

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS



N2KN: Need to Know Now

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Essential Questions and Enduring Understandings

In what ways do Essential Questions and Enduring Understandings contribute to the implementation of the Arts Standards?

Essential questions and enduring understandings are hallmarks of Backward Design or Understanding by Design, the seminal work of authors Jay McTighe and the late Grant Wiggins. Backward Design is a way of thinking purposefully about curricular planning and school reform. Backward Design transforms content standards into focused learning targets based on big ideas, essential questions, enduring understandings and transfer tasks. The National Coalition for Core Arts Standards solicited the guidance of Jay McTighe in the early stages of standards development to ensure that the reconceptualized standards were steeped in rigor and focused on students' ability to demonstrate understanding through performance.

Essential questions and enduring understandings, like process components, serve as guides to help students complete the artistic processes: Creating, Performing/Presenting/Producing, Responding and Connecting. They offer pathways through which artistic works may be accomplished. Since the artistic discipline writing teams for Dance, Media Arts, Music, Theatre and Visual Arts utilized different process components and discipline specific essential questions and enduring understandings, it was necessary to develop 11 overarching anchor standards to unify the arts.

Why It Matters to You

- It is important to understand the structure of the standards in order to use them effectively.
- Dance, Media Arts and Music, for example, relied heavily on process components to inform the creation of performance standards, while Theatre and Visual Arts utilized enduring understandings and essential questions to describe measurable student outcomes.
- Essential companion questions are used to engage learners in thoughtful meaning making to help them develop and deepen their understanding of important ideas and processes that support transfer of learning.
- Students' ability to address essential questions empowers them to work through the artistic processes independently.

Things to Consider

Disciplines in the arts utilized design tools such as process components and essential questions in different ways.

Reflection Questions

- What structures work best to organize making and reflecting on art?
- What is the scope and breadth of learning in an arts discipline?
- Why is it important to provide multiple portals for achieving the performance standards?

Resources for Attending to Access

The central purposes of education standards are to identify the learning that we want for all of our students and to drive improvement in the system that delivers that learning.

Every student should have access to quality instruction in all art forms, which should be represented within the curricula of every school across the nation, and students should develop competence in all four artistic processes through instruction in each art form. [Opportunity-to-Learn Standards](#) help encourage equitable delivery of arts education by outlining the resources necessary for students to succeed, illustrating a continuum of programming, allowing for program review, and articulating the basis for a comprehensive arts education.

In addition, the National Core Arts Standards website provides guidance on attending to the instructional needs of all learners with resources for teaching [exceptional children](#). Additional resources may be found on the National Association for Gifted Children website; which offers a [Position Statement](#) on Arts Education for Gifted and Talented Students.

Recommended Actions You Can Take

- Ensure that each of the artistic processes and anchor standards are represented in arts education programs.
- Provide opportunities for students to Create, Perform/Present/Produce, Respond and Connect in all arts disciplines.
- Provide support to arts educators and teaching artists who may need professional learning around the structure and elements of the new standards and their implementation in classrooms and learning settings.
- Ensure that school leaders understand the new standards and recognize the relationships between the anchor standards, artistic processes, and the grade by grade discipline-specific performance standards.
- Support the use of the new standards in pre-service and in-service learning opportunities so new teachers are well versed and prepared to use the standards.
- Advocate for state and federally funded arts education programs that support the new standards.
- Provide professional learning opportunities to discuss how Essential Questions and Enduring Understandings help describe learning in the arts standards.

“In teaching students for understanding, we must grasp the key idea that we are coaches of their ability to play the ‘game’ of performing with understanding to them on the sidelines.”

Grant Wiggins

Links

Useful Resources:

- American Alliance for Theatre & Education- <http://www.aate.com/core-arts-standards>
- College Board- <http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/arts/arts-at-the-core-brochure-2012.pdf>
- Educational Theatre Association- <https://www.schooltheatre.org/advocacy/standardsresources>
- National Art Education Association- <https://www.arteducators.org/learn-tools/national-visual-arts-standards>
- National Dance Education Organization- http://www.ndeo.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=893257&module_id=185206
- National Association for Gifted Children- <https://www.nagc.org/sites/default/files/Position%20Statement/Arts%20Education%20and%20Gifted%20and%20Talented%20Students.pdf>
- National Association for Music Education- <https://nafme.org/my-classroom/standards/>
- State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education- https://www.pepperpd.com/courses-list?subject_id=ARTS&grade_id=all&author_id=SEADAE
- Young Audiences- <http://www.youngaudiences.org/why-arts/national-core-arts-standards-faq>

