

What an honor to be recognized as the 2019-20 Arts Unlimited Friend of the Arts. Under normal circumstances, I would be with you in the Forest View Theater, thanking you in person. We would also be recognizing the student artists, writers, and special student performances from each school for their outstanding contributions to the arts this year. Instead we are practicing social distancing by staying home and saving lives.

Congratulations, students! You all earned the right to represent your schools in the anthology or on the stage as a performer, and that's a fantastic honor.

If you are reading this, you are a friend of the arts. You are influenced by the arts and support the arts by presenting, performing and advocating for the arts. What will push us to the next level, to be the next champions for the arts? I look to others who challenge me to "take it to the next level" --to learn new things or take on new challenges, to continue to grow and flourish--to motivate others and push yourself and your advocacy for the arts to the next level.

Mentors challenged me throughout my career and made me a better friend of the arts. I've had many mentors; some knew they were mentors, and some were mentors from a distance. One distance mentor was Elliot Eisner, a great artist and art educator whose words, books and lectures inspire many today. Dr. Eisner, in "10 Lessons the Arts Teach," says, "The arts' position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young, what adults believe is important." I'm inspired by this idea because it emphasizes how smart our students are. They know that actions speak louder than words. Dr. Eisner challenges us all to keep pushing arts to the front of the education table. In fact, in March, because of the great arts advocacy by stakeholders from around the state, "Illinois made history, becoming the first state in the nation to include the arts as a distinct, weighted indicator of K-12 success in its school accountability system. The arts - dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts - now stand alongside subjects such as math and science in how the state measures the impact of every public school in Illinois." Our next step is advocating for implementation with input from all arts stakeholders - taking it to the next level.

Elliot Eisner also said, "The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer." Can there be a greater statement in the times we live in to know the arts have that kind of power, to challenge us to find multiple solutions to problems? Problem solving is a skill that can be taught and as arts presenters, performers and advocates we have learned and taught problem solving daily, whether we are students, teachers, mentors, or, parents. We know that most of the time there is more than one right answer to solving a problem. When we ask questions of ourselves and each other we expect to see multiple answers as well as original thought in those answers. We celebrate unique answers.

Grace Hartigan, a painter from Baltimore, was not my official professor, but was a mentor. She was a trailblazer and has been historically grouped as a post abstract expressionist and a early pop artist. She said when asked about her work said, "I cannot expect even my own art to provide all of the answers, only to hope it keeps asking the right questions." As artists, we continually challenge ourselves by asking questions about our own work, whether it is painting, composing or playing a song, dancing or acting we push ourselves to the next level. We also allow others to critique our work and use that information to help develop our studio

practice. We do not live in a vacuum. We pose questions, create, revise, edit, resolve and ask more questions and create again.

So now, as you are all friends of the arts, how can you challenge yourself and take it to the next level? Will you try a new art medium, learn a new musical instrument, mentor a student or colleague, pose more questions, advocate to your school or to the state legislature for more funding and grant opportunities for the arts? Whatever you choose, you are a welcome advocate to our Arts Community.

Thank you,

Barbara Shaffer
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