

Overview

The Arts Schools Network (ASN), in collaboration with the [Accrediting Commission for Community and Precollegiate Arts Schools](#) (ACCPAS), has devoted significant effort to defining, supporting, and assessing exemplary practices in arts education. Each year, the Art Schools' Network *Exemplary Schools Award* celebrates schools that exemplify excellence in arts education through innovative practice, inclusive culture, and sustained commitment to student growth.

This designation is designed to honor schools that not only achieve high standards in arts education but also serve as models for creative learning and leadership across the nation. Beginning this year, the application has been redesigned around five shared beliefs that reflect ASN's core principles of exemplary arts education. Each belief highlights a key area of practice and invites schools to reflect deeply on how these principles come to life in their programs.

Key areas of Practice:

- Curriculum
- Leadership
- Teaching and learning
- Community engagement
- Sustainability

Each section includes:

- An "Our Shared Belief" statement defining the principle.
- Reflective writing prompts to guide your school's 500-word narrative.
- A corresponding rubric that assesses both the narrative and supporting documentation is provided at the end of the application.

We encourage schools to not only describe their programs, but also to reflect on purpose, practice, and impact, celebrating what is strong while acknowledging aspirations for continued growth. Our goal is to make this process reflective, equitable, and meaningful. We hope that in applying, you find renewed clarity in your school's vision, renewed pride in your community's accomplishments, and renewed inspiration for the work ahead.

The ASN Exemplary Schools Committee looks forward to learning from your journey and celebrating your commitment to advancing arts education for all.

With appreciation,
The Arts Schools Network Exemplary Schools Committee
2026 Application Cycle

Overview 1

2026 Arts School Network Exemplary Schools Application..... 3

 School Context and District Support Narrative 3

 1. School Purpose, Arts Program & Curriculum..... 3

 2. Leadership: Administration & Faculty 4

 3. Facilities & Resource Management..... 5

 4. Student Participation in Arts Programming..... 6

 5. Community and Cultural Engagement..... 6

 Additional Information 7

Exemplary Arts Schools Evaluation Rubric 9

 1. School Purpose, Arts Program & Curriculum 9

 2. Leadership: Administration & Faculty 9

 3. Facilities & Resource Management..... 10

 4. Student Participation in Arts Programming..... 10

 5. Community & Cultural Engagement 11



2026 Arts School Network Exemplary Schools Application

School Context and District Support Narrative

This narrative is required but is not scored. (300-word maximum)

1. Describe your school's current reality regarding arts education. What are your strengths, challenges, and key initiatives? How does arts education fit into the overall school culture?
2. What level of support does your school receive from the district for arts education?
 - Describe how arts education is valued at the site and district level.
 - Describe any district initiatives and/or policies that support or hinder arts programming.

For each section, write a narrative that communicates the school's commitment to "Our shared belief" through demonstrated principles of exemplary practices. Supporting Documentation, both required and optional, should be uploaded in the corresponding section. Each section will be scored, considering both the narrative and the supporting documentation simultaneously according to the corresponding rubric.

1. School Purpose, Arts Program & Curriculum

Our shared belief: Exemplary art schools provide all students with a comprehensive arts curriculum. This may include models of arts integration and interdisciplinary learning and/or pathways in the arts.

500-word limit narrative

Guiding Questions:

- What is your school's vision and mission, and how are the arts integral to this work?
- How do your school's purposes and goals guide decision-making, planning, and evaluation of programs and operations?
- What is your school's current reality in arts education—its strengths, challenges, and key initiatives?
 - How does arts education shape your school culture and contribute to academic goals?
- How do your school's purposes inform current efforts and future aspirations?
- Describe your school's arts curriculum.
 - How does it provide a comprehensive and diverse arts education?
 - How does your curriculum incorporate interdisciplinary learning and real-world applications?
 - How is it exemplary?

- How does it implement innovative practices in teaching and learning?

Supporting Documentation:

Required:

1. Course of study, Course Catalogue, or Academic schedule (early childhood - elementary)

Optional: *Limit of one additional supporting document. Below are some examples, but a school has the discretion to determine what evidence is most appropriate to reflect its practices.*

- Evidence of interdisciplinary and innovative teaching practices.
 - Documentation should contain both imagery and text that provide a brief description of what the audience is seeing, who is involved, how the project/program impacted student achievement, etc.
- Strategic Plan for 3-5 years with clear objectives and metrics
- If your website includes obvious evidence of the requirements, please include the website link

2. Leadership: Administration & Faculty

Our shared belief: Exemplary art schools cultivate strong arts leadership, ensuring sustainability and a clear vision for the arts. Exemplary art schools provide high-quality and consistent learning for educators to support this vision. Exemplary art schools strive to ensure students have equitable access to highly qualified arts educators who are empowered to inspire, innovate, and lead within their fields.

500-word limit narrative

Guiding Questions:

- In what ways do school leaders and educators demonstrate a clear vision that guides decision-making, strengthens school culture, and advances the mission of providing rigorous, high-quality arts education?
- How does the current staff sufficiently support the programs offered?
 - If you have staffing needs, tell us your strategy for adding staff and describe how the addition of staff will enhance the educational experience for students.
 - Consider whether the current student and faculty numbers will meet future educational needs.
- How does your school support arts educators in maintaining excellence in instruction?
 - Describe the professional development opportunities available to your arts faculty.
 - What opportunities exist for arts faculty to contribute to faculty leadership and collaborate with administrative structures?
- Describe the schoolwide practices that ensure creativity, collaboration, innovation, and professional growth/schoolwide growth within programs.
- How does your school evaluate the quality of its educational programs and what students learn? And how is this information used to evolve schoolwide practices and improve student outcomes?

Supporting Documentation:

Required:

1. Comprehensive school schedule detailing arts learning and/or implementation of school vision for the arts
2. A multi-year Professional Learning Plan that outlines dates, topics, and outcomes for staff learning

Optional: *Limit of one additional supporting document. Below are some examples, but a school has the discretion to determine what evidence is most appropriate to reflect its practices.*

- List of outstanding student and school achievements that demonstrate quality arts instruction and preparation (Include any notable alumni and year of graduation)
- Example of assessment practices (capstone, portfolio review, etc.)
- Examples of high-level collaboration (ex., Professional Learning Communities) that exemplify creative and innovative projects that meaningfully contribute to your school's purpose.
- List of all current school personnel by title and/or teaching assignment

3. Facilities & Resource Management

Our shared belief: Exemplary art schools demonstrate sustainability in fiscal management and sound resource management. Exemplary art schools provide students with access to high-quality resources, facilities, and materials that support the unique needs of their programming.

500-word limit narrative

Guiding Questions:

- Describe how facilities and resources support your vision for arts learning. (e.g., studios, theaters, technology, equipment, texts, access to library holdings, archives, etc.)
- How does the site ensure the sustainability of materials and supplies for arts education, arts integration, and/or interdisciplinary learning? What funding sources support your school's arts programs (e.g., district budget, grants, private donations, partnerships)?
- Are there any gaps in materials or facilities that impact arts education at your school?
 - How are those gaps identified and addressed on the campus?
- Considering present and projected funding, how does your school evaluate the quality of its financial decision-making in support of its purpose, size, and scope?
 - Describe any financial challenges, if any, and how they are being addressed.

Supporting Documentation:

Required:

1. Outline of Site Budget and Resources that demonstrate sustainable arts programming

Optional: *Limit of one additional supporting document. Below are some examples, but a school has the discretion to determine what evidence is most appropriate to reflect its practices.*

- Campus floor plan showcasing facilities and resources used to facilitate arts instruction
- High-resolution photos from your school
- Master Campus/Building Plan or even a link to it if it's too large to share otherwise (for those in the process of brick and mortar projects)
- Description of additional funding sources (arts school foundation, PTA, etc.) and evidence of their impact on student learning.

4. Student Participation in Arts Programming

Our shared belief: Exemplary art schools provide high-quality and consistent arts training/preparatory, and arts integration models. Exemplary art schools provide access for all students to participate in arts pathways or arts-integrated learning.

500-word limit narrative

Guiding Questions:

- What is the participation and/or completion rate for students enrolled in arts programming?
 - How do you ensure students progress through different levels of study?
 - What percentage of students actively participate in arts education?
 - How does your faculty empower the engagement and progress of students?
- Describe student access to and participation in consistent performances, exhibitions, or opportunities within the arts. How do these initiatives/activities demonstrate longevity/sustainability?
- How does your school ensure the long-term stability and growth of its arts programs?
 - Address student accessibility, recruitment, and retention.
- Describe your strategies for recruiting and retaining students in arts programs.
 - How does your student body reflect the demographics of your school's community?
 - What policies and/or procedures support equitable access to enrollment?

Supporting Documentation:

Choose three that you believe best reflect the school's practices

- Strategic arts plan or similar guiding document.
- The overall demographics of the school and student enrollment by arts area
- Schedule of recruitment events and locations (activity Excel sheet)
- School performance schedule
- High-resolution photos of students from your school that illustrate performances, events, and/or leadership opportunities for students.
- Scope and Sequence of Arts Courses and Pathways
- CTE/ Pathway Completion Reports

5. Community and Cultural Engagement

Our shared belief: Exemplary art schools create and leverage meaningful partnerships with families and the community to strengthen and support arts learning within their schools.

500-word limit narrative

Guiding Questions:

- How does your school connect students with professional artists, cultural institutions, and community arts organizations?

- What opportunities exist for students to showcase their work outside of the school environment?
- How do professional arts & cultural organizations support student learning in the arts?
- How do your community partnerships support your school's purpose?
 - Does the partnership contribute to the artistic/educational goals, operational needs, or integrity of your arts programs?
 - How does your school develop relationships between your school's community (faculty, students, and administration) with the community at large (various stakeholders: i.e., caregivers, board members, and community groups)?
- How does your school evaluate the quality of its community partnerships and what students learn?
 - How do community partnerships enhance arts learning and career pathways for students?
 - Consider how using this information, like feedback from students and assessments, helps the school improve its work and update its partnerships.
 - How does your school's arts programming contribute to the cultural and artistic landscape of your community?

Supporting Documentation:

Required:

1. Letter of support from a community partner or alumni

Optional: *Limit of one additional supporting document. Below are some examples, but a school has the discretion to determine what evidence is most appropriate to reflect its practices.*

- Letter of support from the supervising entity
- Student exhibition, performance, special events calendar
- High-resolution photos of students from your school that illustrate community and cultural engagement.
- Residency schedules
- MOU/ contracts with partners

Additional Information

The following items are not scored but are required.

- 1) a 200 word summary about your school to use for press release, e communication, and ASN website,
- 2) Electronic copy (hi-res: 300 dpi, vector) of the school logo,
- 3) Three high resolution student photos from your school

Optional Narrative

The following section *is optional*.

If you choose to complete this section, select one question from the options below that may capture the heartbeat of your school. (100 word count maximum)

- What is a question you wish we had asked? And then answer the question.
- "If we spent a day at your school, what would we notice about how people interact and learn together?"
- "How would students, families, and staff describe the 'heartbeat' or spirit of your campus?"
- "What makes your school community feel unique compared to others?"

- "What stories, traditions, or daily practices best capture your school's culture?"
 - "What three words would someone use to describe the atmosphere of your school after visiting?"
-

Exemplary Arts Schools Evaluation Rubric

1. School Purpose, Arts Program & Curriculum

Criteria	4 – Excellent	3 – Proficient	2 – Developing	1 – Needs Improvement
Vision, Mission & Arts Integration	Arts are central to vision/mission; guide decision-making, planning, and evaluation.	Arts are well-connected to vision/mission; inform some decisions.	Arts are partially referenced in vision/mission; limited role in decisions.	Arts are absent from or not connected to vision/mission.
Current Reality in Arts Education	Reflective description with strengths, challenges, and initiatives clearly identified.	Clear description of strengths and challenges; some initiatives.	Uneven description with limited context.	Vague, incomplete, or missing context.
Impact on School Culture & Achievement	Arts strongly shape culture, contributing significantly to academic achievement and whole-child development.	Arts are valued in culture with some contribution to academics.	Arts acknowledged but limited connection to culture/academics.	Arts are minimally valued; no connection to achievement.
Curriculum	Comprehensive, diverse, exemplary, and evolving to meet interests and industry trends.	Well-rounded curriculum with some innovation and adaptation.	Covers core disciplines but lacks depth or innovation.	Narrow or limited curriculum with few options.
Interdisciplinary & Real-World Applications	Seamless integration of interdisciplinary learning and authentic real-world applications.	Regular integration of interdisciplinary and real-world learning.	Limited or occasional interdisciplinary/real-world connections.	Little or no evidence of interdisciplinary or real-world applications.

2. Leadership: Administration & Faculty

Criteria	4 – Excellent	3 – Proficient	2 – Developing	1 – Needs Improvement
Vision & Leadership	School demonstrates a clear vision advancing rigorous, high-quality arts education and strong culture.	School provides vision; arts inform decision-making and culture.	Vision is limited; arts inconsistently included in decisions/culture.	No clear vision for arts leadership; culture is minimally impacted.
Staffing	Staffing fully supports programs; clear strategies for growth and alignment to future needs.	Staffing supports most programs; some strategies for addressing gaps.	Staffing uneven; strategies for growth underdeveloped.	Staffing inadequate with no clear plan for growth.

Support for Arts Educators	Strong, ongoing support for faculty excellence; robust professional learning with leadership opportunities.	Consistent support and PD for arts faculty; some leadership roles.	Limited support or PD; few opportunities for faculty leadership.	Minimal support or PD; arts educators isolated.
Collaboration & Innovation	Schoolwide practices foster creativity, collaboration, innovation, and professional growth.	Collaboration and innovation occur regularly across some programs.	Collaboration/innovation occasional or inconsistent.	Little evidence of collaboration, innovation, or growth.
Evaluation & Improvement	Programs and student learning are rigorously evaluated and used to drive ongoing improvement.	Evaluation occurs and informs some schoolwide practices.	Evaluation limited; impact on improvement unclear.	No consistent evaluation or use of results.

3. Facilities & Resource Management

Criteria	4 – Excellent	3 – Proficient	2 – Developing	1 – Needs Improvement
Facilities & Resources	High-quality facilities/resources fully aligned to vision for arts learning.	Adequate facilities/resources with some alignment to vision.	Facilities/resources uneven; some needs unmet.	Facilities/resources inadequate; do not support vision.
Sustainability of Materials & Supplies	Sustainable systems and diverse funding sources ensure consistent access.	Systems and funding sources generally sustain programs.	Sustainability inconsistent; limited funding diversity.	No clear systems; programs vulnerable to resource gaps.
Financial Decision-Making	Financial practices are strategic, sustainable, and aligned to school's size/scope/purpose. Challenges may be present and are addressed.	Financial practices are adequate; generally aligned to needs.	Financial practices are uneven; gaps impact programs.	Financial practices are insufficient; major gaps in arts access.

4. Student Participation in Arts Programming

Criteria	4 – Excellent	3 – Proficient	2 – Developing	1 – Needs Improvement
Participation & Completion Rates	High rates of participation/completion; clear evidence of student progression through pathways.	Strong participation rates; evidence of student progression supported.	Moderate rates of participation; progression inconsistent.	Low participation rates; no evidence of progression.
Faculty Empowerment of Students	Faculty deeply empower engagement, growth, and progression.	Faculty support engagement and progression consistently.	Faculty support uneven; limited empowerment.	Faculty minimally support engagement or progression.
Performance & Exhibition Opportunities	Consistent, diverse, high-quality opportunities that demonstrate sustainability.	Regular performance/exhibition opportunities with some sustainability.	Limited or occasional opportunities; sustainability unclear.	Few or no opportunities; no sustainability.

Stability & Growth of Programs	Programs stable and growing; strong recruitment/retention strategies ensure equity.	Programs stable with some strategies for recruitment/retention.	Programs show instability; limited recruitment/retention.	Programs unstable; no strategies for recruitment/retention.
Equity & Access	Policies and practices ensure equitable access, reflecting community demographics.	Policies support equity with some alignment to demographics.	Equity/access addressed inconsistently.	Little or no evidence of equity/access policies.

5. Community & Cultural Engagement

Criteria	4 – Excellent	3 – Proficient	2 – Developing	1 – Needs Improvement
Professional & Community Partnerships	Deep, sustained partnerships with artists, cultural institutions, and organizations significantly enhance learning.	Regular partnerships enhance student learning.	Limited or occasional partnerships; impact unclear.	Few or no partnerships; minimal impact.
Opportunities Beyond School	Consistent, high-quality opportunities for students to showcase work in the community.	Regular opportunities to showcase work beyond school.	Limited opportunities beyond school.	Few or no external opportunities.
Alignment to School Purpose	Partnerships directly strengthen educational/artistic goals, operations, and integrity.	Partnerships support school goals with some alignment.	Partnerships loosely aligned; impact inconsistent.	Partnerships unrelated to goals or absent.
Relationships with Stakeholders	Strong relationships across faculty, students, administration, caregivers, board, and community groups.	Relationships with some stakeholder groups are strong.	Relationships uneven; some stakeholder groups not engaged.	Few or no stakeholder relationships evident.
Evaluation of Partnerships	Partnerships regularly evaluated with evidence of positive impact on learning and pathways.	Partnerships evaluated occasionally; some impact documented.	Limited evaluation; impact unclear.	No evaluation of partnerships.
Contribution to Community	Arts programming meaningfully contributes to the cultural/artistic landscape of the wider community.	Arts programming contributes to the community in some ways.	Contribution limited or occasional.	Little or no contribution to the community.

