

Arts Education in the Time of a Pandemic: *COVID-19 Suggested Reopening Guidelines for Vermont PreK-12 Visual Arts Programs*

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Rationale

The Vermont Art Teachers Association is a group of art educators dedicated to promoting the essential role the arts play in fully educating our students. With the goal of preparing fellow educators during the current pandemic to best serve our students, the VATA leadership team has created this document. When students have access to the arts as an integral part of their educational experience, they grow as learners and citizens from the myriad benefits of receiving an arts education. From teaching students to think creatively when problem-solving to learning to collaborate with peers, the reasons students are in need of a quality arts education are many: visual arts instruction promote academic achievement, encourage focus and perseverance, boost confidence and decision making skills, as well as support the increasingly important social-emotional learning. The following is a guide for Vermont art educators and their administrators to plan in accordance with the COVID-19 school reopening plan.

Key Considerations for Administrators

Upholding Education Quality Standards

- EQS 2120.5 Curriculum Content states, “each school shall enable students to engage annually in rigorous, relevant and comprehensive learning opportunities that allows them to demonstrate proficiency in artistic expression (including visual, media and performing arts)”,
- EQS 2123.2 Development and Implementation of Local Comprehensive Assessment System “each school shall implement a local comprehensive assessment system that employs a balance of assessment types, including but not limited to, teacher-or student

designed assessments, portfolios, performances, exhibitions and projects”.

Actionable Steps Supported by VATA:

- Art programs should be maintained in both staffing and funding prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- All students should have access to art education during in-person learning, hybrid learning, and remote learning.
- Art educators should be included in all planning to take into consideration the unique learning environment of art classes that vary from other disciplines.
- Professional development must be provided to arts educators, so that they may develop strategies for the delivery of art instruction that can be adapted to a variety of learning environments and conditions.
- The arts are a cultural necessity that belong to everyone.

*These statements were adapted and modified from the [The Massachusetts Arts Coalition](#)

Why Visual Art Matters

Visual arts education cultivates skills for learning.

- Strengthens critical thinking
- Encourages student engagement
- Fosters creativity

Visual arts education boosts students' academic achievement.

- Enhances writing quality and early reading skills.
- Contributes to postsecondary success.
- Improves test scores.
- Unites and engages communities.

Visual arts education enhances the educational experience of traditionally underserved students.

- Helps students acquire English skills.
- Increases academic achievement of teenagers from low-income backgrounds.
- Impacts students positively outside of academics.

*These statements were adapted and modified from the [National Art Education Association](#)

Guidelines for Vermont Visual Art Educators and School Administrators Planning Considerations

Curriculum

- Be innovative and use a flexible mindset in art lesson design, differentiating, and providing choice in assignments while maintaining a rigorous, standards-based curriculum with opportunities for Creating, Responding, Presenting, and Connecting.
- Design lessons connecting students to the real world and enhancing individual student voice in processing our shifting and uncertain cultural landscape.
- Create a sense of community and respect in both the physical and virtual art classrooms.
- Engage in culturally responsive teaching practices to engage all students including those from diverse and minority backgrounds.
- Blend synchronous and asynchronous learning that is developmentally appropriate and includes students with diverse learning styles and abilities.
- Employ visual literacy strategies to help students learn how to read images and visually communicate messages with complex meanings using higher-order thinking skills.
- Plan units that encourage diverse media and material exploration whenever possible. Prioritize this in hands-on instruction in a school setting since access to materials may be more limited when students work online.
- Consider art units with interdisciplinary content and Arts integration methods to support student growth across curriculum areas where student contact hours have been reduced.
- Adapt assessment strategies to provide meaningful and constructive feedback through all phases of reopening and other transitions.
- Embed individual and group problem-solving strategies in art lessons promoting artistic choice and encouraging self-efficacy.

- Provide opportunities for art exhibits, and other community events virtually or with social distancing practices in place.
- Introduce students to using online resources exploring the work of historic and contemporary artists and traditions reflecting diverse voices and methods of production.

Social-Emotional Learning

- Engage students in art-making to encourage student voice and expression assisting in the development of self-confidence and self-efficacy.
- Use the inherent capacity of visual expression to support stress management, and identifying emotions during this period of rapid change.
- Foreground how visual arts provide motivating ways for students to develop resilience and risk-taking skills that lead to organizational and internalized goal setting.

Classroom Environment

- Ensure students have equal access to the following:
 - An assortment of consumable art materials and tools.
 - Appropriate and adequate technology resources, including training on specific platforms and/or devices.
 - Individual student material kits developed by art educators that allow for diverse art learning opportunities created with budget restraints in mind.
- Teachers and students use masks and other tools for decreasing transmission as developmentally appropriate and responsive to Vermont and school-specific health guidelines.
- Ensuring physical distancing in all spaces and during class transitions according to Vermont and National best practices.
- Develop a COVID-19 guidance document that is discipline-specific for students posted in a visible place in the physical classroom and available to students and parents in a virtual format.
- Provide a schedule that allows for the increased time required for the disinfecting of space and materials.
- Increased access to hand sanitizer/installation of additional hand sanitizing stations to insure student compliance in a quick and efficient manner.
- Use of technology to reduce reliance on face-to-face interactions and provide students with enhanced art-making and expressive experiences in the visual arts.

- Consider having a permanent classroom set-up to minimize transitions and assigned seating to ensure social distancing measures. Also, consider bringing art instructions to students in their classroom to minimize transmission risk and effectively use allocated time with younger students.
- Develop a classroom environment that limits students touching surfaces and materials unnecessarily while safely and efficiently distributing projects and materials.
- Utilize outdoor spaces whenever lessons and weather permit for socially distanced yet immersive art experiences.
- Schedule arts classes as an expected part of the day/week for all students with adequate time to ensure the ability to meet NCAS art standards and instructional minutes that are proportional to pre-COVID levels compared to other subjects.
- Ensure that instructional space for the arts is preserved and maintained in a hygienic manner.

Professional Development

- Provide Art Education professional development for arts educators:
 - Using technology to support creation of high-quality learning materials and artistic experiences.
 - Using best practice for remote learning in the arts classroom.
 - Increased professional development to meet student needs in social-emotional development in times of transition and trauma.
- Provide timely administrative updates about local community transmission so educators can make plans that meet the needs of their students, families, and individual health histories.

Sources:

The National Art Education Association suggests following up-to-date health and safety guidance.

Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov: specifically for schools: Childcare, Schools, and Youth Programs.

World Health Organization, specifically for schools: Key Messages and Actions for Covid19 Prevention and Control in Schools.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: www.epa.gov

Lesson Plan Templates

[How to use the Templates](#)

[In-Person](#)

[Hybrid](#)

[Remote](#)