

Spring/  
Summer 2026



vaea

virginia art education association

Virginia Art Education Association

Priyanshi, 6th Grade,  
Old Donation School,  
Leigh Drake



## Our Mission

Our mission is to promote, support and advance visual arts education through leadership, professional development and service.

## The VAEA News Magazine

VAEAnews is a publication of the Virginia Art Education Association, and is distributed to members three times a year: January, June and September.

## Articles

Articles are submitted by the Executive Board and Extended Board members. Contact your Regional President, Division Representative, or appropriate Affiliate Liaison to offer news or photographs for inclusion in their reports.

## Contact Information

See page 28.

## Student Art

Members send submissions directly to Sean Collins, News Magazine Editor via the form located at [vaea.org/news](http://vaea.org/news)

## Vendors

Vendors wishing to advertise should contact Peggy Wood, Executive Secretary, at [wood.vaea@gmail.com](mailto:wood.vaea@gmail.com)

## Submission Deadlines

Winter Issue: December 15

Spring/Summer Issue: March 15

Fall/Conference Issue: July 15



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# President's Message

Leigh Drake

**“As art educators, we don’t just teach students how to make art; we teach them how to think creatively, see possibilities, and believe in their own voices.”**

I am excited and honored to serve as your newest VAEA President. The VAEA has opened countless doors for me throughout my career, and I am grateful for the opportunity to give back and to work alongside so many dedicated educators across the Commonwealth. I believe the purpose of education is to create a community of learners who strive for excellence in themselves, in their peers, and in their communities. Art education plays a vital role in this mission. Through creativity, critical thinking, empathy, and self-expression, our students learn not only how to make art, but how to understand themselves and the world around them.

Ultimately, the most valuable resource educators have is each other. Our growth becomes truly meaningful when we share ideas, challenges, and successes. Through collaboration and community, we strengthen our programs, advocate for the arts, and enrich our students’ lives. As I step into this role, I am eager to listen, learn, and support you as we continue to move art education forward in Virginia. I encourage you to reach out, share your stories, and connect with colleagues across the state so we can celebrate successes together and navigate challenges side by side.

## The Impact We Make Every Day

In the midst of lesson planning, supply orders, grading, and the many tasks that keep our programs running, it’s easy to overlook the profound impact we make every day. Yet each time you encourage a student to take a creative risk or explore a new idea, you are helping them develop skills that will last a lifetime. Each time you create a space where students feel seen and safe to express themselves, you foster confidence and belonging. Each time you advocate for your program or connect your school community to the arts, you send a powerful message that the arts matter and are essen-

tial to a well-rounded education.

This is the power of art education. We don’t just teach techniques—we teach students to observe, question, imagine, and empathize. We help them find their voices, tell their stories, and envision the world they want to shape.

This year, I encourage you to celebrate the everyday victories in your classroom: the student who beams with pride, the mural that brings people together, the spark of discovery on a student’s face. These moments remind us why our work matters.

As you continue to advocate for your programs, know that you are not alone. VAEA is here to support you, amplify your voice, and help you grow as both an educator and an artist. Together, we are building a strong and connected community that champions creativity and honors diverse voices.

Thank you for the dedication you bring to your classrooms each day. I look forward to working with you across the regions as we continue to build, support, and celebrate our art education community here in the Commonwealth. ■



Ashley, 12th Grade, Liberty High School, Heather Deeney

# Vice President's Message

Rebecca Davidson



Each year, art educators from across the Commonwealth gather for one of the most energizing professional events: the VAEA Conference. The 2026 conference will be held in Richmond at the Hilton Richmond Downtown from October 22–24. This event unites educators from all grade levels and teaching contexts for a time dedicated to creativity, collaboration, and professional growth.

The 2026 conference is hosted by VAEA's Central Region, whose members are actively planning an engaging and inspiring experience for attendees. Kelly Cullum has stepped into the role of Central Region President and will also serve in a leadership role for the upcoming conference alongside Laura Lockhart. Educators interested in joining the planning team or supporting conference efforts are encouraged to contact Central Region President, Kelly and Laura to learn how they can help.

The VAEA Conference offers something for everyone. Attendees can choose from a wide variety of hands-on workshops, presentations, and panel discussions led by art educators, artists, and leaders in the field. Sessions aim to provide practical classroom strategies, introduce new artistic techniques, and explore innovative ways to teach visual arts.

One of the conference's highlights is the chance to learn directly from fellow educators. Teachers from around Virginia share the lessons, projects, and ideas that are working in their classrooms today. Whether it's exploring new media, integrating technology, encouraging student voice and choice, or strengthening connections between art and other subjects, the conference is filled with ideas educators can immediately apply in their classrooms.

The conference also provides opportunities for connection.

Teaching can often feel isolating, especially in specialized areas like art education. The VAEA Conference brings together a lively community of educators who share a passion for creativity and student learning. Conversations during workshops, in hallways, and over meals often lead to new collaborations, professional friendships, and long-lasting support networks.

Our conference is also a time to honor the remarkable work happening across the state. Special events celebrate outstanding educators, display student artwork, and highlight how art teachers enrich their schools and communities. These moments serve as powerful reminders of the impact art education has on students' creativity, confidence, and critical thinking.

The call for conference proposals is open. Proposals will be accepted through June 15. Educators, artists, and arts partners are invited to submit session ideas to share practices and strategies with colleagues across Virginia. Whether presenting a hands-on workshop, classroom innovation, or a collaborative project, speakers play a key role in shaping the conference's learning experience. ■



4th grade collaboration, O.B. Gates Elementary School, Kai Chen

# Advocacy

## Mike Kalafatis



Advocacy starts with you. We often tell ourselves that decisions made from ‘the ivory tower’ come down from uncaring bureaucrats. While there are certainly legislators and decision makers who are more bullish than others, you’ll rarely have a conversation with a school division leader or lawmaker that ends up with them stating that they don’t support the arts. Which means it’s on us to educate and advocate.

Here are some basic tips all of us can utilize:

- Your program is the billboard for your school community. The student art exhibitions you display around a school and online are often the school’s visual indicator of success. Just by sharing student work in your building or on social media platforms you are defining your program’s story and proclaiming the importance of the visual arts.
- Most school divisions are increasingly willing to allow their educators to post online. If your school does not allow you to do so, reach out to your division’s communications department. Perception can tell a powerful story.
- Your school or division’s YAM Book is an annual yearbook that you can share broadly with community members, local leaders and lawmakers. It’s a record of all you’ve done and continue to do each year to support the arts.
- Become aware of the resources you have available to you at the state and national level.

On Arts Advocacy Day, January 22nd, I had the opportunity of visiting lawmakers and their legislative aides. During these visits with Dr. Barbara Laws and Michelle Milligan, I got to have meaningful conversations with those who decide state laws and policy. This experience reinforced my belief that we have more influence than we realize. Most of our decision makers at all levels are trying to do right by their constituents and their community. They often want to reflect the interests and desires of the voices they’re hearing.

Too often these decision makers don’t hear from you.

Many educators choose to complain bitterly that those who make decisions don’t have our best interests at heart: that those in the ivory tower aren’t listening. When in reality, most of the arbiters of limited funding at all levels just weren’t art educators.

It’s on you, which turns to us if we act collectively: to regularly display students’ work, to share our message online to the broader school community, document what we do in our YAM Book, to familiarize ourselves with the resources and data already available to us. To be willing to make public comments when called upon, and to speak at school board meetings and in forums where your voice matters helps more than you realize. Resources with dates are plentiful and available to you. ■

You + We (Message+ Story + Data) = Advocacy!

VAEA: <https://www.vaea.org/advocacy.html>

NAEA: [www.arteducators.org/advocacy](http://www.arteducators.org/advocacy)



Finlee, 7th Grade, Old Donation School, Leigh Drake

# Social Media

## Holly Bess Kincaid



### Everyday Advocacy: Share Your Art Education Story

Every classroom holds a story worth sharing. Every lesson, every student voice, every creative breakthrough is a powerful piece of art education in action. When you share what is happening in your classroom, you are not just posting. You are advocating.

By sharing your lessons, Youth Art Month highlights, student artwork, classroom tips, and community events, you help tell the story of why art education matters. You are building connections, supporting fellow educators, and helping policymakers and community leaders better understand the impact of the arts in our schools.

Use **#VAARTED** to amplify your impact. VAEA loves to

reshare and celebrate your work. Join the **VAEA Facebook Member Forum** to exchange ideas, ask questions, and uplift one another.

Ready to take your advocacy a step further? Step into leadership with the **VAEA Social Media Committee**. We are building a creative team of educators from every region to help capture, curate, and celebrate the incredible work happening across Virginia. From spotlighting classrooms to sharing best practices, you can help shape a vibrant and inspiring online presence for our community. If you are interested, please reach out to our Social Media Chair. We would love to collaborate with you and grow this vision together.

Together, through everyday advocacy, we strengthen our community and inspire the future of art education.



# Awards

## Tiffany Floyd



It is time to start thinking of outstanding colleagues with active memberships to nominate for a VAEA Division Award or other recognized award (see list on the VAEA website).

The purpose of the VAEA/NAEA Awards Program is to recognize excellence in the many individuals, state/province associations, and programs of NAEA. The program also promotes art advocacy while providing tangible recognition of achievements.

Any VAEA member who meets the award criteria established by NAEA may be nominated or self-nominate. Note that the VAEA regional and state awards represent a small portion of the awards offered on the national level.

Check out the lists of categories and view forms and deadlines on the VAEA and NAEA websites:

<https://www.vaea.org/awards.html>

<https://www.arteducators.org/events-and-opportunities/awards-program/>

For VAEA awards, packets for ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE & SECONDARY division awards must be submitted electronically to **regional presidents** for adjudication by **August 31, 2026**. Packets for SUPERVISION, MUSEUM ED & HIGHER ED division awards must be submitted electronically to **division directors** for adjudication by **September 15, 2026**. Other VAEA awards are submitted to the **awards chair** for adjudication by **September 15, 2026**. We recommend thinking of candidates soon, in an effort to ensure they have ample time to gather documents and complete their packets. If you are not sure where to submit a packet, please contact the awards chair, Tiffany Floyd, at [awardsvaea@gmail.com](mailto:awardsvaea@gmail.com).

Please do not hesitate to reach out with questions and/or concerns. ■



Keren, 7th Grade, Old Donation School, Leigh Drake

# Division News Elementary

Erika Ogier



## Elementary Takeaways from NAEA 2026

Elementary art educators from across the country gathered at the 2026 convention of the National Art Education Association (NAEA) in Chicago to share ideas, reconnect with colleagues, and celebrate the incredible creativity happening in art rooms everywhere. For those of us who teach our youngest artists, the conference offered plenty of inspiration and practical ideas to bring straight back to the classroom.

One of the biggest themes across elementary sessions was student choice. Presenters emphasized that even in short class periods, giving students meaningful opportunities to make decisions about their work can make a huge difference. Whether it's choosing materials, colors, or subject matter, small moments of choice help students feel ownership over their art and encourage creative risk-taking.

Another strong takeaway was the value of introducing contemporary artists to elementary students. Many educators shared ways to make complex artistic ideas accessible for younger learners while also highlighting artists from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Connecting student projects to living artists helps students see that art is not just something from the past—it is something happening right now.

Several sessions also reinforced a message many of us try to prioritize in the elementary art room: process over perfection. Encouraging experimentation, curiosity, and even mistakes allow students to develop confidence as creative thinkers. When the focus shifts from the final product to the act of making, students become more willing to explore new materials and ideas.

Of course, one of the best parts of attending NAEA is the chance to connect with other educators who understand the unique joys—and challenges—of teaching elementary art. Conversations in hallways, during sessions, and over coffee often spark just as many ideas as the presentations themselves.

The conference was also an opportunity to celebrate excellence in our field. Congratulations to Meredith Snyder for being recognized as the South-eastern Elementary Art Educator of the Year. Her dedication to inspiring young artists and supporting fellow educators is something our entire community can celebrate.

As we return to our art rooms, it's exciting to think about the new ideas we can try with our students. Sometimes all it takes is one small adjustment—a new artist to introduce, a new material to explore, or a little more room for student choice—to spark fresh energy in the classroom. Conferences like NAEA remind us that even though we each teach in our own school we are part of a vibrant community of educators working together to nurture creativity in the next generation of artists. We hope to see you this fall at our own VAEA conference, October 22-24th in Downtown Richmond! ■



Hadley, 2nd Grade, O.B. Gates Elementary School, Kai Chen

# Middle

Liz O'Neill



Hey there, Middle Level Rockstars!!!

My name is Liz O'Neill and I am the new middle level director for VAEA. I've taught art at the middle level for 20 years in Loudoun County and I'm so excited to be a part of the board for VAEA.

VAEA conference is such a highlight of my fall. I look forward to it every single year. It's like one part art teacher/sleep away camp and one part mini vacation where you learn all these cool things from all these cool people. If you have never been, please consider joining in the fun! I'd LOVE to meet you and connect you to other like-minded arties at our middle level meeting at conference. NOTE: Big congratulations to our VAEA middle level educator of the year, Alison McNew!!!

Unfortunately for me, it seems spring has already sprung in the art room. How do you combat the restlessness, the incessant boundary pushing and keep your students engaged and out of trouble during this time of year? Here are some thoughts (none of them new) listed below.

Be prepared for what you are teaching, particularly with supply organization, distribution, management and class flow. I find that when I have classes that don't go the way I anticipated, often it is due to one of these things or that I didn't communicate or model what I wanted to see from my students.

Continue to review processes and procedures. Losing your mind because supplies are a mess and left everywhere? Whether you went over how to care for supplies in the fall (or two weeks ago) doesn't mean that students have internalized it or remember it. Review

often and hold them to those expectations.

Be mindful of transitions. How students move from one part of the lesson to another can accidentally encourage all kinds of misbehaviors. Properly thought-out transitions are almost as important as the lesson itself.

Address the small behaviors early. A behavior that occurs once could be a fluke. Twice... starts a trend. Have the hard conversations in private early on "sandwich" style. Share a positive about the student, then your observations about the student behavior of concern with a concrete plan of action to address the behavior and end on a positive note emphasizing their awesomeness and reinforcing the positive behavior you want to see. If the issue escalates, contact home early, and if needed, get the counselor or admin involved.

Break out those high engagement/high success projects. Have a project students absolutely love or is almost always successful? Teach it now! Busy, engaged students have time for less mischief. Check out these simple project ideas if you are in a pinch. Check out the art of education "managing the middle in the art room" on YouTube.

Look for a positive in every day. Our kids do the strangest, funniest and amazing things sometimes. At their core, they are the best!

And the most important reminder is to remember that your students are lucky to have YOU! Thank you for all you do every day for our middle school students! ■



*Nika, 7th Grade, Old Donation School, Leigh Drake*

# Division News Secondary

Susan Schutte



Hello and cheers to Spring! I'm Susan Schutte, high school art teacher in Virginia Beach and new Secondary Division Director for VAEA. I am honored to serve as a representative for the middle and high school art teachers across Virginia supporting VAEA and NAEA missions. One of my duties is supporting the belief that "visual art [is] unique and important in the school curriculum." I had the privilege of attending the 2026 NAEA National Convention: RE-Envision in Chicago, Illinois, in March thanks in part to my administration supporting this belief. The sessions I attended affirmed that art educators are constantly "re-envisioning" how to provide art curriculum to students through best practices in art making, art on a limited budget, and creating art in public spaces, public forums online, and creating communities of art makers.

On the heels of the amazing art vibes in Chicago, in this newsletter I bring you some examples of the importance of art in the curriculum by sharing good vibes from fellow art educators in the Secondary Division of VAEA. In that vein, I asked secondary art teachers, "What is the best thing happening in your classroom right now?" Some teachers responded by sharing about great projects currently happening in the classroom like creating a collaborative mural, working on mini clay projects, and having their foundations class team up with 2nd grade art students to transform 2D artworks into 3D sculptures. One art teacher shared that their admin is amazing and supportive! Most of the

responses centered around the students as the "best things" happening in the art room right now. One teacher said, "My students are wowing me! Their ideas and commitment make me proud!" Others shared, "I have an amazing classroom community." "My students are engaged!" "I got lucky with a very small 3D design class so I have time to work one-on-one with students to really differentiate based on student interests, and I'm loving it." "Kids are joyfully making art!" They're "eager, taking risks, making friends, mistakes, and successes!"

I'm curious. What's the best thing happening in your classroom right now? We all know everything isn't perfect, but why not share the bright side of what's going on in your classroom to highlight important aspects of art education in our schools? Take a moment to reflect on the best things you're experiencing now and remember to share those wins with your colleagues and students. Cheers again to art and Spring, may your art hearts be full. ■



Pranavi, 7th Grade, Old Donation School, Leigh Drake

# Division News

## Museum Education

Emily Cayton



As seasons change and nature shifts from one look to the next, educational spaces always seem to see big transformations as well! Youth Art Month being in March has that kind of shifting, blooming, whirlwind energy. In the museum division, YAM brings new partnership ideas. When planning for YAM 2027, if you're looking to connect with museums or galleries, it's never too early to get started. Here are some things to consider on both sides of the partnership:

As a museum educator

Your coworkers at the museum may or may not even know about Youth Art Month! Take the time to work collaboratively across the various departments early and often to make a plan to show off what you're doing to celebrate. Meet with the communications department to schedule social media stories and possible news opportunities. See how your curatorial colleagues might be open to infusing youth voice or interpretation into gallery spaces. At the museum where I work, we were able to schedule multiple pop-up exhibitions and receptions embedded within existing evening or weekend programming. Take a look at other events happening in March and explore ways to double efforts. We also took a monthly program and turned it into a weekly one just for March. Families were so curious why, and there's another opportunity to share the joys of YAM!

As a PK-12 educator

You are probably jam-packed with YAM ideas, but have you ever done something with a museum, gallery, community arts center,

or library? If so, feel free to create a tips and tricks sheet to share with membership! If not, now would be a great time to try something new. The cultural arts centers in your region typically have someone on staff that really wants to advocate for and lift up youth art. Prepare a few ideas and meet with them as early as you're able since museums often plan super far in advance. Explore any published events, calendars, or family offerings and see if there's an existing program that could be enhanced with youth art. For example, if a museum is planning a spring family day, wouldn't that be a great venue for a pop-up exhibition or student-led artmaking activity? Even just a social media story about an art project you're working on with students inspired by something from the local collection or gallery could be a great way to start a YAM partnership.

Big questions for museum educators: Why should museum educators seek out YAM opportunities? What stories about youth art could you mine from your collection or current exhibition?

Big questions for PK-12 educators: How might your school or district benefit from a museum partnership as part of YAM? In what ways do you already partner with cultural institutions? ■



Nina, Brianna, Emma, & Lily, 7th Grade,  
Old Donation School, Leigh Drake

# Supervision and Administration

## Amber Hester



Upon returning from the National Art Education Conference in Chicago, I was reminded of the significance of maintaining connections with fellow art educators and fostering ongoing professional development.

As educational leaders, advocating for teacher professional development and participation is crucial. Supporting attendance and addressing obstacles that prevent participation must remain a priority. Across the country, education budgets have been reduced, federal grants eliminated, and local funding remains limited. These challenges often result in districts being unable or unwilling to cover costs associated with conference attendance. While some districts provide financial support, many educators are faced with personal expenses, ultimately leading to decreased participation at the local, state, and national levels.

To alleviate these barriers, it is essential to explore solutions such as increasing membership engagement, local opportunities for state conferences, seeking alternative funding through scholarships, collaborating with PTAs, and pursuing fundraising initiatives.

Local boards should also consider offering presenter discounts, as administrators may be more inclined to allocate resources when educational content is made accessible for those unable to attend due to financial constraints. Prioritizing these efforts on leadership agendas is imperative to supporting our educators.

In our local news, the Supervision and Administration team

has benefited from a partnership with the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, enabling us to host quarterly meetings focused on significant topics affecting art education and policy. These gatherings offer valuable opportunities for collaboration, professional growth, and mutual support. Each meeting includes time set aside to explore current museum exhibitions, providing further inspiration as we return to our respective districts. We welcome the participation of teacher leaders in districts without designated coordinators or supervisors and encourage them to contact us for upcoming meeting information.

During our visit to Richmond, we also met with a local delegate, Alex Q. Askew, of the 95th House District representing Norfolk and Virginia Beach. He requested artwork from his constituency to display in his office. We appreciate such support for art education and recognize the positive impact of our collaborative efforts. ■



Above: Supervision and Administration team meeting at the VMFA.

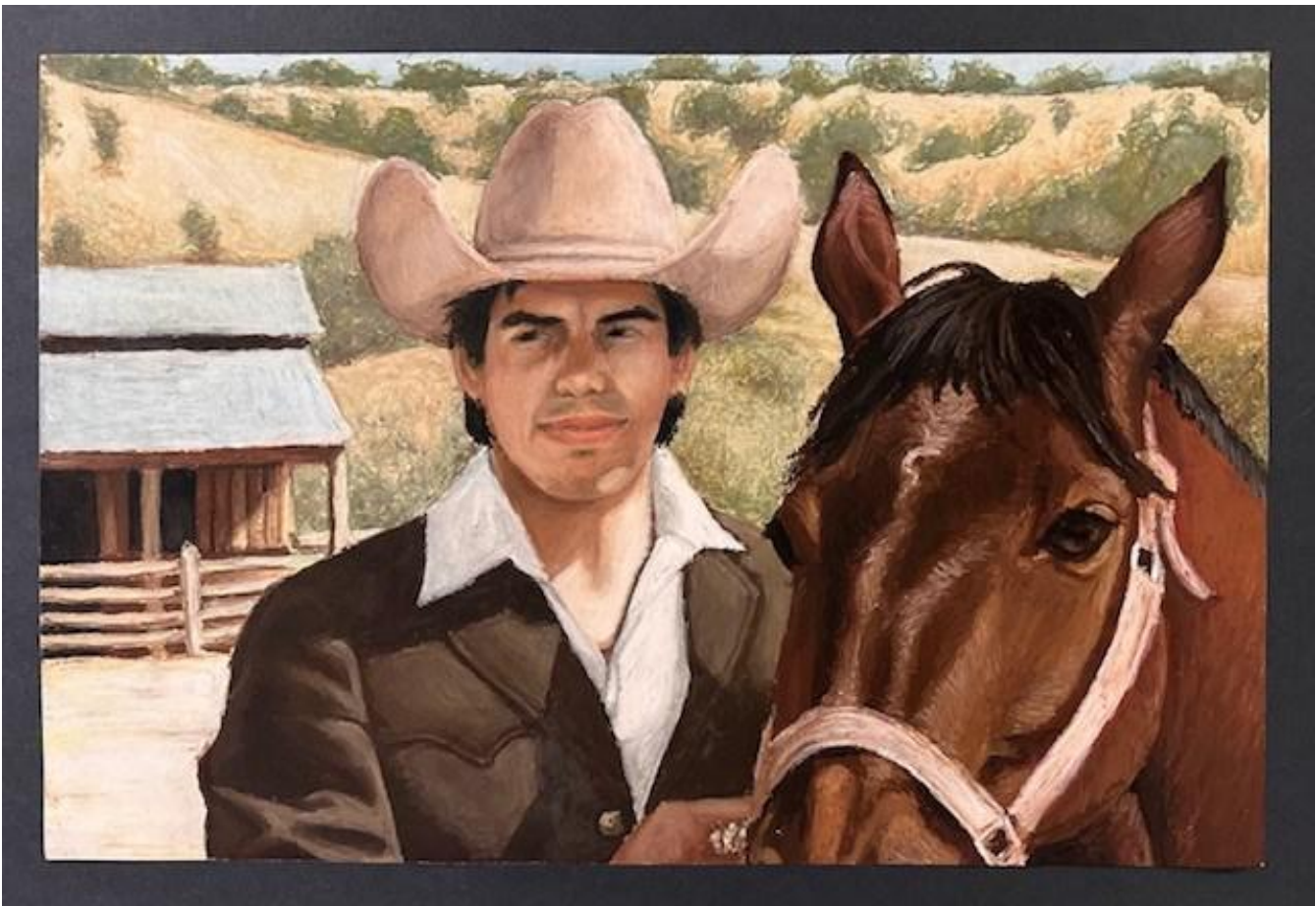
Left: Members meeting with delegate, Alex Q. Askew.



Lucas, 8th Grade, Old Donation School, Leigh Drake



Struthi, 7th Grade, Old Donation School, Leigh Drake



Miranda, 11th Grade, Liberty High School, Heather Deeney



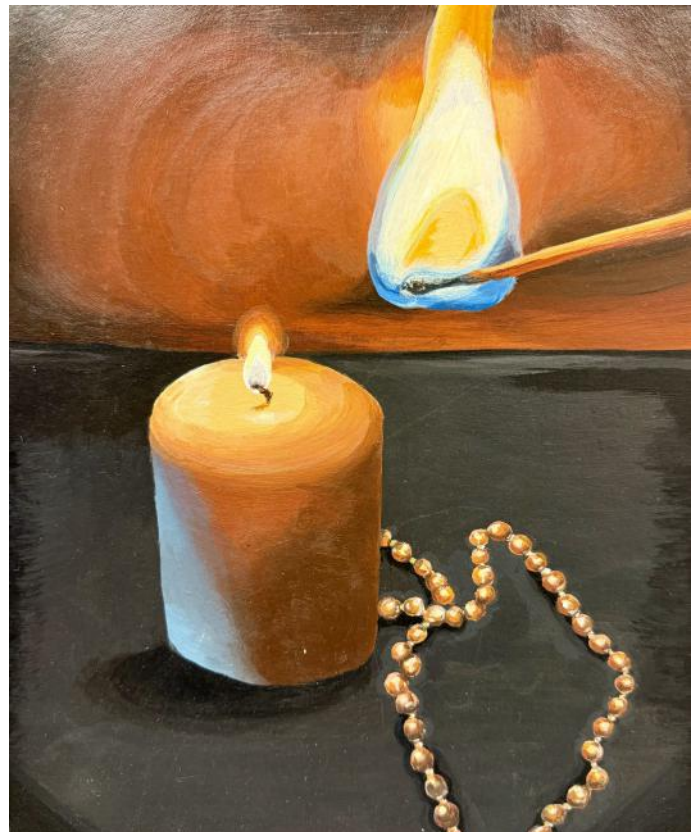
Priyanshi, 6th Grade, Old Donation School, Leigh Drake



Supreme, 7th Grade, Old Donation School, Leigh Drake



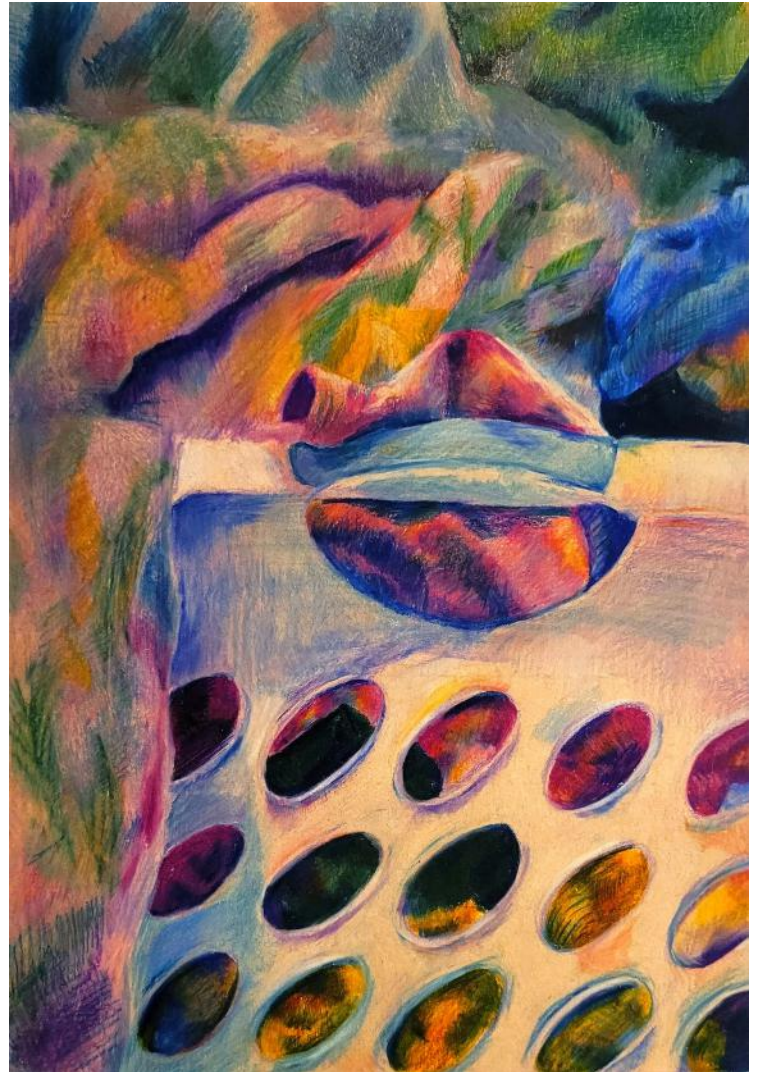
Kaelanna, 6th Grade, Old Donation School, Leigh Drake



Alana, 11th Grade, Clover Hill High School, Kai Chen



Kealanna, 6th Grade, Old Donation School, Leigh Drake



Clare, 11th Grade, Catholic High School, Maggie Hudson



Abigail, 5th Grade, O.B. Gates Elementary School, Kai Chen



Ashley, 12th Grade, Liberty High School, Heather Deeney

# Archivist

Angie Salerno



For this edition of the newsmagazine, I am focusing on some of what I discovered in the archives from the late 1980's. In 1987, the VAEA conference theme was "The Year of Elementary Art Education" and was held in Rosslyn, Virginia. There were 543 members in VAEA that year. The next year, the conference was held in Roanoke and the theme was "Art in Education: A Requirement for the Quality of Life". David Burton had a session on "Teaching Art History". Peggy Wood, then VAEA newsletter editor, was selected as the VAEA Art Educator of the Year in 1988. In 1989, the conference was held in Virginia Beach with the theme "An Art Sea Affair". That

year, Patsy Parker was the VAEA Treasurer and Barbara Laws was the VAEA Past President. There were 599 VAEA members that year. And in 1990, our own Barbara Laws, current Policy Chair on the VAEA Board, was selected as the Virginia Art Educator of the Year. The conference was held in Richmond in 1990. Thank you to all of our hardworking members from the late 1980s who are still very active with our organization still today!

**Fun Fact:** In 1970, dues for active members were \$2 and \$1 for students! In 1974, dues were \$4 for full members and \$2 for students! ■

# Virginia Department of Education

Kelly Bisogno



## An Update on the Review and Revision of Visual Arts SOL

The Virginia Department of Education will conduct a review of the 2020 Visual Arts Standards of Learning (SOL) in 2026–2027. This review occurs on a seven-year cycle to ensure the standards remain relevant, rigorous, and aligned with current best practices in art education.

In March 2026, educators and members of the public were invited to submit comments and suggestions on the existing standards, and educators were invited to submit an interest form for joining a review committee. This feedback will be reviewed by review committees in mid-2026. Following this work, a draft of proposed revisions will be shared with external partners, including museums, cultural organizations, industry representatives, and institutions of higher education.

In early 2027, after the Board of Education conducts a first review of the proposed changes, educators and

the public will have another opportunity to provide input before the standards are finalized.

Once adopted in 2027, the revised standards will guide curriculum development, instruction, and classroom assessment in Virginia's public schools. Art educators are encouraged to stay engaged throughout the process. For more information, visit the Virginia Department of Education's Fine Arts webpage. ■

# Policy

## Barbara Laws



We're finally at the end of the very busy General Assembly session. This year, as all even years, brought a long session of 60 days in which all of the arts education associations and the Virginia Coalition for Fine Arts Education (VCFAE) work together even more closely than usual. While it's exciting during the session, we're certainly ready to see it end.

We scan the subject headings of all regular House of Delegates (1531) and Senate (836) bills and track legislation of interest, keeping a close eye on that which could impact arts education. This year there were several which required our attention:

- HB478, introduced by Del. Watts, requires the Board of Education to develop guidelines for a diploma seal of excellence in the fine arts. The bill passed both chambers unanimously and is sitting on the Governor's desk waiting for her action, the deadline of which is April 13. We are hopeful.
- HB36, introduced by Del. Cole, and SB656, filed by Sen. Durant, in response to a request by one of her constituents, would have increased the class size cap in 6th grade music classes from 35 to 45. While it is important to have a large number of students in beginning classes to ensure sufficient enrollment in upper-level classes (something that also impacts the other arts discipline including visual art), that concern is more than superseded by the need for smaller classes for students in beginning level instrumental classes. After significant opposition from a number of stakeholders, including the VA Music Educators Association (VMEA), VAEA, and VCFAE, the patrons withdrew their bills.
- HB1249, introduced by Del. Glass, would have created a Creative Economy Task Force charged with creating a plan to grow the creative economy. Although not related directly to arts education, expansion of this economic sector would have provided additional future opportunities for our students. The bill was passed by the House but was continued until 2027 by the Senate Finance and Appro-

priations Committee.

We have found – more than ever – that personal connections to individual legislators are unbelievably effective in making an impact on policy. On Arts Advocacy Hill Day, January 22, Michelle Milligan, VMEA Advocacy and Government Relations Chair, Mike Kalafatis, VAEA Advocacy Chair, and I visited the offices of the sponsors of these bills and House and Senate Education Committee and subcommittee chairs, spoke to legislative aides, and took with us prepared VCFAE position statements on each of the bills to leave behind contact information. We then went separately to visit with our own legislators. We think the conversations were really constructive.

We used a variety of means to contact the legislators including directly through email, calling the office, and testifying before committees virtually. We also initiated calls for action to you, our members, and other stakeholders in the legislative process and appreciate the great response. I know it made a difference. Thank you for your efforts! Many voices are more likely to make an impact, and legislators like to hear from their constituents.

If you don't know your legislator, this summer would be a good time to connect with them. You never know when you'll have an "ask" and it's better to make a deposit before you need to make a withdrawal. We also keep a chart of legislators, their "friends", and other information so if you have a close relationship with a legislator, please let us know. ■

# Membership

Patsy Parker



**It's all about opportunity!**

The annual VAEA state “mini convention” is in the preparation stage, and they are not the only ones planning. My mission is to gather public, private, independent and parochial school art educators (at least annually) and group them together to engage in what I have experienced for the last 40 years. There are so many Virginia K–12 art educators that are not part of our NAEA/VAEA family.

So, what am I doing about this? Well, I set myself up for the task of contacting the VAIS (Virginia Association of Independent Schools) school leadership again. I had written letters testifying how membership in VAEA had enhanced my teaching and how it affected the depth and breadth of my curriculum. I stressed that often being the only art educator in a Fine Arts department may be daunting in contrast to being a member of a large city’s art faculty. Similarly, many county art educators do not have the luxury VAEA members have of obtaining shared knowledge concerning trends in art history, studio, critique, media and curricula to enrich their programs and further the development of the “whole” student. The Professional Development I received from my school district was the gift I had taken for granted.

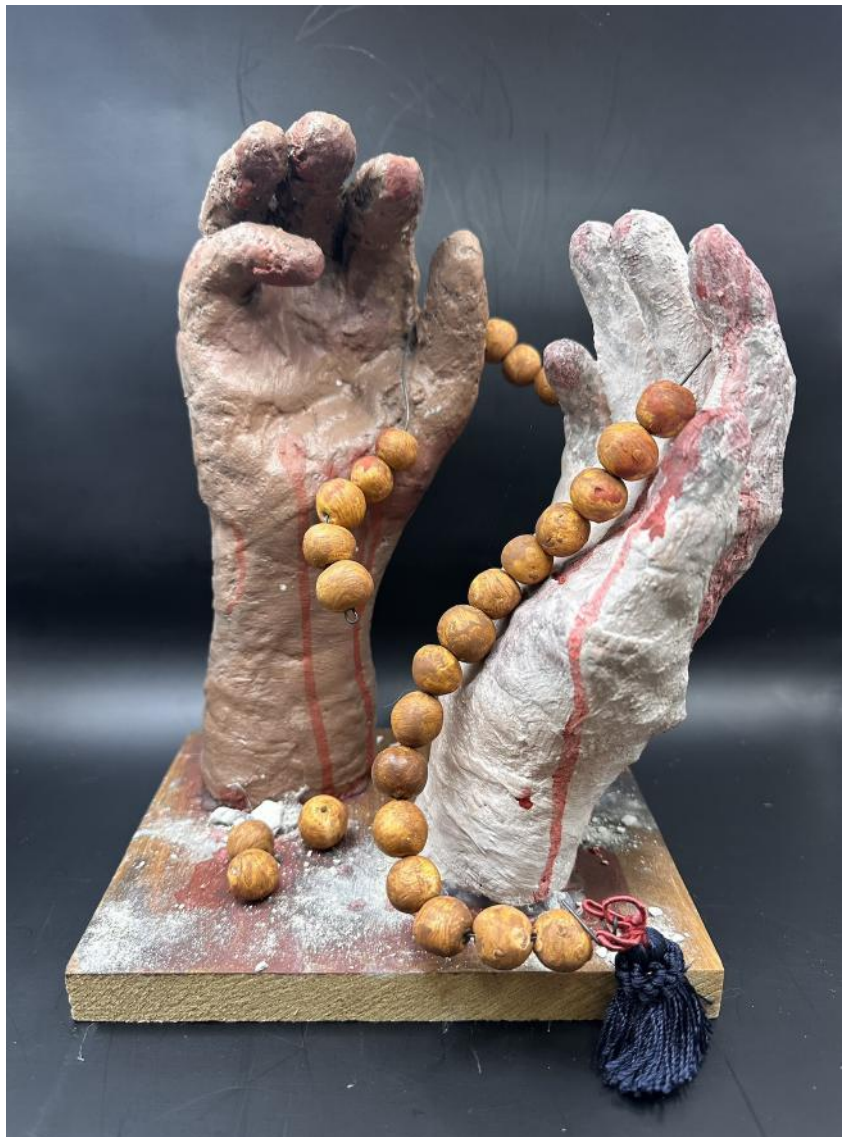
Please help! Now is the time to reach out to give non-members time to discover VAEA and schedule participation in our annual (Art) Family Reunion. If you know any art cousins, please urge them to discover the conference content on [vaea.org](http://vaea.org) and share about the wealth of belonging to NAEA/VAEA. It is such an easy (fun) and beneficial way to earn recertification points. There is not one administrator who isn’t pleased (‘gold stars’ on their annual report) that his/her/their art teacher is attending and may be presenting a session or two at the state or national level.

So, what will I be doing in the meantime? I’m

starting by contacting the VAIS folks again sharing about how our fall conference will be centrally located in Richmond. Then I’m reaching out to every art educator I can find and share our website. Hopefully if someone is contacted twice, they will think again about NAEA/VAEA and plan to join us at the state conference.

Thank you for believing, caring and sharing!

Thank you for everything you do for Art Education in Virginia! ■



*Angelina, 12th Grade, Liberty High School, Heather Deeney*

# Research

Kelly Nelson



artist, but the work is on a computer.

## Research in Action:

### Q & A with Sara Cubberley

Are you excited to unleash some creativity and get your students engaged with digital tools? Whether you are just testing the water of digital resources or looking to spice up your toolkit, you'll enjoy learning how Sara Cubberley, Supervisor of Art at Roanoke County Public Schools, utilizes Adobe Express (a free program) and activates students' creativity and design. After teaching for eleven years, Sara transitioned into her supervisory role but still teaches a couple of classes herself. Beyond that, she supports other teachers, develops curriculum, manages the gifted art program, and oversees the Center for Visual Arts, which offers and accelerated and enriched art experience for advanced high school students.

Q: Describe one of your most effective digital art education practices.

A: I have found my most successful lessons involve translating a process or the work of a fine artist to a digital form so that fine art blends with the digital arts.

Students learn to work as a fine

Q: What resources are recommended to implement your practice?

A: Our district has the full creative suite, Adobe Creative Cloud. I recommend student access to Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop and Lightroom (or Lightroom Mobile) for dedicated graphic design and photography classes, as these programs are the industry standard. For mixing in occasional digital lessons into the curriculum, Adobe Express is fun and versatile—and it is free.

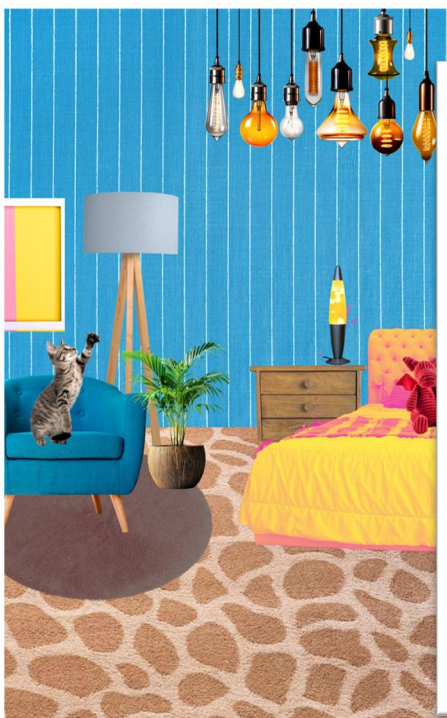
Q: Walk us through one of your effective digital art lessons:

A: Room Collage is now my favorite. Students use stock images in Adobe Express and just like a magazine collage, they create a digital collage. This works well in collaboration with a world language class—once the collage is made, the students present the room in their secondary language, reinforcing vocabulary. Group work can be involved if one student designs a kitchen, and another designs a bedroom, and in the end the students market the house. I enjoy the fun in searching

for images, as there are limited options in the program, yet quite a variety, just like when you shop or search through a magazine.

Q: Will you share a tried-and-true introductory digital lesson?

A: The Lip Balm Label project includes a bit of product design and photography. One of our schools—Glenvar High—has a beehive and makes lip balm, so we purchase our tubes from them. My students create their own label, which we print on sticker paper. They do a photo shoot to



Continued on page 27

# Regional Messages Northern

## Kelly Wasson



Hello Northern VA Art Superstars! Spring is in the air, creativity is blooming, and Youth Art Month has wrapped our schools in that wonderful, electric buzz we all know and love. I hope your month was filled with joyful moments, big and small, that reminded you just how transformative the arts can be.

Youth Art Month always gives us permission to dial up the magic, to let creativity spill into hallways, walls, windows, and hearts. This year, I leaned into that spirit by handing out art supplies and Post-it notes for our annual collaborative bulletin board, along with color-your-own paper flowers for every student and staff member. Those little blossoms turned into cheerful window-box displays outside the bus arrival area, simple, vibrant, and full of the kind of joy YAM is all about.

As we close out our Youth Art Month celebrations, please note that YAM Portfolio submission dates have been changed this year to the end of June. Keep an eye out for an email from our fantastic YAM Chairs with updated details and submission guidelines.

We are also thrilled to announce the NVAEA Spring Workshop 2026, a hands-on creative experience designed to refresh and inspire. Join fellow art educators on Saturday, April 18th at the Haymarket Public Library

for a free basketweaving workshop. You will learn traditional weaving techniques using natural cane and reed and leave with a completed handcrafted market basket. All materials are provided, just bring your creativity and enjoy a relaxing morning of making and connecting with colleagues across Northern Virginia.

Looking ahead to next fall, we will all be together again at the Fall Conference in Richmond, October 22 to 24, and it is already shaping up to be an inspiring few days. Start thinking now about a session you would love to present. Your ideas, strategies, and classroom stories could be exactly the spark another educator is looking for.

And now: Awards!!! It may feel early, but this is the perfect time to start noticing the amazing people around you. Think about colleagues who inspire you, innovate in their programs, lift up their students, or champion the power of art education in meaningful ways. Those are the people who deserve a nomination, and you might be one of them too!

Thank you for the incredible magic you create every day. The joy you spark, the worlds you help your students imagine, and the colorful communities you build matter so much. Here is to more art, more learning, and more shared moments of wonder as we continue this creative journey together this spring and beyond. ■



*Dahila, 7th Grade, Old Donation School, Leigh Drake*

# Central

## Kelly Cullum



### Making Time to Create

As art educators, we spend our days pouring our energy into others. Along with lesson planning, prepping materials, and supporting student growth, many of us also advise clubs, coach, mentor, and take on leadership roles within our schools and counties. In the midst of constantly giving, it's easy to forget something important: we are creators and artists too. Making time to nurture your own creativity is essential to sustaining both your teaching and your well-being.



The spring months, in particular, can feel overwhelming. Between daily classroom responsibilities, student testing, exhibition setups, and after-school events, this time of year often becomes the most hectic. It's easy for personal artmaking to become an afterthought, leading to creative burnout. As someone who experiences this each spring, I know how frustrating it can be, especially when creativity is such a core part of your identity. So how do we reconnect with the joy that brought us to art education in the first place?

For me, it starts with small, intentional choices. Reconnecting with creativity doesn't require hours of studio time, it can begin with giving yourself space to pause, reflect, and explore without pressure. One practice I've carried with me since graduate school is a simple daily exercise: creating a circle. I spend anywhere from 2-20 minutes each day making one circle, ensuring each is different from the last. Over time, I've explored a variety of media, including fabric and embroidery. This idea can easily translate to sketching, color exploration, or collage. The goal is not to produce polished work, but to engage in the process.

Another way to incorporate creativity into your routine is to create alongside your students. While this can be challenging, especially at the middle school level, it is possible in small moments. As a digital media teacher, I often find brief windows where I can sketch on my iPad or

*Continued on page 27*

# Blue Ridge

## Melissa Combs



If you would like to be more involved in VAEA and help plan workshops and events for our region, please consider running for the regional board! Our regional



board works as a team to plan and communicate happenings around our region and there will be several board positions available this election season.

Currently, we are working to plan a travelling art teacher show. It takes some time to align all of the stars and find gallery spaces that are available at the right times, but we hope to have some spaces lined up soon. If you know of gallery space that would like to host an art teacher show, please let a regional board member know!

Our one-day workshops have been very popular lately and we plan to have another one in late summer or early fall. That workshop will most likely be during the week and we will use that opportunity to create pins for the state conference as well.

The state conference is a little closer this year so I hope to have a great turn out for Blue Ridge region. As always, if you have feedback or ideas for future workshops or regional events, please let us know! ■



Brylee, 5th Grade, Hardy Elementary School, Rebecca Martin-Meissner

## Southwest

**Sierra Fraizer**  
SWVAEA Vice President  
Guest Author



This school year has been an exciting and meaningful one for the art students at Craig County High School, marked by unique opportunities, creative growth, and strong community connections.



Our students were honored to be the only school featured in the Ruth C. Horton Gallery in the Moss Arts Center. Centered around the theme “Dreamscapes,” the exhibition invited students to explore imagination, symbolism, and personal narrative through their artwork. The experience extended beyond the gallery walls as students attended an opening reception where they engaged viewers and reflected on their creative processes. An accompanying field trip further enriched the experience, allowing students to see their work in a professional setting and connect with a broader arts community.

Building on this momentum, we had the opportunity to travel with our exhibition to the Alexander Black House in Blacksburg, Virginia. Presenting our work in a second venue allowed students to gain a deeper understanding of how art can live and evolve across different spaces, while also reaching new audiences.

In addition, Radford University hosted its annual High School Juried Art Show, where Craig County High School was represented by three student works. We are especially proud that one of our students received the Fine Arts Award of Merit, recognizing both technical and creative vision. This achievement reflects the dedication and talent of our students, as well as the supportive environment they continue to build together.

Throughout the year, these experiences have fostered valuable connections with local galleries, universities, and the wider arts community that will continue to benefit our program moving forward. Opportunities like these not only highlight student achievement but also reinforce the importance of art education in developing confidence, communication, and creative thinking.

*Continued on page 27*

## Tidewater Melanie Soscia



As the new President of the Tidewater Region, I am honored to continue our region’s strong commitment to our educators and the fine arts commu-



nity. Along with a stellar Tidewater board with talented arts educators from across our diverse area, we look forward to serving our teachers and educators in new ways while recommitting to long-standing partnerships across our region.

In February, Tidewater hosted our annual Winter Workshop professional development day at the Mary M. Torggler Fine Arts Center at Christopher Newport University in Newport News. Teachers from around our region came together to learn about new hands-on techniques that included collaging fabric and sculpting cardboard; 3D printing in the art room; contemplating what “art” is with students; and how to incorporate inclusive practices into our classrooms in order to serve a wide variety of ever-changing student needs. The Tidewater Region and Board thanks The Torggler Fine Arts Center for their partnership for the third consecutive year and we look forward to continuing to work together for the benefit of our local community and educators.

As the weather gets warmer (and sometimes colder again, and then hot, and then snows, and then warm again), our teachers are preparing for the end of the school year and the start of summer. And while summer is a cherished season for all educators, art teachers in particular relish the opportunity to focus on our own creativity and enhancing our own techniques and skills. Often times summer is our only chance to really dig in and focus on creating our own artwork and to find ways to slow down enough to be inspired by what we cherish during this different pace of life.

We hope that as summer approaches and you begin to think about this new season, you will join us on Thursday, July 16th, and Friday, July 17th, at the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk for the Summer Teacher Institute! We will be partnering with their museum educators from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm each day to “Reflect and Recharge” while exploring the galleries and working to refine our own artistic practices. July is the perfect time to gain space and distance from the previous school year for

*Continued on page 27*

# Pre-Service

## Grace Smith



### “Retired Teachers Q&A”

As we get ready for the summer and wrap up the end of the semester, I wanted to shout out the amazing accomplishments of our NAEA/VAEA family. The NAEA conference in Chicago was a huge hit! Every NAEA conference is full of networking opportunities for pre-service educators. It also provides lots of ideas for the classroom—and supplies, if you’re lucky! For me, it settled many of my nerves about becoming an art teacher and reminded me of the community I’ve always had. If you weren’t able to make it this year, consider starting with the VAEA Conference this October. While you’re there, find a buddy or classmate to and plan to attend the NAEA conference with them. This year, we will be working on more opportunities for pre-service educators to attend, like “Getting Hired: Mock Interviews” or

As a pre-service educator myself, I understand the stress levels of college classes and how much work you all are putting into each semester. However, these conferences are here to provide an escape from the work and to celebrate the fun of being an art educator! There are even opportunities to lead workshops or presentations if you would like to practice projection or speaking skills with classmates. If you find yourself wanting to attend but needing a buddy, I am always here! You can find my email on the website and find out about conferences, events, or future ideas you’d like to collaborate on together. Hopefully I’ll see you at the VAEA Conference in October; otherwise, have a wonderful summer! ■

# DEIA

## Rachel Principe



I’m Rachel Principe, a high school art educator working in Chesterfield, VA. I am serving as your new VAEA Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access Chair. I’m excited to begin the work to help art educators not only ensure we are creating equitable, accessible, and inclusive environments for all learners, but to advocate for these initiatives both inside and outside of our school communities. What is DEIA? Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access are four foundational ideas that are essential to creating a safe and secure learning environment for all students. To borrow some definitions from my district, diversity is the presence of difference; inclusion is recognizing and honoring those differences, equity is ensuring those differences don’t limit opportunity or access. The VAEA also includes access as an essential part of DEI initiatives, in order to ensure people with disabilities and marginalized groups can fully engage, utilize resources, and participate on an equal footing. Why is this work important? ■

In our current climate where DEIA initiatives are being stripped, it is important to uphold and model these ideals for our students and to understand the barriers that may be in the way for some of our learners. What better space to be the example for DEIA than an art classroom? This is a curriculum that is saturated with concepts of diversity (understanding different artforms and perspectives) and promotes empathy and inclusion. Art classrooms should be spaces where every student sees their own cultural background, heritage, and identity reflected and valued. The most honest and the strongest student work comes out of spaces that feel the safest to our students. DEIA ensures that students from marginalized groups—including those based on race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, ability, gender identity, and sexual orientation—feel a sense of belonging and see their stories as essential contributions to their communities. How can you help? As we move forward in doing the work to ensure our

*Continued on page 27*

# Youth Art Month

## Kaitlyn Canter & Karla Kolb



Youth Art Month in Virginia: Portfolio Recognition and Student Achievement

Kaitlyn Canter & Karla Kolb

Virginia art educators and students were recognized nationally this year when the Virginia Youth Art Month Digital Portfolio received an Award of Merit from the Council for Art Education. The award was presented during the 2026 National Art Education Association Convention in Chicago, highlighting the collaborative efforts of art educators across the Commonwealth to celebrate and advocate for visual arts education.

Each year, Virginia educators document Youth Art Month celebrations through a statewide digital portfolio coordinated through the Virginia Art Education Association. The portfolio captures the many ways teachers promote art education within their schools and communities. Documentation includes student exhibitions, school and community art events, advocacy efforts, partnerships, and social media outreach that highlight the importance of visual arts programs.

District submissions also demonstrate how art educators build meaningful connections between students, schools, and their communities through creative experiences. Portfolio documentation highlights participation numbers, events and exhibits, program improvements, proclamations from local leaders, and partnerships that support art education.

### 2026 YAM Portfolio guidelines

Together, these contributions create the Virginia Youth Art Month portfolio submitted for national recognition. The Award of Merit reflects the dedication and leadership of Virginia art educators who continue to elevate student voice and creativity through Youth Art Month programming.

Another highlight of the Youth Art Month celebration is the annual YAM Flag Design Competition,

which invites students across Virginia to create artwork inspired by the national theme, “The World Needs Art.” The statewide winning design is reproduced as the official Youth Art Month flag representing Virginia at the National Art Education Association Convention.

The 2026 Virginia Youth Art Month Flag winner is Sienna Breault, a sixth-grade student from Old Donation School (teacher: Leigh Drake), whose design represents Virginia’s creative spirit and the importance of art in shaping the future.

Virginia educators are encouraged to continue documenting their Youth Art Month celebrations and submit materials for the 2026 Virginia Youth Art Month Digital Portfolio. Submissions should include a shareable Google Slides presentation highlighting events, student

artwork, and advocacy efforts. The documentation form and portfolio materials are due June 1.

Youth Art Month continues to be a powerful opportunity for art educators to showcase student creativity, advocate for visual arts programs, and strengthen connections between schools and their communities.



**Sienna Breault,**  
6th Grade, Old Donation School, Leigh Drake

# Retiree News

Linda Conti



It is such a pleasure to join the VAEA Board in a new position for me: Retired Chair. While this is a wonderful chance to be of service to art educators in Virginia, I know I am following some very able retired leaders such as Ginna Cullen, Carla Jaranson, and Lynn Hilton-Conyers.

After a satisfying twenty-nine years of teaching art in the classroom, it is a whole different perspective to be fully retired and figuring out what to do with the gift of time. Most retired art educators were teaching for a long time, through early years after college, changing ideas about how to teach art, Covid-19, and then the recovery from that crisis. We have seen it all!

The challenge to retired art educators is how to use that knowledge to support art teachers who are still in the trenches. Let us be a resource for you. If you need a professional to consult regarding an ongoing or strange problem in the art room, please contact us. We have quite a number of very capable retirees ready to assist. Often it is helpful to have someone to hear you out, perhaps someone outside of your current school. My new email is [lindamconti58@gmail.com](mailto:lindamconti58@gmail.com). Feel free to reach out.

Retirees are ready to be active mentors. Recently I had an opportunity to interview Ron Fabin for the “Legends and Legacies”

Project started by David Burton. It was so informative to hear from Ron about his career teaching art. Many of us travel similar roads in our journey as teachers, and it is reinforcing to hear how others have dealt with those paths.



Ron served as President of VAEA, went to England and Japan with the Fullbright programs, and continues to explore his own art through drawing, printing, photography, stained glass, and quilting. Please look at the “Legends and Legacies” articles saved on the VAEA website, especially the latest one on Ron Fabin, an inspiring educator! ■



Alexander and Lillian, 3rd Grade, O.B. Gates Elementary School, Kai Chen

# Why Join NAEA & VAEA?

One Membership.

Two Powerful Communities.

Membership connects you to both state and national support systems—providing professional growth, advocacy, inspiration, and a community that understands the unique work of art educators.

The Virginia Art Education Association and the National Art Education Association support, connect, and advocate for visual arts educators at the state and national levels.

## National Art Education Association

- High-quality professional learning through [live and on-demand webinars](#)
- Discounted registration for the annual [NAEA National Convention](#)
- Subscriptions to [Art Education Journal](#), [NAEA News](#), and [Schoolarts Magazine](#)
- Access to [national standards](#), [research](#), and [curriculum resources](#)
- Networking through [interest groups](#) and online [communities](#)
- [Leadership](#), awards, and [national recognition](#) opportunities
- [Advocacy](#) for arts education at the national level
- Eligibility for [NAEF grants](#) and funding opportunities
- Ability to sponsor [National Art Honor Society chapters](#)
- Career support resources, including [job postings](#), leadership pathways, and [mentoring](#)
- Opportunities to [present](#) at national and regional conferences
- Pratt CEUs for NAEA Programming
- [Connection](#) to special interest groups by grade level, media, and teaching focus
- Opportunities to [exhibit](#) personal and student work
- Member [Insurance](#) Discounts



## Virginia Art Education Association

- Professional learning and [resources](#) tailored to Virginia educators
- Access to the VAEA Annual [Conference](#) and regional events
- State-level [awards](#) and recognition programs
- Networking and mentorship with fellow Virginia art educators
- Opportunities to serve in leadership and support advocacy across the Commonwealth
- Strong local community supporting K–12, higher education, and preservice educators
- Opportunities to showcase member and [student work](#) through exhibitions, [publications](#), and spotlights
- Access to regional networks for localized collaboration and problem-solving
- Support for early-career and preservice teachers through mentoring and professional pathways
- Features on VAEA Social Media Webinars

**Join today and invest in your growth, your students, and the future of art education!**

# Continued...

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## Continued from SWVAEA

As art educators in Southwest Virginia, we often work across a wide geographic region where many schools have just one art teacher serving their entire student body. Because of this, building connections and sharing opportunities is especially important. I would love to hear from other educators in the region about exhibitions, student opportunities, and collaborative ideas. Please feel free to reach out and connect so we can continue to strengthen our creative community.

As we look ahead, we are excited to culminate the year with our own campus-wide art show in May. This event will celebrate the growth, experimentation, and accomplishments of all our students while inviting our school and local community to experience the vibrant work being created at Craig County High School.

It has truly been a year of inspiration, connection, and artistic exploration. ■

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## Continued from K. Nelson

create a static ad, and also do a 15 second video shoot on a turntable for a commercial. This assignment starts small and progressively grows more in-depth with digital tools. Students also create silly brands or off-the-wall designs, like pizza flavored balm! ■

Questions? Contact Sara Cubberley at [scubberley@rcps.us](mailto:scubberley@rcps.us).

The QR code has step-by-step Room Collage instructions.



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## Continued from K. Cullum

drape on a dress form while students are working independently. These moments not only support my own creativity but also model artistic practice for my students.

Equally important is finding connection. Many art educators work in isolation, particularly in smaller districts. Building a creative community, whether through colleagues, workshops, or online spaces can reignite inspiration and remind us we're not alone.

Give yourself permission to create again. Start small and stay consistent. When we nurture our own creativity, we not only support ourselves, we enrich our classrooms and inspire our students. ■

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## Continued from M. Soscia

authentic reflection, while also offering the chance to renew our goals and recommit to our teaching practices for the upcoming school year. Teachers from all regions are encouraged to join the Summer Teacher Institute. More information will be shared via email and on our social media accounts as it becomes available.

Once again, I thank you for welcoming me into my new leadership position with grace and encouragement, and I look forward to serving the art educators in the Tidewater region in a variety of ways in the months to come! ■

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## Continued from R. Principe

schools and communities are truly equitable, and the content is truly accessible to all students, we must ask the hard questions: What biases do I have? Are these biases creating barriers to any of my students? Do all my students feel safe and supported? What changes can I make, that are in my control, to foster a greater sense of belonging in my classroom? In the coming months, I hope to highlight various DEIA literature and big ideas from these books that you can utilize in your classrooms. First up will be some big takeaways from the book, *Ruthless Equity: Disrupt the Status Quo* and *Ensure Learning for ALL Students*, by Ken Williams. Keep your eyes on social media for these DEIA Literature reviews.

Call to Action:

If you are interested in learning more about fostering more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible learning environments, please reach out to me at [rachel.principe@gmail.com](mailto:rachel.principe@gmail.com). I'm gathering a DEIA committee to plan ways we can promote more DEIA literature reviews, strategies, and dialogue with our VAEA community, at conference, as well as within your regions and districts. ■



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### Youth Art Month

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# Depth Perception

Lesson Plan for Grades 3–12



**Step 1:** Fold construction paper—accordion style—to form sides. Cut colored art paper in half.



**Step 2:** Cut paper as frames that recede in size. Cut objects from inner pieces. Apply depth-enhancing techniques as listed in lesson plan.



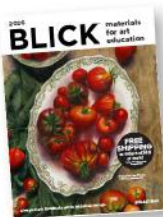
**Step 3:** Assemble by gluing cut frames in the folds of black paper. Position large objects on front frames, and smaller ones in the back.

Explore the principle of depth in art using perspective, shading, scale, and more within a simple, tunnel-like paper sculpture.

**CHECK OUT NEW** lesson plans and video workshops for students of all ages at [DickBlick.com/lesson-plans](https://DickBlick.com/lesson-plans).



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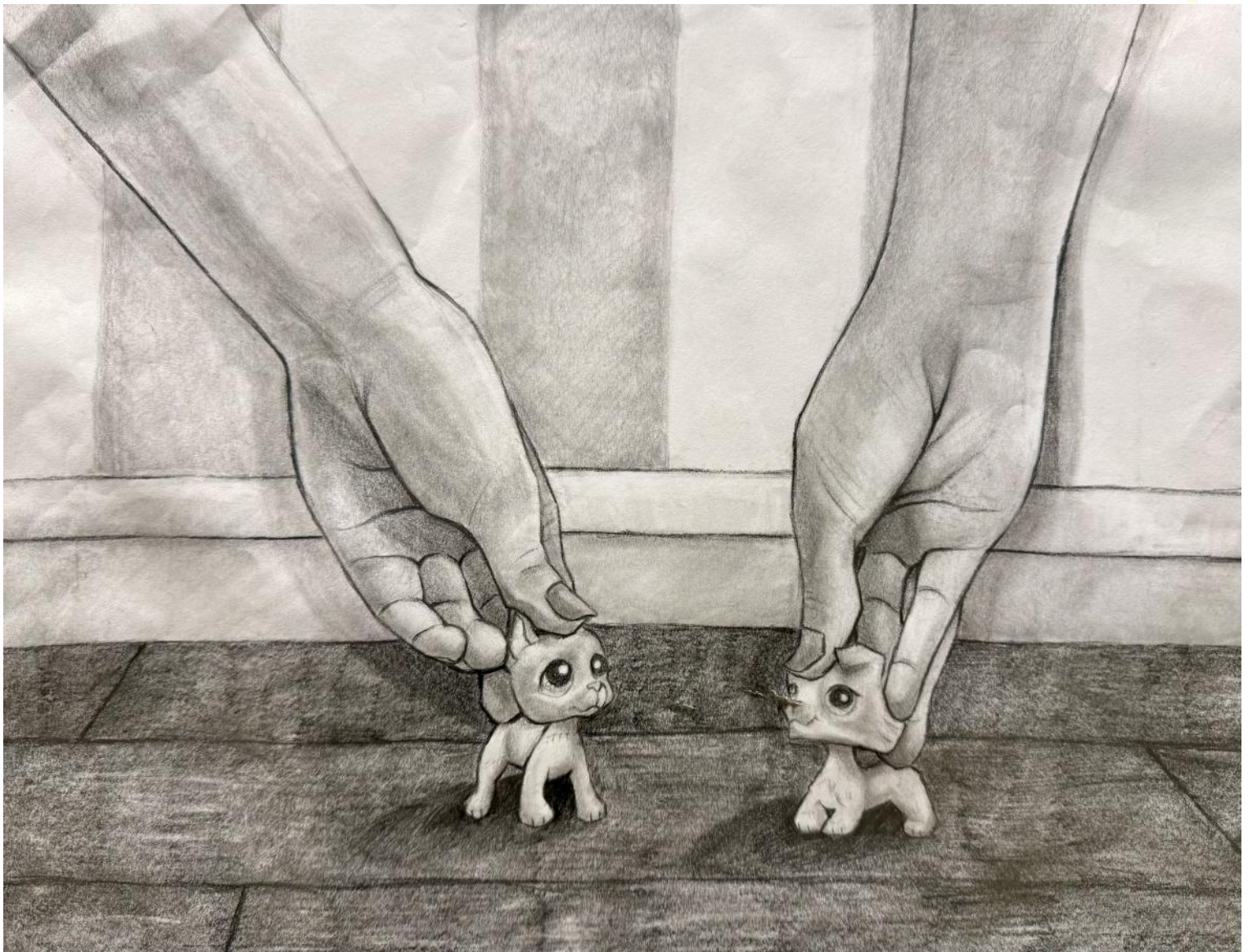
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Madi, 10th Grade, Clover Hill High School, Rachel Principe