



Teaching and Learning  
Mary Eich, Assistant Superintendent

**Arts Education in the Newton Public Schools  
Report to the Newton School Committee  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

The City of Newton is a community that values the arts. The Mayor's Office for Cultural Affairs and Newton Community Pride provide residents with access to activities and experiences so varied and vast that nearly any day of the week a person could find an arts activity in Newton. Over 30 organizations offer opportunities for adults and children to enjoy performances, participate in events, and to learn and grow in the arts discipline of their choice.

Arts education in the Newton Public Schools reflects the city's commitment to the arts, and its willingness to support children's arts education both formally, through curriculum and instruction, and less formally through performances and participatory activities.

## **STATE AND NATIONAL CONTEXT**

As an educational discipline, the arts have been subject to the changing approach to the organization of public education in the past 30 years. As is the case with other educational disciplines, arts education is loosely governed by the National Assessment Governing Board, national professional organizations, and the Massachusetts Department of Education Curriculum Frameworks.

### National Assessment of Educational Progress and the Governing Board

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP – The Nation's Report Card) conducts national assessments to determine what students know and can do in various subjects including the Arts. The test is based on National Assessment Governing Board's Arts Education Assessment Framework. "Two major components of learning are expected of students who study the arts. Students should gain knowledge and understanding about the arts, including the personal,

historical, cultural, and social contexts for works; and they should gain perceptual, technical, expressive, and intellectual/reflective skills. Both components are found in each arts discipline.”<sup>1</sup> Within the Framework are descriptions of the three processes (creating, performing, responding) in each of the four arts: Dance, Music, Theater, and Visual Art.

The Arts NAEP was conducted in 1997, 2008 in visual art, music, theater and dance, and in 2016 in visual art and music only. Results of the 2016<sup>2</sup> administration are only available at the national level (not by state), and showed no significant change from the 2008 administration.

### National Coalition for Core Arts Standards

Many K-12 education disciplines have a national organization which provides resources and leadership for the teaching and learning of the discipline. For example, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics “advocates for high-quality mathematics teaching and learning for each and every student.”<sup>3</sup> The National Council of Teachers of English “is devoted to improving the teaching and learning of English and the language arts at all levels of education.”<sup>4</sup> These organizations have been influential in the development of curriculum frameworks and learning standards, and in providing professional resources, conferences and learning communities for teachers and administrators.

Arts education has traditionally had four<sup>5</sup> components: visual art, music, dance and theater. Each discipline has at least one professional organization, among them the National Association for Music Education, the National Dance Education Organization, the National Art Education Association and the Educational Theatre Association. Each provides teachers and administrators with professional resources, access to conferences and learning communities and guidelines for teaching and learning. To put together arts standards at the national level, these groups and others came together to form the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS). The standards are organized by discipline, and by artistic processes – “the cognitive and physical actions by which arts learning and making are realized. National Core Arts Standards are based on the artistic processes of creating, performing/producing/presenting, responding, and connecting.”<sup>6</sup> These artistic processes apply in differing ways to all five disciplines.

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<sup>1</sup> National Assessment Governing Board, US Department of Education. *NAEP Arts: Arts Education Framework Project 2016 Arts Education Assessment Framework p10*  
<https://www.nagb.gov/content/nagb/assets/documents/publications/frameworks/arts/2016-arts-framework.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Nation’s Report Card, Arts Assessment, 2016 Grade 8  
[https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/arts\\_2016/#/music/overall-results](https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/arts_2016/#/music/overall-results)

<sup>3</sup> National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, *Overview, About NCTM* <https://www.nctm.org/About/>

<sup>4</sup> National Council of Teachers of English *About Us* <http://www2.ncte.org/about/>

<sup>5</sup> Recognizing the unique opportunities for creativity and expression made possible by technology, media arts has recently been added as the fifth component.

<sup>6</sup> National Core Arts Standards: Dance, Media Arts, Music, Theater, and Visual Arts  
<https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/>

## Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 transformed the expectations and accountability structures for public education. Among its many provisions, the 1993 Act required curriculum frameworks and learning standards in all core academic subjects, mandated student testing including a competency determination for high school graduation, and increased expectations for teacher evaluation and professional learning.

Curriculum Frameworks in Mathematics, Science, and English Language Arts were adopted in 1996-97, and by 1999 frameworks were in place for History and Social Science, Foreign Language, Health, and Arts. While frameworks have been revised and updated in most subjects, the frameworks developed in the 1990s are still in place for Arts, Health, and Foreign Languages. Student testing in the form of MCAS began in 1999 in Mathematics and English Language Arts, with Science added several years ago.

Changes in curriculum frameworks and the controversies about student testing have had little or no direct impact on Arts education, which has both benefits and disadvantages. Arts, as well as Foreign Language, have been largely left to determine curriculum and instructional standards locally, and have not been publicly judged by statewide testing results. While lack of state oversight has many benefits, it can also lead to perceptions of triviality and unimportance.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) is currently conducting a review and revision of the Arts Frameworks and has established an Arts Education Advisory Council to “address the issues innate in revising the Arts Curriculum Framework as well as research, review, and document valid recommendations ... *work on revisions to the Arts Curriculum Framework, and include a focus on college and career readiness.*”<sup>7</sup> At the time of this writing, a draft of the new framework is out for public comment

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Education in the arts has always been a strength of the Newton Public Schools. We provide each elementary student weekly classes in music and art, and introduce instrumental music for all students in third grade recorder, followed by choice of symphonic instruments in fourth and fifth grade. Fourth and fifth graders also sing together once a week in grade level choruses. In middle school, students continue their study of art and general music in all three grades, and may choose to participate in one or more ensembles including chorus, band, and orchestra. Though high school students are required to take only five credits in the arts, many students take advantage of the breadth and depth of offerings beyond the requirement.

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<sup>7</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, The Board of Education Advisory Councils, Arts Advisory Council *Council Statement* <http://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/councils/arts.html>

## Elementary and Middle Schools

Arts Education in elementary and middle schools continues to provide a rich and diverse program of study in music, theatre, and visual art. Despite a significant turnover in faculty due to retirements in recent years, our remaining veteran and newer educators have maintained a collaborative spirit. Collaboration is particularly important in helping students transition from 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and in encouraging students to take advantage of the full range of elective arts programs at the secondary level.

Among 47 elementary and middle school arts teachers, 29 have worked in Newton for less than 10 years. Of that 29, 20 have worked in Newton for five years or less with seven about to finish their first year of teaching in Newton. The faculty in each discipline comes together to revise and plan their curriculum and program, and to share skills among each other. Recently, they've made a concerted effort K-8 to align core curriculum and program expectations. K-8 Music teachers are meeting and planning activities that will strengthen ties of feeder programs and K-8 visual art teachers are coalescing around developing student strengths in the eight studio habits of mind.<sup>8</sup> They have also recognized and been more explicit about the role the arts play in the social and emotional development of students through the expressive and creative disciplines of the arts.

In a 2013 Fine Arts report to the school committee, we identified the value of an arts teacher's "signature curriculum," the unique and often in-depth instructional units that are specific to the teacher's background and training. Where one music teacher designs an extensive African Drumming unit, another designs an extensive unit on bucket drumming (5-gallon Home Depot buckets, for example). Both units satisfy the standard of playing musical instruments (MA Arts Curriculum Music standard #4), but a music teacher's particular musical interests often inform the type of instrument used. Other examples of arts teachers bringing their signature curriculum to the classroom include:

- Recorder Karate
- Choice-based visual art instruction - Teaching for Artistic Behavior<sup>9</sup>
- Arts Integration as a school wide initiative
- Media arts (use of iPads with art making and animation apps, Garageband composition projects)

The Fine Arts Department is committed to honoring myriad arts specializations and artistic talents of the artist-educator and the richness that their own artistry brings to our students.

In addition to regularly scheduled instruction during the school day, many schools' music and theatre programs offer extra-curricular music performance ensembles and theatre productions. We have a thriving music ensemble program in grades 5-8 and our middle school drama programs have grown to involve large numbers of students and multiple productions annually. Most students

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<sup>8</sup> NPS Elementary Visual Arts Team 2015 "The Studio Habits and Mind: An Elementary Approach: A Resource for Implementing The Eight Studio Habits Of Mind In The Elementary Art Classroom" Studio Habits of Mind Poster Set [https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1fvtrjvDoG97qZMrZ1\\_Arw-TO3qrf0be](https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1fvtrjvDoG97qZMrZ1_Arw-TO3qrf0be)

<sup>9</sup> Teaching for Artistic Behavior <http://teachingforartisticbehavior.org/index.html>

participating in performance programs do so for the positive social and emotional growth they experience as a member of these ensembles. They're collaborating with peers towards a common goal, they're making new friends, learning new skills, learning more about themselves, and they're having fun.

At the same time, our school performances can showcase the students who are developing skills as accomplished performers. These students can also participate in citywide groups such as Newton's All City Band, Orchestra, Treble Singers, Troubadours who tour schools and local senior centers for community performances, and in audition-based music and theatre festivals and including:

- Massachusetts Educational Theatre Guild (METG)'s Middle School Drama Festival/Musical Theatre Awards
- Massachusetts Music Education Association (MMEA)'s Junior Districts and Treble Chorus
- Massachusetts Instrumental and Choral Conductors Association (MICCA) festivals

### High Schools: Access and Excellence

Newton North and Newton South High Schools each have highly respected Fine & Performing Arts (F&PA) programs that support all learners in their art, music and theatre education. Within these programs, many students find their connection to the greater school community. For some, our classes are simply a welcome respite from the stressors of their main subjects, an opportunity to explore and create; while for others, our courses are a main pillar of their education requiring a dedication to the pursuit of excellence that has, in some instances, gained them national recognition. In either instance, our depth of programming and achievements are possible because students have been supported in art, music, and theatre classes, including extension programming, throughout the entirety of their education in Newton.

#### Access

Programming at both High Schools is driven by the interplay between access and excellence. For the majority of students in our courses who are fulfilling a five-credit graduation requirement, curriculum is focused on exposure to a variety of methodologies of making/expressing, and an awareness of the historical and contemporary context of different art forms.

Newton North offers wide-reaching courses, programs, and opportunities for learning across art, music, and theatre. The F&PA department offers 44 classes ranging from film scoring to costume design to sculpture

and beyond. Eleven music ensembles perform 20-25 concerts per year; art exhibits are put up all over the school and in the community that incorporate painting and drawing, photography,

Newton North Course Enrollment: Nov 2018 <sup>10</sup>			
	# Courses	# Sections	Students Enrolled
Art	13	30	553
Music	17	19	319
Theatre	5	7	105

<sup>10</sup> Newton Public Schools *Enrollment Planning and Class Size Report* January 2019 p63

ceramics, and printmaking; and the acclaimed theatre program puts on 11-14 productions annually.

The breadth of Fine & Performing Arts (F&PA) programming at Newton South High School (NSHS) is robust, enrolling over three-quarters of the school’s population in courses that range from initial exploration to sustained investigation. Ensembles perform in a range of events from school and community service concerts, to state and nationally adjudicated events (over 30 annually.) South Stage puts on eleven or more productions annually.

Newton South Course Enrollment: Nov 2018 <sup>11</sup>			
	# Courses	# Sections	Students Enrolled
Art	24	48	958
Music	17	21	419
Theatre	6	9	108

The Arts belong to everyone; yet we are largely an elective experience. Students of all socio-economic, racial, and learning profiles find personal success in the Arts. Over the past five years, departments at both high schools have looked at ways to encourage student participation, retain students, and create opportunities for affinity groups.

Arts educators at Newton South have developed two ways for special populations to increase their access to programs: ELL Theatre and All Access Theatre. The ELL Theatre class is specifically designed and paced to foster a functional understanding of language and promote comfort using English in improvisation, presentations, acting, textual understanding. For the first time in the 2018-2019 school year, South Stage is offering an All Access theatre workshop to students with special needs. General education and special education students are teamed up to create, practice and perform one-act plays during the month of April.

Additionally, technology support in the form of a dedicated (and updated) computer lab and software (Adobe Suite Subscription/Logic) for Music Technology and Digital Photography has enabled students who do not play instruments, yet are highly musically inclined, to create professional recordings or dive deeper into Music Theory in our AP Music Theory courses.

AP Exam Results	AP Studio Art	AP Music Theory
2017-2018		
Course Enrollment	13	27
# Taking Exam	5	19
% Scoring 4 or 5	80%	53%
2016-2017		
Course Enrollment	19	24
# Taking Exam	12	8
% Scoring 4 or 5	67%	88%
2015-2016		
Course Enrollment	19	8
# Taking Exam	14	6
% Scoring 4 or 5	50%	67%

**Excellence**

In-depth arts programming is essential for some of our students. As one senior at South put it, “I can really find myself and start planning my future.” Students enrolled in AP

<sup>11</sup> Newton Public Schools *Enrollment Planning and Class Size Report* January 2019 p64

Studio Art, prepare portfolios for entrance into art school, or look to minor in the Arts at a college or university. An equal number of music & theatre students find lead rolls on stage, or participate in audition-based groups that form the basis for their college trajectory.

## **Jazz**

North and South's jazz programs have flourished in the past five years, achieving national notoriety. Recent accolades at adjudicated events include:

- Berklee Jazz Festival (2019) where North's Jazz Combo took home top honors, and South's Combo came in third;
- Mingus Competition (2018-2019) where South's Jazz Ensemble placed second;
- Massachusetts Jazz Educators Association festival (2018-19) where South's Jazz Ensemble received perfect scores at both the district and state level;
- Essentially Ellington (2017-2018) where South's Jazz Ensemble was accepted to the competition and won the Mingus Spirit award at the Mingus Competition.

## **JAZZhers**

Gender equality in jazz is an area of focus in the 2018-2019 school year for one of our nationally recognized music teachers. A traditionally male dominated music form, jazz students at South are only around 10% female while the Symphonic Band is balanced at around 50/50. The JAZZhers program is a series of affinity group jam sessions that are based at South and inclusive of female and male jazz students from Newton and surrounding towns. Each session features alumni, collegiate, and professional female jazz role models, master classes jam sessions, and time to discuss what it means to be a female jazz player. This year's guest artists, supported in part by the Lillian Radlo Resident Artist fund include: Keira Harman, Chris Dorsey, Lauren Sevia, and Bill Paxton.

## **Lillian Radlo Resident Artist Program**

The Lillian Radlo Resident Artist Program was established to "foster opportunities in the arts for Newton High School students that are above and beyond the scope of the traditional school arts curriculum. Mentors from the community apply to share their expertise through master classes, clinics, visual art installations, theatre workshops, and other initiatives, with the overall goal of building relationships within the community and the schools, as well as engaging and involving students."<sup>12</sup>

Recently, the program helped us feature guest artists in all three disciplines who's work is exemplary and represent a racially diverse cross-section of their craft. Actors in the Shakespeare Actors' Guild spoke to South students about their gender and racially fluid roles in Macbeth, performed, and addressed racial bias in their own lives as artists. Leading black musicians, including Chris Dorsey and Bill Paxton, led master jazz classes helping our suburban students connect to the intent behind the music. Visual artist, Lucy Kim, spoke to South art students about the evolution of her work and how she elides mold making and photography to create

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<sup>12</sup> Lillian Radlo Resident Artist Program [www.newton.k12.ma.us/domain/526](http://www.newton.k12.ma.us/domain/526)

contemporary portraiture. The Radlo grant has helped teachers to continue to break from Euro-centric Arts education by showcasing artists who represent the students' we have in our classrooms and validate personal experience as rich content worthy of expression.

## Travel

Both high schools have been engaged in travel opportunities through the Arts. Both jazz programs have traveled to New Orleans. Over the last decade Newton North music students have traveled to the Jingshan School in Beijing and throughout Italy. The Theatre Department has taken two trips to London to immerse themselves in the rich theatre scene, and travel to New York city every year. This year, North Art Teacher Eileen Gagarin is taking a group of North students to Greece for two weeks. Additionally, North F&PA has a decade-long arts exchange with Haileybury College, in Melbourne, VIC, typically every two years during the month of April. The exchange is open to any student studying the Arts at North. Student participation in international travel can be supported by the GELF fund at Newton Schools Foundation.

## ARTS AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

We do not have an achievement gap, but rather we have an access gap. Two groups of students are limited in their access to arts electives by the current schedule. Students with IEPs who require Academic Support do not have the blocks in their schedules to enroll in Arts courses. Conversely, the same schedule restriction forces top performing groups (Wind Ensemble, Jazz Combo) to meet outside of the school day. The new schedule does not address this limitation, and may further limit arts access with the reduction in blocks from 28 to 21. In addition, the change from four meetings in two weeks to three meetings in two weeks may have a negative impact on ensembles.

From our viewpoint, firmly seated in dynamic and capable departments K-12, we believe that an arts education is essential for all students in the Newton Public Schools. Our teachers are facile in their ability to respond to the needs of students, they create classrooms that are naturally multi-leveled and skillfully scaffolded for effective differentiated instruction, and become havens of self-discovery and creative growth. In addition, students report their experience in arts classes provides a welcome break from the stress of more academic subjects, and cite their arts classes as places where they can explore and create.

In a recent survey of F&PA students, responses were overwhelmingly positive about the in response to the prompt: "Tell me what being in an arts course means to you."<sup>13</sup> In addition, 65% of students responded that curriculum allowed them to deeply explore the arts, and 75% of students responded that they felt arts courses helped them to de-stress from the rigors of life at South. As one student put it, "Being in an arts course helps me explore my creativity. I love being able to try new things without the fear of failure."

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<sup>13</sup> Tell me what being in an arts course means to you

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eq2eleBV7i53GdjFOk2qsB0NPfSuLQnEj8a6lZbbXK4/edit>

## SUPPORT FROM NEWTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND THE COMMUNITY

Quality fine arts instruction is often dependent on equipment and facilities. In recent years, our fine arts departments have benefitted from investments made by the district. One obvious example is our ambitious school construction program, which has provided excellent arts facilities and resources in new and renovated buildings. Other investments by the district maintain equity among all schools regardless of their building. Examples include

- Piano replacement and restorations
- Kiln upgrades and replacements
- Risers, staging, and rigging systems for performance spaces
- Middle School band and orchestra stock instruments
- Color printers added to stock art equipment
- Middle School extra-curricular theatre stipends which have increased staff involvement and enabled higher production quality

Additional support from the greater NPS community through the Newton Schools Foundation (NSF) continues to be very generous. In recent years, the NSF has provided funding for to support elementary musical instrumental instruction for students in schools designated or on the cusp of being designated Title 1 schools. Newton Schools Foundation has also provided funding for an ongoing arts integration program in one elementary school, for the acquisition of adaptive art tools at another, and most recently, funding for a pilot middle school music program to investigate the integration of an online music instruction support system.

Similarly, over the past several years, Parent Teacher Organizations have supported community art projects, particularly as part of school construction and renovation. In the past ten years, PTOs have been key sponsors of mural projects at the newly constructed Angier, Zervas, and Cabot; as well as Countryside, Lincoln-Eliot, Newton South, Peirce, and Ward. The visual art teachers at these schools have worked hard to bring these community art projects to their students; which would have been prohibitively difficult without the funding and volunteer support provided by school PTOs.

## CURRICULUM AND PROGRAM UPDATES

Arts education curriculum is being renewed and re-energized by new National Core Arts Standards. In response, a review and update of the *MA DESE Curriculum Frameworks for the Arts* is well underway. The public comment phase on the revised draft Framework has closed, and we can anticipate the release of the final version to be adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education before the end of 2019.

Among the developments in an arts curriculum framework is the new, fifth arts discipline of Media Arts. The Media Arts discipline is characterized as a “nexus” discipline that has applications across

the four traditional arts disciplines of dance, music, theatre, and visual arts. Artists, musicians and theatre arts practitioners have incorporated media tools and devices among and between the arts disciplines for decades; now the Media Arts discipline has been codified in state and national arts standards.

In Newton, Media Arts has been growing slowly in our curriculum as teachers develop in their expertise and as more technology becomes available. Innovative arts teachers are using Finale composition software, Garage Band, SmartMusic, video scene writing programs, and using iPad animations and other art making apps to explore the power of technology to create music, theater, and art. Now that Media Arts has been codified as a formal arts discipline, arts education departments throughout the country will be looking for access to 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies to leverage a growing interest in media arts among our students.

Even before the National Core Arts Standards and frameworks revision began, our high schools were re-thinking their curricula. In the 2015 school year, the South Art Department embarked on a curriculum review that examined both introductory and capstone experiences. Using backwards design, the department determined the need for students to have a broader understanding of a range of materials and a better functional use of the design process. The result was two introductory Foundations programs (2D meets 3D, or Foundations, and Media Arts), both offered for the first time in the 2018-2019 school year. In 2D meets 3D, students experience a different material each of the four terms (drawing, ceramics, photography, and sculpture). Teachers have noted a significant increase in student engagement, and enrollment numbers for second level arts courses is up over 20%.

Similarly, the North F&PA Department is taking an outside look inwards at what they teach and why. Looking ahead to a new high school schedule, the department is working towards creating a curriculum that continues to be both foundational for Arts learning, but also include steps toward new ventures such as creating courses in Arts Therapy, Arts Business, and more specific work in Technical Theatre.

In our presentation on Monday, May 13, we will discuss some of these ideas, and display some of the fabulous work of our student musicians, artists, and thespians.