, creative thinking, and technical art skills.

She remains an active artist and community member. She is involved in the local arts community where she shows her work regularly in both solo & group shows. Through mixed-media painting and collage, her artwork explores the nuanced interplay among organic forms and the tranquil spaces they occupy. Her practice resonates with the tradition of still-life studies, yet embodies a contemporary approach to the abstraction of time and memory.

Lisa plans to continue on this art ed journey for as long as she can, with just the right amount of Pollyanna and Daria – a balance of optimism and sarcasm. When in doubt, laugh and don't forget: speak up, speak out, and make art, not war.

2026 Illinois Art Education Association Award Recipients

IAEA GRANTS



IAEA **Professional Development Grant Awardee**
Jiaqi Liu



IAEA **Professional Development Grant Awardee**
Merry Lanker



Cole Schnaudigel

Illinois Art Education Association

Early Professional Art Educator of the Year

Cole Schnaudigel is a high school art teacher at Marion High School. He grew up in Arlington Heights and attended William Rainey Harper College in Palatine, Illinois where he graduated with his associates degree in art. From there, he moved to Carbondale, Illinois where he graduated from Southern Illinois University in 2023 with his bachelor's degree in Art Education.

He began his teaching career at Century, a K-12 school, and developed an art program that supported students while refining his own teaching skills. After 2 years gaining valuable experience at Century, he transitioned to teaching high school students at Marion High School. As he begins his second year teaching at Marion High School, he aims to continue to develop student skills in creativity, artistic expression, and passion for the arts.

His favorite thing about teaching art is being able to see the development of each student as they become their own artist and develop their voice through their work. In his personal life, he enjoys rock climbing, hiking, traveling, and working on his car. A fun fact about him is that he works as a zipline tour guide over the summer.



Karen Popovich

Illinois Art Education Association

President's Award

Karen Popovich is a high school art educator at Metea Valley High School in Indian Prairie School District 204, an IAEA Distinguished School. Spanning a 30-year teaching career that began

in 1996, she has taught visual arts across elementary, middle, and high school levels. She earned a Bachelor of Arts from North Central College in 1996, a Master's in Art Education from Northern Illinois University in 2001, and achieved National Board Certification in 2009.

A dedicated advocate for arts education, Popovich has been an active member of both the Illinois Art Education Association (IAEA) and the National Art Education Association (NAEA) since 1997. She frequently presents at state, regional, and national conferences on visual arts curriculum, assessment, and studio practices. Her leadership within IAEA includes terms as Secretary, Vice President, and President. Additionally, she served on the NAEA Convention Planning Committee for the 2016 and 2021 Chicago conventions, holds a leadership role with the NAEA Fiber Arts Interest Group, and actively mentors incoming art educators by sponsoring student teachers.

Her contributions to the field have earned recognition including IAEA Middle School Art Educator of the Year (2007), IAEA Art Educator of the Year (2012), National Secondary Art Educator of the Year (2013), and the Distinguished Member Award (IAEA, 2019).

At Metea Valley, Popovich serves as a PLC leader, sponsors the National Art Honor Society, and has coordinated District 204's Fine Arts Festival since 1999. She is committed to showcasing student artwork through local community exhibitions.

As a practicing artist specializing in fiber arts and mixed media, Popovich operates a boutique space in Batavia, Illinois, and regularly exhibits her work in local shows. She resides in Sugar Grove, Illinois, with her husband, Paul; they are the parents of two sons, Brady and Preston.



Michael Jon Skura

Illinois Art Education
Association

Distinguished Member

Michael is an award-winning artist and veteran educator with over 28 years of teaching experience. Born in Istanbul, Turkey, and moving to the States when he was five years old, he was raised in Schaumburg, Illinois, and served six years in the Army

National Guard as an E-5 Sergeant Infantryman before beginning his teaching career. He holds an Associate degree from William Rainey Harper College, dual Bachelor's degrees in Studio Art/Painting and Secondary Education from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), and advanced graduate credentials in Educational Leadership and a Master's in Curriculum & Instruction from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Under his leadership, the visual arts program has expanded to serve hundreds of students annually. Students have gone on to earn many awards through Art ConnectEd's Northern General Exhibition, Senior Portfolio, and Early College Programs, the National and Regional Scholastic Art & Writing Competitions, Northern Illinois University, and U.S. Congressional High School Competitions. Michael has supported an active National Art Honor Society chapter of over 80 members, and under his direction, Oswego High School has received the Schools of Distinction for IAEA 2021-2023 and just recently for 2026-2028. Lastly, in the last five years, Oswego High School has been among the top 20 schools to receive the highest amount of scholarships for their Seniors through the Art ConnectEd Senior Portfolio Program.

A past president and currently the advocacy sponsor for the Illinois Art Education Association (IAEA), Michael was named the 2017 IAEA Art Educator of the Year and the 2018 School District 308 Teacher of the Year. He is also a published author on secondary art assessment strategies and maintains an active studio practice. Outside the classroom and studio, Michael is a father of three, based in the western Chicago suburbs, passionate about his Catholic faith, family, outdoor recreation (hiking), and cooking.



Joan LeGrys Mills

Illinois Art Education Association

Distinguished Service to the Profession of Art Education

Joan LeGrys Mills is an art educator, practicing artist, and arts education leader with extensive experience in teaching, mentoring, professional development, and organizational leadership. She holds a BS in Art Education from the University of New Hampshire and a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Olivet Nazarene University.

Throughout her career, Joan has shared her experience and expertise through presentations and workshops at the local, regional, state, and national levels. She continues to present at state and national art education conferences, offering hands-on learning experiences that encourage creative exploration and provide practical strategies for art educators.

Joan has held numerous leadership roles within the Illinois Art Education Association (IAEA), including serving as President. She currently serves as IAEA's Professional Development representative and liaison with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), supporting professional learning opportunities for art educators throughout Illinois.

As a practicing mixed-media artist, Joan continues to exhibit her work in regional galleries and exhibitions. Her ongoing involvement in artmaking, professional development, and arts education reflects a commitment to lifelong learning, creative exploration, and advocacy for the visual arts.



John P. Zilewicz, Jr.

Illinois Art Education Association

Distinguished Member

For 30 years, John P. Zilewicz has dedicated his career to one fundamental belief: every student deserves the opportunity to discover their creative voice and to understand that their art can open doors to a larger world. As a visual arts educator, practicing artist, mentor, advocate, presenter, and arts leader, John has spent his career creating those opportunities, not only for the students in his classroom, but for young artists and educators throughout Illinois and beyond.

2026 Illinois Art
Education Association
Award Recipients

Awards, Grants, and Scholarships!



Illinois Art
Education
Association

APPLY FOR A GRANT OR SCHOLARSHIP SPONSORED BY IAEA

Please plan now to apply next year!

Submission window will open in January 2027.

- **Undergraduate and Graduate \$1,000 Scholarships** available for full time students.
- **Professional Development Grants** available for current and retired members for up to \$500.
- **Carolyn and James Howlett Scholarship** provides professional development through the Continuing Studies program at the School of the Art Institute Chicago. Professional development could include a course, seminar, workshop, or Ox-Bow session.
- **Conference Grant** – This grant provides support for individuals traditionally underrepresented in education.
- **Artist Connection Fund Grant** – This grant (up to \$500) helps arts educators bring artists into their learning environment to engage with students through artist talks, guest critique sessions, workshops, and virtual connections.

Learn more about IAEA scholarship and grant application details online

<http://ilaea.org/awardsgrants>

All grant and scholarship applications must be submitted by **Wednesday, June 30, 2027.**

The IAEA Awards Program is intended to recognize art educators who are committed and dedicated to their students and the art education profession. This program, which recognizes excellence in individuals and programs, helps provide for the development of quality art education throughout the state of Illinois.

- To promote public awareness of the importance of quality art education.
- To promote support of and to focus professional attention on quality programs and excellent art educators.
- To recognize significant contributions to the profession and organization of IAEA.

Nominations for the 2027 awards will be accepted beginning Friday, October 23, 2026 and through Monday, February 8, 2027. This is an opportunity to honor and elevate art, design, and media educators who exemplify excellence. Self-nominations are also accepted. Nomination information will be shared throughout the newsletter, social media platforms, and at **<https://ilaea.org/programs-events/awardsgrants>**.

Questions about the award program should be directed to Josh Shearer at **vicepresident@ilaea.org**.

AWARD CATEGORIES:

- Illinois Art Educator of the Year
(Chosen by award committee from nominations in categories below)
- Illinois Elementary Art Educator of the Year
- Illinois Middle School/Junior High Art Educator of the Year
- Illinois Secondary Art Educator of the Year
- Illinois Early Professional Award (1-3 years teaching)
- Illinois Higher Education Art Educator of the Year
- Illinois Art Administrator/Supervisor of the Year
- Illinois Museum Art Educator of the Year
- Schools of Distinction Award
- Distinguished Service in IAEA
- Distinguished Service in the Profession of Art Education
- Distinguished Service to Art Education (outside the profession)
- President's Special Award (chosen by current IAEA president)
- Distinguished Member Award
(chosen by past Distinguished Member recipients)

IAEA

DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS

Roy Abrahamson	1998	Stanley Madeja	1993
Eugene L. Aiassi	1992 *	Theresa McGee	2019
Dr. Carolyn Allrutz	1997	Dr. David McKay	1992 *
Craig Anderson	2005	Karen Meadows	2004
Dr. Carmen Armstrong	1992 *	Robert Miller	2001
Robert Basso	2002	Laura Milas	2009
William Bealmer	1992 *	Joan Mills	2017
Dr. Anne Becker	2015	Dennis Morris	2006
Patricia Belleville	2019	Hector Munoz	2000
Dorothy Bennett	2014	Dr. Marilyn Newby	1992 *
Meg Bero	2015	Mary Packwood McMullan	1992 *
Becky Blaine	2007	Angela Paterakis	1992 *
Dr. Wil Booker	1992 *	Karen Popovich	2019
Mary Bortz	2006	Emil Proska	1993
Dr. Judith Briggs	2020	Mary Acierto Ridley	2004
Wesley Buchwald	1992 *	Colette Rinn	2011
Rod Buffington	1992 *	Robin Russell	2002
Rosemary Layendecker		Nadine Saitlin	1994
Buffington	1992 *	Marilyn Schnake	1996
Dr. Charles Canon	1992 *	Harold Schultz	1998
Brenda Dianne Cinkovich	2004	John Schwartz	1999
Suzanne Cohan-Lange	1998	Michael Jon Skura	2026
Joseph Corsello	1997	Josh Shearer	2024
Anna Marie Coveny	2014	Roger Shule	2005
Donna Davis	2025	Richard Siegesmund	2020
Marge Dickinson	1992 *	Karyl Silerzio	2020
Judy Doebler	2007	Clair Smith	1992 *
Ruth Esserman	1992 *	David Smith	2015
Dr. Linda Willis Fisher	1996	Dr. Ralph Smith	1993
Truman Fox	1992 *	Miriam Socoloff	2004
Dr. Ruth Freyberger	1994	Kimm Stastny	1998
Tricia Fugelstad	2024	Jerry Stefl	2002
Patricia Galinski	2004	Ed Stewart	2010
Dennis Grabowski	1994	James Umbaugh	1995
Jonathan Grice	2025	Jean Morman Unsworth	1992 *
Don Gruber	2006	Lucinda Vriner	2010
Dr. Olivia Gude	2010	Joseph Weber	1998
Jerome Hausman	1993	Jamie Willis	2009
William Hazard	1994	John Yakel	2004
Connie Heavey	2004	John P. Zilewicz, Jr.	2026
Joseph Hernandez	2023	* Inaugural 1992 DM members	
Kathryn Hillyer	2005		
Jack Hobbs	1995		
Joanne Hogan	2005		
Dr. F. Louis Hoover	1995		
Nick Hostert	2021		
Carolyn Howlett	1992 *		
Rebecca Hubbs	2024		
Patricia Indovina	2007		
Lorelei Jones	2007		
David Knoebber	1997		
Dr. Phyllis Kozlowski	1992 *		
Dr. Ann Lally	1998		
Mary Ann Ludwig	2002		

Honorary Distinguished Members

Dr. Jack Arends	2023
George Barford	2023
Dr. Calvin Countryman	2023
Laura Jupin	2023
Edwin Neimi	2023
Norma Riehl	2023
Marie Ringquist	2023
John Stenvall	2023
Frank Tresise	2023
Dr. Mildred Whiting	2023



WONSOOK KIM
COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS
Illinois State University

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IAEA PAST PRESIDENTS

1949: Dr. Mildred Whiting
 1950: Dr. Louis Hoover
 1951: Norma Riehl
 1952: William Bealmer
 1953: George Barford
 1954: Mary McMullan
 1955: Dr. Ann Lally
 1956: Dr. Calvin Countryman
 1957: Marie Ringquist
 1958: John Stenvall
 1959: Frank Tresise
 1960: Laura Jupin
 1961: Dr. Charles Canon
 1962: Carolyn Howlett
 1963: Edwin Neimi
 1964: James Umbaugh
 1965: Truman Fox
 1966: Ruth Esserman
 1967: Dr. Jack Arends
 1968: Wesley Buchwald
 1969: Jean M. Morman
 1970: Eugene L. Aiassi
 1971: Angela Paterakis
 1972: Dr. Roy Abrahamson
 1973: Dr. David McKay
 1974: Dr. Carmen Armstrong
 1975: Rod Buffington
 1976: Dr. Caroline Allrutz
 1977-1978: Dr. Marilyn Newby
 1979-1980: Joe Weber
 1981-1982: Rosemary L. Buffington
 1983-1984: David Knoebber
 1985-1986: Dr. Wil Booker
 1987-1988: Clair Smith
 1989-1990: Dr. Phyllis Kozlowski
 1991-1992: Marge Dickinson
 1993-1994: Marilyn Schnake
 1995-1996: Kimm Stastny
 1997-1998: Hector Munoz
 1999-2000: Jerry Stefl
 2001-2002: Brenda Dianne Cinkovich
 2003-2004: Kathryn Hillyer
 2005-2006: Becky Blaine
 2007-2008: Laura Milas
 2009-2010: Judy Doeblor
 2011-2012: Dorothy Bennett
 2013-2014: Dr. Anne Becker
 2015-2016: Joan Mills
 2017-2018: Theresa McGee
 2019-2020: Nick Hostert
 2021-2022: Michael Skura
 2023-2024: Karen Popovich
 2025-2026: Kerry Parrish



SCHOOL OF DISTINCTION

ILLINOIS ART EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Schools of Distinction

Art, design, and media education are central to a comprehensive education. Participation in these courses uniquely affords students creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills.

Along with social and emotional skills, students involved in art, design, and media programs are well-prepared for college, career, and citizenship. Therefore, it is essential to recognize when excellent school programs in art, design, and media education provide students with these critical skills. The Illinois Art Education Association seeks to honor this programmatic and professional excellence where it occurs in Illinois schools.

Excellence in programming begins with a high-quality curriculum, instruction, and assessment. It provides students with direct, authentic engagement with the creative sector and includes students' engagement with the art, design, and media education community. Excellence in programming is driven by educators deeply engaged with broadening their expertise through participation in communities of practice and by seeking out content-specific professional development and training.

The Schools of Distinction Program recognizes schools that demonstrate excellence in the following areas:

- curriculum and assessment
- authentic learning
- showcasing student learning
- connected communities
- leadership and advocacy
- professional development and training

These areas reflect the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards (IPTs), The Illinois Fine Arts and Media Standards, and Social-Emotional Learning priorities. Alignment between the Schools of Distinction Criteria and the IPTs is highlighted. Embedded within the requirements

are the principles of equity, cultural responsiveness, critical multi-culturalism, and inclusion. Documentation can include events or activities extending back 36 months.

Excellence in programming begins with a high-quality curriculum, instruction, and assessment. It provides students with direct, authentic engagement with the creative sector and includes students' engagement with the art, design, and media education community. Excellence in programming is also driven by educators who are deeply engaged with deepening their expertise through participation in communities of practice and by seeking out content-specific professional development and training. The Schools of Distinction award not only recognizes programs that do this but provides a more equitable and impactful opportunity to honor quality where and when it happens in Illinois Schools.

The Schools of Distinction recognition lasts two years and includes:

1. A digital banner for display on your school's website.
2. A physical award.
3. Recognition on the IAEA website.
4. A press package.

After the recognition expires, schools may reapply at any time.

To learn more about the recognized schools and how your school can be identified in 2027, please visit the Schools of Distinction webpage:

ilaea.org/programs-events/awardsgrants/schoolsofdistinction/
 or email schoolsofdistinction@ilaea.org

Scan this QR Code

to see how the award aligns with state markers.





Wauconda High School



Principal:
Jamie Born

Educators:
Ann Ossey
Mary Plazak

2026-2028

IAEA Schools of Distinction

JB Conant High School



Principal:
Michael Smith

Educators:
Erin Garrity-Duffey
Luke Jenner
Brian Schroeck
Jamie Peterson
Justin Bickus

Oswego High School



Principal:
Christopher Grays

Educators:
Aaron Kolkay
Daniel Whipple
Marie Strejc
Michael Skura

Grayslake North High School



Principal:
Dr. James Roscoe

Educators:
Kelly Bott
Meghan Crowley
Randy Sweitzer

Deer Path Middle School



Principals:
Dr. Michelle Shinn
Sam Paulsen

Educators:
Theresa Fontana
Michelle Patch
Maggie Seymour

Aurora Christian High School



Principal:
Dr. Henderson

Educators:
Mr. Wilkin
Mrs. Sanders

Niles West High School



Principal:
Steve Parnther

Educators:
Deanna Sortino
Dawn Zalkus
John Zilewicz



2026-2027 IAEA Student Art Show and Student Video & Animation Showcase

Susan Tiemstra (she/her), Student Show Coordinator 2026-2027
Heidi O'Hanley & Elizabeth Farnesi, Award Ceremony Committee
Kerry Parrish, President

StudentShow@ilaea.org

The Statewide Student Art Show and Student Short Video and Animation Showcase are both annual juried student art exhibits that debut at the IAEA Conference celebrating Kindergarten through 12th Grade Art Curriculum in Illinois Schools and advocating through exhibitions.

Each year IAEA members may submit K-12 student artwork for Art Show selection. This year 595 superb pieces were submitted by 71 art teachers. Ten judges were asked to select 45 artworks for the Student Art Show.

Members may also submit media for the Video & Animation Showcase, and this year, eleven outstanding Videos & Animations created by students in 6-12th Grade. Six Art Teachers submitted 36 pieces of media that were juried by four judges.

The Saturday afternoon Student Award Ceremonies and Reception event begins by debuting the Student Short Videos and Animations Showcase followed by the Statewide Student Art Show. During both slide shows, student artists and their art teachers receive their certificates and student award bags generously sponsored by Blick Art Materials with an addition from Jack Richeson & Co., and teacher award bags generously sponsored by Artsonia. The framed student artworks are set up gallery style from Thursday afternoon through the ceremony and reception.

After the conference, the Student Art Show travels to different locations in Illinois each month from November 2026 through August 2027, including schools, two public libraries, a hospital, the DuPage Regional Office of Education, Capitol Day in Springfield, and the IASB/IASA/IASBO Joint Annual Conference in Chicago.

We offer the opportunity for 6th-12th grade students to advocate for The Arts by speaking at Capitol Day in April about their artwork, what it means in their lives, and why art is such an important part of their school life.



Top: Artwork by Lauren Lauer, 12th Grade
Oswego East High School, Oswego, Heather Stanich, Art Teacher

Bottom Left: Artwork by Yajur Apoorva, 1st Grade
Prairie Elementary, Buffalo Grove, Christopher Morris, Art Teacher

Bottom Right: Artwork by Sofie Fellowes, 5th Grade
Ivy Hall Elementary School, Buffalo Grove, Katherine Lindgren, Art Teacher

Right: Artwork by Mariam Ahmed, 8th Grade
Glenn Westlake Middle School, Lombard
Alicia York, Art Teacher



Above: Artwork by Camilla Quan, 2nd Grade
Prospect Elementary School, Clarendon Hills
Hillary Andrlik, Art Teacher



Right: Artwork by Daniel Rios-Hernandez, Kindergarten
Benavides Steam Academy, Aurora
Bonny Ramirez, Art Teacher

Below:

Artwork by Charlie Stoica, 10th Grade
Belvidere High School, Belvidere
Jilian Reints, Art Teacher



Above: Artwork by Lilou Peters, 4th Grade
John Shields Elementary, Sugar Grove
Colleen Grigg, Art Teacher

Below: Artwork by Vivian Hayes, 9th Grade
Oswego High School, Oswego
Aaron Kolkay, Art Teacher



Above: Layla Soledad-Mai, 9th Grade, Crystal Lake South High School, Crystal Lake, Kerry Parrish & Rigel Nelson, Art Teachers

CALLING ALL ARTIST EDUCATORS

Each year IAEA celebrates its artist-educators in a special exhibition at the state conference. All IAEA members have the opportunity to share their own artwork in the IAEA Membership Exhibition. Enter by **October 1, 2026**.

Current IAEA members may submit 1-3 pieces of original art, in any medium – *completed within the past three years (and not previously submitted)*. Selected works will be digitally presented at the state conference, throughout the online conference platform, on the IAEA webpage and social media outlets. There's no fee to enter and juried prizes will be awarded! For more information and entry link, visit www.ilaea.org/member-show



2025 Membership Exhibition Winners

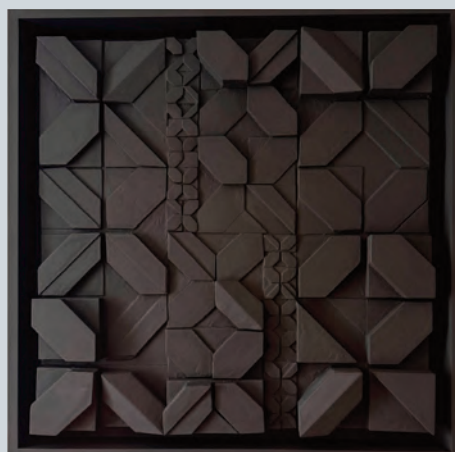


Best in Show

Erin Garrity-Duffey

Everything All At Once

Acrylic and colored pencil on canvas
2025



1st Place

John Odum

rebuilt shadow

Paint and wood
on panel
2025



2nd Place

Ann Ossey

Unexpected Beauty

Colored pencil
2023



3rd Place

Randy Sweitzer

Foretold

Mixed media
2025





DAVIS





To Simply Be

ESTABLISHING THE IAEA ART EDUCATOR RETREAT

by Joanna Angelopoulos (she/her)
IAEA Business Manager

BusinessManager@ilaea.org



The first ever Illinois Art Education Association Art Educator Retreat during the summer of 2025 was a one-of-a-kind immersive experience designed to help art educators reconnect with their creativity, recharge their spirits, and reimagine their practice. We were nestled in the peaceful setting of Camp Manitowa, and participants enjoyed a weekend filled with inspiring art workshops, yoga sessions, glow sticks and meaningful connections with fellow educators. More than professional development, the retreat provided the rare gift of time and space to create, explore, and simply be. We rediscovered our artistic voice while building a supportive community of creative new friends. The retreat culminated in a reflective moment around the pool as we shared our growth, our appreciation for connection and our celebration for making space to come together. We left feeling renewed, inspired, and empowered to carry our creativity, confidence, and sense of connection back into our classrooms and lives.





CLICK HERE TO

REGISTER FOR CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS!

**THERE ARE A LIMITED NUMBER OF PAID
WORKSHOPS STILL AVAILABLE! SIGN UP
TODAY TO RESERVE YOUR SPOT!**

**ATTENTION MEMBERS: IAEA NEEDS YOUR HELP
CLICK HERE TO VOLUNTEER AT THE CONFERENCE!**

INCLUDED WITH REGISTRATION

- Access to over 100 sessions and workshops
- Conference Swag Bag
- 2 Featured Speakers
- Early Bird Reception Thursday evening with hors d'oeuvres
- Interactive Maker Space
- Exhibit Hall (Friday and Saturday)
- Exhibit Hall Power Hour in the Mornings
- Lunch Friday and Saturday
- Friday Night Festivities featuring an Artisan Market
- Awards Reception and Member Show with hors d'oeuvres and desserts

BOOK YOUR HOTEL TODAY!



BOOK HERE!

MEET OUR FEATURED SPEAKERS

TONIKA LEWIS JOHNSON

JONATHAN JURAVICH

TONIKA'S WORK

@TONIKAJ



FOLDED MAP PROJECT

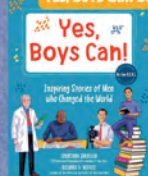


INEQUITY FOR SALE

JONATHAN'S WORK

@JJURAVICH

YES, BOYS CAN! BOOK



TED ED TALK:
HOW DO YOU TEACH
EMPATHY?



REGISTRATION PRICES

	EARLY BIRD RATE THRU 9/21/26	NORMAL RATE
MEMBER	\$259	\$299
NON MEMBER	\$309	\$359
RETIRED MEMBER	\$150	\$180
RETIRED NON MEMBER	\$185	\$205
STUDENT MEMBER*	\$120	\$150
STUDENT NON MEMBER*	\$145	\$165

Student discounted rate is for:
Undergraduate students enrolled
in 12+ hours of courses
Graduate students enrolled in 6+
hours of courses

*Student rates require 2 hours of
volunteer time during the
conference weekend to secure
the discounted rate.



REGISTER HERE!



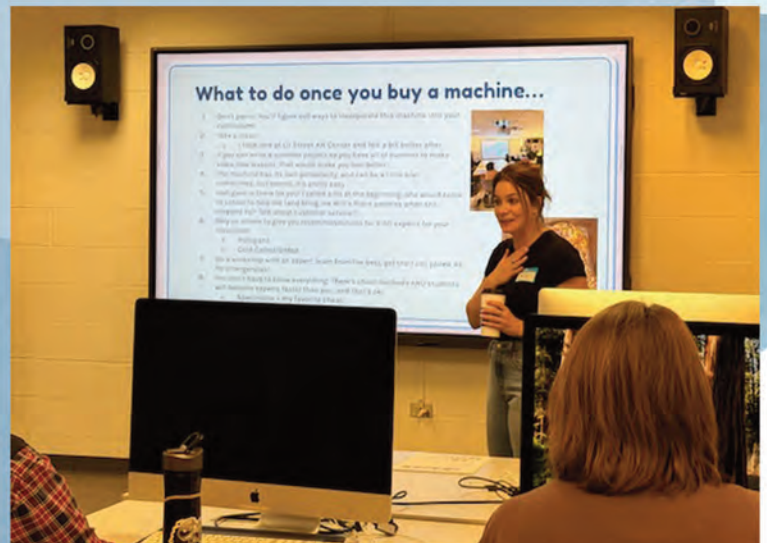
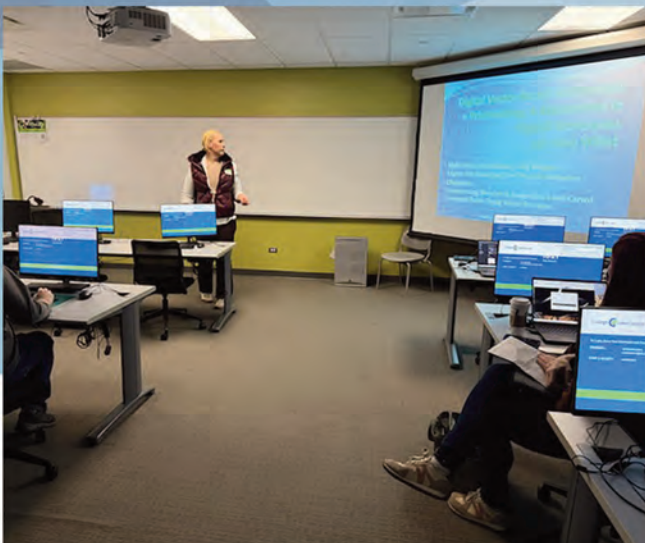
Illinois Art
Education
Association

DART Conference

by Dina Sampras (she/her)
digitalarts@ilaea.org



We had a wonderful DART conference this year with some amazing workshops! We had hands on mini cardboard sets being built, a RISograph machine demonstration and AMAZING shared lessons. It was a beautiful collaborative effort all around and it was exciting to see all the information being shared, the ideas being discussed and the “it takes a village” mentality. DART is a space where digital art teachers thrive so we would LOVE to see it grow in the future! To join DART, volunteer, or get on our email list – email us at digitalarts@ilaea.org.





Illinois Art
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IAEA Leadership

Executive Committee:

President

Kerry Parrish
IAEApresident@ilaea.org

President-Elect

Eryn Blaser
PresidentElect@ilaea.org

Vice President

Josh Shearer
VicePresident@ilaea.org

State Secretary

Julie Gervais
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Treasurer/ Business Manager

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Southern Communications Coordinator

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IAEA MISSION STATEMENT

Whereas, Art plays a significant and vital role in our culture, economy and the education of our children, it is the mission of the Illinois Art Education Association to provide leadership for the advancement of excellence in art education.

- Providing support, direction and advocacy for quality art education
- Providing professional development for the pursuit of knowledge, skills and content in the making and teaching of art
- Encouraging innovation, research and reform
- Networking within the arts and with other organizations
- Encouraging membership, leadership and efficiency of the organization's operation

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Membership Coordinator

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Conference Registrar

Jennifer Fitzpatrick
Registrar@ilaea.org

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Conference Coordinators

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Student Show Chair

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Artists Connections Chair and Coordinator

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Interest Group Committee Chair

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Elementary School Division Coordinator

Jennifer Raia
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Higher Education Division Coordinator

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Schools of Distinction Coordinator

Patricia Farrell-Levange
schoolsofdistinction@ilaea.org

Members who are interested in becoming more involved in professional association affairs should contact their Regional Vice President.



Illinois Art
Education
Association

Did you know that the Illinois Art Education Association is led by members just like you?

Each of the people behind the scenes of this wonderful organization are Art Educators who volunteer their time to keep our association running. We are a team of educators who work to serve other educators. By being a member you not only benefit from our offerings, but you are also contributing to the organization to keep it growing. Education is an ever-evolving field that changes and adapts to accommodate the needs of students as the world around them does the same. To carry out our mission to serve all Art, Design, and Media Educators in our state, IAEA is ever-evolving too. The support from our members makes this all possible.

Some of the many IAEA Membership benefits include:

- **Webinars and Professional Learning Events** that extend your knowledge and earn you precious PD hours – Did you know that we release amazing webinars that can earn you PD hours? You can also play ALL archived webinars back if you missed them! Visit our website to learn more.
- An **Advocacy Team** that fights for you and for art education in Illinois. In the past 5 years, the IAEA has helped bring art programs back to 7 schools AND worked with ISBE to get the fine arts as a weighted success indicator on the state report card.
- **Scholarships and PD Grants** – As a member, you can apply for scholarships and PD grants on our website.
- **Discounted Conference/Event Rates and Benefits** – Our conference is an amazing opportunity to network with art teachers from across our state, attend amazing sessions, and earn a hefty amount of PD hours. As a member, you are entitled to a great discount!
- **Arts Standards Resources** – You can find helpful resources and videos about our Illinois Art Standards on our website.
- **SLO/PERA Resources** – Better understand how you are evaluated as an educator, you can find helpful resources and videos on our website.
- **Job Postings** – Be the first to know about job openings for Art Education positions.

**These are just a few of the many, and ever growing, benefits of an IAEA membership!
Be sure to spread the word of IAEA activities and invite a colleague to join the association!**



SKUTT