

SUCCESS STORY: Building Teacher Sustainability Through Mentorship



**Support Effective
Educators and
School Leaders**

Iowa Alliance for Arts Education “Model of Excellence” Mentoring Program

The primary mission of the Iowa Alliance for Arts Education (IAAE) is to increase awareness, recognition and support of policies, practices and partnerships that ensure and advance quality arts education for all Iowans. The Iowa Alliance for Arts Education’s “Model of Excellence Mentoring Program” is an integral part of our programming to help us fulfill our mission to support quality arts education in our state.

The Iowa Alliance for Arts Education has been operating a mentoring program for beginning fine arts teachers since 2005. We are currently celebrating our 20th year of operation in the state of Iowa. During that time our program has grown from a simple block grant program to three fine arts professional organizations to a comprehensive mentoring program that is currently collaborating with seven fine arts educational organizations, the Iowa Department of Education and the Iowa legislature.

Mentor Program Components and Participants:

The IAAE mentoring program has three components which are designed to assist the beginning fine arts teacher through the first two years of their teaching career. In the state of Iowa, the novice teacher must have two successful years of teaching before a permanent teaching license can be issued. The three components of the mentoring program are:

1. A scholarship of \$500 annually the first two years of teaching to assist beginning teachers to attend professional conferences in the state of Iowa and pay professional dues.
2. A no-cost professional development conference that is geared to the needs of the beginning teacher.
3. Unlimited virtual and in-person mentor visits by active and retired teacher mentors that are assigned by the teacher’s respective professional arts education organization.

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These visits are provided to local school districts at no cost. IAAE reimburses all in-person mentors \$150 a day, plus meals, mileage and hotel. Virtual mentors are reimbursed at \$25 per hour.

IAAE is currently partnering with the following seven professional arts education organizations to implement this program across the state:

1. Art Educators of Iowa
2. Iowa Bandmasters Association
3. Iowa Choral Directors Association
4. Iowa High School Speech Association
5. Iowa Music Educators Association
6. Iowa String Teachers Association
7. Iowa Thespians

The program is administered by Leon Kuehner, IAAE executive director, and Cassidy Noring, middle school band director at Adel-DeSoto-Minburn School district. Each of seven professional arts education organizations has representatives on a mentorship committee that locates and assigns mentors to the beginning teachers, designs the annual Fall Symposium professional development conference and provides input to IAAE on project implementation.

“ Art Educators of Iowa allowed me to collaborate with teachers all over the state and gave me the confidence to make many changes to art education in my own district, including revising the district art website, building curriculum, and even establishing new courses and clubs at the high school. I credit IAAE with my success today. I have achieved so much in the first three years of my career simply because of the individuals I met within that organization and its affiliate, Art Educators of Iowa. ”

-Model of Excellence Program Participant

Mentor Program Funding

In 2005, the initial year of the mentoring program, IAAE received funding from the Iowa Department of Education to provide block grants to three professional arts education organizations to provide professional development for beginning teachers in their respective

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organizations. During that year, project co-administrators Leon Kuehner and Elizabeth Fritz, along with Iowa Department of Education Fine Arts Consultant Rosanne Malek, designed the components of the mentoring program and submitted them to the Iowa Department of Education for approval and funding. During the Obama administration, the mentoring program was included in an Iowa Department of Education Teacher Quality Grant application to the federal government. When this grant was approved, the grant operated with federal funds, administered through the Iowa Department of Education. When the federal funding was completed, the IAAE lobbyist suggested we look for funding from the Iowa legislature as part of the state of Iowa education budget. IAAE contacted many key legislators about the need for the mentoring program for fine arts teachers. The state of Iowa had a mentoring program for teachers, but the mentors were not necessarily discipline specific.

The rural legislators we talked to understood the need for the program since fine arts teachers in smaller schools were often only teacher of a specific subject area in the school building, and in some cases the entire school district. The IAAE lobbyist suggested that we offer a cash match for any funds appropriated by the legislature. After many discussions, it was decided that the legislature would provide \$25,000 with IAAE matching these funds. This provided IAAE with a \$50,000 annual budget to run the mentoring program. In 2023, this appropriation was raised to \$50,000 with a \$50,000 IAAE cash/in-kind match. IAAE hosts an annual Arts Education Advocacy Day at the state capitol in Des Moines. Each year we have mentor/mentee pairs talk to key legislators or testify to the Education Committee on the impact and importance of the mentoring program to their teaching career. It is a testament to the program that the funding for the program has been approved the last eleven legislative sessions. It made no difference which political party was in power, the legislators understood the need and impact that the program was having on Iowa teachers.

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Thanks to funding from the IAAE, I was also given the opportunity to work with a retired band director, someone with over thirty years of music education experience. This was a person who understood the unique challenges of teaching in a music classroom...The IAAE also sponsored a Fall Symposium where my mentor and I were able to network with other young teachers and share ideas collaboratively. I firmly believe that my success as a young teacher had much to do with my relationship with my retired teacher mentor, being able to meet face-to-face and receive relevant feedback throughout the year. The continued financial support of this mentorship program is truly an investment in Iowa's next generation of fine arts educators.

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-Model of Excellence Program Participant

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Impact and Scope of the Mentoring Program

Since its inception in 2005, the mentoring program has seen steady growth and participation from the professional fine arts organizations. Initially our outreach was mainly to music teachers. Over the years the program has expanded to include teachers of visual art, speech and drama. During the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school

years, COVID 19 had a devastating impact on education and especially arts education. Prior

to that time the mentor program only allowed in-person mentor visits. The need for mentoring skyrocketed during these two school years as teachers were facing unprecedented challenges in delivering instruction. IAAE pivoted and allowed virtual mentoring (Zoom, FaceTime, Go To Meeting, etc.) and this opportunity proved to be very popular and successful. When schools reopened, IAAE decided to keep this option in addition to the in-person format. During the 2023-24 school year, 531 mentor visits were completed with 434 being in-person and 97 being virtual. Our mentors visited 126 schools in 54 Iowa counties. Annually, 65-75% of schools that are visited by mentors are rural schools.

“During my first and second years of teaching, I had the pleasure of working with my active mentor, Mr. Jared Barnes, and my retired mentor, Mr. Steve Citta. Without Jared and Steve’s help and support, I do not think I would have lasted as a teacher. They pushed me to a level of confidence and knowledge I did not think I possessed, which I have in turn, used in my teaching to encourage my students to be the best musicians—and people—they can be. In a society where teachers are undervalued and the teacher shortage is rising, we need the mentorship program now more than ever.”

-Model of Excellence Program Participant

There are several key components that increase the impact of the mentoring program:

- The **dedication and passion** of the participating member organizations in locating the beginning teachers, assigning mentors and designing quality professional development.
- The **support and collaboration** of the Iowa Department of Education. IAAE operates the mentoring program under an annual contract with the Iowa Department of Education to provide mentoring services to the local school districts. The fact the IAAE mentoring program is a service provided by the Iowa Department of Education gives us immediate credibility with the local school districts.

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- The **financial support** of the Iowa legislature and donor contributions. After initially being funded by a federal grant, IAAE needed to find a stable source of income. The mentoring program is currently a line item in the Iowa education budget. We need to lobby for that continued support on an annual basis. Total funding of the program by a small non-profit (IAAE) would severely limit the services the program could provide. The unique partnership of a arts education non-profit organization with the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Legislature has proven to be successful.

Looking to the Future

IAAE has five goals in mind as we look into the future of the Model of Excellence Mentoring Program:

1. Increase funding from the Iowa legislature and donors to ensure the program will be in existence for future generations of beginning fine arts teachers.
2. Decrease the matching fund requirement from IAAE. We currently must match the \$50,000 annual appropriation with a \$50,000 cash/in-kind match.
3. Increase participation by the first- and second-year teachers from all the participating fine arts organizations in all aspects of the mentoring program (in-person and virtual mentoring, scholarships, professional development).
4. Continue the collaboration between the members of the IAAE mentorship committee in administering the program.
5. Increase sharing with other arts education organizations on what we have learned in the past twenty years of operating a mentor program.

We are hoping that the model we have established in Iowa can be adapted to other states to serve the beginning teachers across the country.

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Acknowledgments



Author:

Leon Kuehner has been the Executive Director for the Iowa Alliance for Arts Education since 2013 and Co-Administrator of the IAAE “Model of Excellence” mentoring program since 2006. He is a member of the Iowa Fine Arts Leadership Team for the Iowa Department of Education and was the instrumental music chair for the Iowa Fine Arts Standards Adoption Team. He also served as President of the Iowa Bandmasters Association and the Iowa High School Music Association Executive Board. He was the national winner of the National Federation of High School Association’s Citation for contributions to music education in 2012. In 2023 he received the Governor’s Arts Learning Award from Iowa Arts Council.



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About AEP Success Stories

The Arts Education Partnership at Education Commission of the States is a national network of more than 200 organizations dedicated to advancing arts education. AEP has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education since 1995 and is administered by Education Commission of the States. AEP is the nation's hub for arts and education leaders, building their leadership capacity to support students, educators and learning environments. Through research, reports, convenings and counsel, leaders gain knowledge and insights to ensure that all learners — especially those that have historically been marginalized — receive an excellent arts education. To achieve its goal to expand access to high-quality arts learning opportunities for all learners, AEP gathers detailed information on success stories with the potential to be replicated in communities across the country.

The Success Stories project collects submissions from organizations that highlight successful arts education programs. These stories demonstrate the benefits of arts education and promote continued collaboration and learning for individuals and organizations working toward student achievement and success.

Are you interested in sharing your work for a future success story? Please reach out to [Mitra Chamanbahar](#), AEP project manager, to share your story.

