

Pedro Rivera  
Pennsylvania Secretary of Education

Dear Dr. Rivera,

First and foremost, thank you for your leadership during these difficult times. The sudden pivot to online and distant learning has been abrupt and has challenged our school communities in so many ways. As plans related to re-opening our schools begin at the state and local level, we will be faced with a whole new set of conditions, obstacles, and challenges. And while our students will return, it will be likely under different circumstances. Pennsylvania's arts education organizations in music, visual art, media art, theatre, and dance are heeding your call and preparing our teachers with curriculum and teaching strategies that will engage our students at any point along the continuum.

In addition to arts learning as defined in ESSA language as a part of a well-rounded education, arts has a **vital role in the lives of students and communities**. The arts have a unique ability to communicate and connect the ideas and emotions of the human spirit; there has never been a time more critical in our student's well-being. Pennsylvania arts organizations are now working with national leaders in the fields of medicine and learning theory to discern best practices for social distancing as well as diverse ways to provide opportunity for arts performances, presentations, and productions. Pennsylvania arts organizations are increasing professional development opportunities to improve arts teacher practice, intentional SEL instruction and remote/online teaching strategies.

A growing body of research indicates that education in the arts provides significant cognitive benefits and bolsters academic achievement as well as developing student social and emotional learning skills. Pennsylvania arts organizations continue to be proactive in meeting the unique needs of all Pennsylvania students and teachers at this challenging time, particularly in encouraging communication with students, and among administrators, colleagues, and parents.

As PDE prepares its guidance to schools for re-opening, it is our hope that the information provided encourages district administrators and school boards to continue delivery of arts education programs and expect input and leadership from visual art and music teachers and where available, theatre, dance, and media arts teachers.

Sincerely,

Tina Bennett, President; Pennsylvania Music Educators Association  
Lisbeth Bucci, President; Pennsylvania Arts Education Association  
Mark Zortman, Chapter Director; Pennsylvania Educational Theatre Association  
Miriam Giguere, President; Pennsylvania Dance Education Organization  
Robb Bomboy, Chair; Media Arts Coalition of Educators

