



# ELEMENTARY DIVISION

## Fall 2025 Spotlight

MEET  
THE  
TEAM



Leslie Marie Grace  
Division Director



Kimberly Olson  
Eastern Region Director



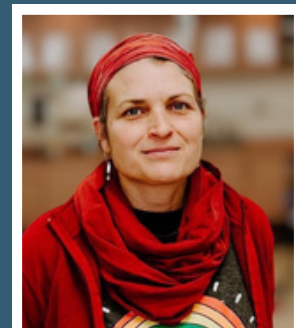
Meera Ramanathan  
Pacific Region Director



Jonathan Juravich  
Division Director-Elect



Detria Graham  
Southeastern Region Director



Melissa Hronkin  
Western Region Director

MEET  
THE  
TEAM

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### A Message From Your Elementary Division Director

Hello Elementary Art Educators,

Welcome to the Elementary Division Newsletter & Spotlight! This publication, coming to you twice a year, is designed to keep you connected, informed, and inspired.

Inside, you'll find updates on big events like the NAEA National Convention, resources tailored to elementary art educators, and spotlights on our four Regional Directors, who are here to share their voices and connect you with colleagues across the country.

Think of this as more than just a newsletter; it's a bridge to the larger NAEA community, a place to celebrate your work, and a reminder that your voice matters in shaping the future of art education.

Thank you for all that you do for your students and our field. I look forward to learning and leading alongside you.

In community,

Leslie Grace  
NAEA Elementary Division Director



## Why the NAEA National Convention Matters for Elementary Art Educators

By Leslie Grace

Save the date: the NAEA National Convention in Chicago, March 5–7, 2026! For elementary art educators, this gathering is more than professional development—it’s a chance to step out of our often isolated art rooms and connect “in the wild.”

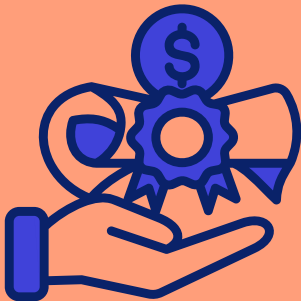
Many of us are the only art teachers in our school, working day after day in our own “natural habitats.” While we pour energy into our students, it can feel lonely to carry the weight of being the sole arts advocate in our building. At Convention, that changes. Suddenly, you’re surrounded by thousands of colleagues who share your passion, understand your challenges, and remind you that you’re not alone.

The sessions and workshops offer best practices, fresh strategies, and innovative ideas that you can apply in your classroom. But the true spark often comes from the in-between moments—authentic conversations, hallway exchanges, and laughter over shared stories. These connections build lasting networks of support that continue to energize us long after we return home.

Professional growth isn’t just about adding techniques to our toolkit; it’s about nurturing ourselves as educators and learners. Attending Convention is an investment in your teaching practice and your well-being—one that ultimately benefits your students, too.

So join us in Chicago. Come ready to learn, share, and celebrate the joy of being part of something bigger. You’ll leave renewed, inspired, and connected in ways that remind us why we do this work.

## Did you know that NAEA offers National Convention Scholarships?



The NAEA Art Educator Scholarship Fund supports art educators seeking further professional learning opportunities through the many programs and events offered by NAEA. The scholarships below support innovators in visual arts, design, and media arts education, providing access to professional learning, leadership experience, and connectivity to the field through the NAEA National Convention.



Click [here](#) for scholarship information

NAEA suggests registering to attend NAEA26 by November 21 to lock in the best registration rate. If you are selected to receive a scholarship, the registration cost you previously paid will be refunded to you. Standard cancellation policy applies. Attendees may only be awarded one scholarship per year.

Application deadline for all scholarships: November 26, 2025



# Your chance to present with the elementary carousel sessions:

## **Hands-On Studio Fiber Arts and Textiles Make and Take**

Share your passion for weaving, felting, stitching, or collage in this dynamic carousel session. Lead a hands-on mini-workshop where attendees gain adaptable lessons, artist inspirations, and strategies to bring tactile, inclusive, and meaningful textile experiences into their classrooms.

## **Hands-On Studio—Make and Take (Any media)**

Lead a hands-on, make-and-take station where participants explore new techniques and gather ready-to-teach lesson ideas. Presenters will guide attendees through creative, practical projects that spark inspiration for both teachers and students alike.

## **Budgeting for Impact: Strategies and Creative Solutions for the Elementary Art Room**

Share your expertise on managing limited art budgets in this interactive panel session. We're seeking educators with strategies for stretching funds, adapting your curriculum, sourcing materials, or securing grants to inspire and support fellow art teachers. This session will be a moderated panel.

## **Inclusive Practices in the Elementary Art Room**

Share your inclusive strategies for supporting diverse learners in the art room. We're seeking educators to lead rotating mini-presentations on adaptations, teaching philosophies, and tools for creating equitable, accessible learning that celebrates every student's creative voice.

## **Integrating SEL and Mindfulness in the Elementary Art Room**

Share how you integrate SEL and mindfulness into the art room in this rotating carousel session. We're seeking educators to lead mini-presentations on calming routines, student check-ins, and regulation strategies that strengthen behavior, engagement, and classroom connection.

**Session days and times will be released in October. The proposal submission form will be updated with those once available.**

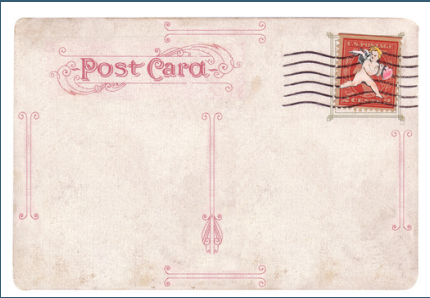


## We are looking for Presenters!

**Submit your proposal at the link below:**

**<https://tinyurl.com/ElementaryNAEA2026>**





# Postcard Moments

By Jonathan Juravich, Elementary Division Director-Elect  
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The first time I attended the NAEA Convention, I was determined to make the most of every single moment. I went from workshop to presentation to workshop—until I realized I had forgotten to eat or even look up at the sky outside. The thing is, I was so grateful for the opportunity to share space with so many art educators that I didn't want to miss a moment or squander the experience (I have since learned the power and necessity of taking breaks, don't worry). I was fully aware that I was the only art teacher from my district who could attend, and I knew that many others wished they could be there too.

But then I found myself in sessions that didn't quite align with my interests or educational context. I could have gotten up and left halfway through, or I could have stayed and listened for what I now call the "postcard moments."

This term reflects an action and attitude I've adopted when I'm traveling, attending conferences, or visiting museums—a way to share the experience with those I wish could be there with me. I remember, as a kid on family vacations, buying postcards for my friends to give them a small glimpse into the adventure. Now, as an adult, when I encounter a resource, activity, or opportunity that I know a fellow art educator would love, I think of it as a postcard moment. I'll quickly send them a text: "Let's talk about this when we're together—you're going to love it!" Or I'll snap a photo to make sure that, when scrolling through later, I remember to spark a conversation with an art teacher pal.

Because of travel costs, funding, and current circumstances, many of our art educator colleagues who want to attend the NAEA Convention in Chicago won't be able to make the journey. What a gift it would be to set a personal goal: How many postcard moments can you collect each day? Or simply remain open to discovering them along the way. Imagine how your "postcard recipient" will feel knowing not only that you were thinking of them, but that you also know what excites and inspires them.

And if you're anything like me, you always bought yourself a few postcards too. Don't forget to take notes, make sketches, and capture photos to remember the joy, learning, and inspiration that make the NAEA Convention so special—for yourself.



## The 2026 Awards Program is now open!

The NAEA Awards Program offers more than 100 awards at state, regional, and national levels.

**Download** the Awards Program Booklet for complete nomination details about each award.

Nomination deadline: Saturday, November 1, 2025.

More details can be found [here](#).



# Takeaways That Transformed My Teaching: Lessons, Strategies, or Artist Inspirations That Made It Back Into the Classroom

By Meera Ramanathan  
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The NAEA Convention brings together educators from across the country for 3 days of learning, presenting, collaborating, and connecting. I am looking forward to attending my fourth conference in Chicago in March 2026! There are several benefits to attending local, regional, state, and national art conferences:

Ideas for practice. There are a multitude of sessions to choose from that are hosted by educators from around the country. You can bring back new lessons, techniques, and media to implement in your classroom.

Finding new art supplies. There are several art vendor booths you can visit, see new products, and receive free samples.

Building community. Conventions are a great way to connect and network with educators, artists, and professionals from around the country.

I attended an inspiring session where I participated in discussing a painting by artist Carmen Lomas Garza with other participants. The facilitator encouraged us to use Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), which was a great way to get us all talking about the painting. It revolved around three questions: (1) What's going on in this picture? (2) What makes you say that? and (3) What more can we find? We had a fantastic discussion where we all felt safe, validated, and successful in our responses. I came back inspired to create that same feeling for my students and started the Elementary Art Talk podcast at my school site, Zamorano Fine Arts Academy in the San Diego Unified School District, with 5th-grade students, and have recorded 30 episodes so far.

With their voices, my students share what they think and feel about an artwork with their peers in the different episodes. Students tell me how excited they are that their friends and families all listen to the podcast. I know this is a project that has to keep going, thanks to the inspiration I found while attending an art conference.

What inspiration will you find at NAEA 2026?



Did you know you can  
pay for your NAEA  
membership through  
your Artsonia funds?  
Click [here](#) to find out  
how!



## Looking for mentorship?

Check out NAEA's new Monthly Mentor Meetings, a new program designed to bring art educators together for rich, collaborative conversations. Each session offers a space to explore classroom strategies, share insights, and connect with others who are passionate about art education.

Click [here](#) for more information and to register for meetings.

## Self-Care at Convention: Finding Balance While Maximizing Opportunities

By Detria Graham  
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Traveling to a conference can be both exhilarating and exhausting. It's essential to prioritize self-care while away from home, both in your preparations and upon your return. Before you travel, ensure you get a good night's rest. Recharge your energy to fully engage during the event. Don't forget to pack your favorite snacks and a refillable water bottle; staying nourished and hydrated is crucial.

Technology can be unpredictable, so consider printing your registration and conference schedule. This will help you feel organized and reduce stress as you navigate the conference.

During the event, try to maintain your usual morning and nightly routines. Continue taking your vitamins and medications, and pack your skincare products to keep up your nightly rituals. Consistency fosters a sense of comfort, no matter your location.

Schedule downtime during the conference to decompress and mix different types of sessions. Create a balance between lectures and hands-on activities. Allow yourself the flexibility to take breaks; stepping away for a moment to rest or go for a walk can recharge your mind.

After the conference, avoid scheduling significant commitments for the days immediately following your return. Give yourself time to relax and process your experiences. Journaling can be a helpful way to reflect on what you've learned and identify key takeaways to implement.

Ultimately, staying hydrated, taking regular breaks, and ensuring sufficient rest are essential for maintaining optimal energy levels. By finding a balance between excitement and mindfulness, you can maximize your opportunities and enjoy your time with fellow art-minded educators without feeling overwhelmed.

# Why Convention Matters and Keeps Me Coming Back!

By Kimberly Olson  
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Attending the NAEA Convention might be the best gift you give yourself—a golden ticket to the next-level version of you! Being surrounded by like-minded, passionate art educators for 3 days is energizing and soul-fueling. No need for explanations—these are your people! You'll connect with new friends, deepen bonds, and feel truly seen and inspired.

With more sessions than you can possibly attend, it's okay to feel overwhelmed—just pace yourself, download handouts, and plan strategically. The keynote speakers are legendary, the presentations are meaningful, and the ideas you gather will instantly spark new lessons and perspectives for your students. Even hallway conversations become unexpected learning moments—insightful, encouraging, and often just what you needed to hear.

Each year brings a new city full of culture, art, and flavor—plus free museum access! It's a great excuse to explore, recharge, and see the world with artist eyes.

Convention also offers a window into leadership. From Board members to state reps, you'll meet the people shaping our field—and maybe even picture yourself in one of those roles. Opportunities like the School for Art Leaders or Connected Arts Network are highlighted throughout.

Whether you dream of presenting or just soaking it all in, Convention fills your cup, elevates your teaching, and celebrates your dedication.

Now click that registration link, and we'll see you at the Convention!!

# How Might I Serve?

By Melissa Hronkin  
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Whether you call it Dharma or servant leadership, this question has guided my involvement in—and love for—our NAEA family. My first National Convention was in 2008 in New Orleans. I slept on the hotel room floor while serving as Michigan's Delegate, attended sessions and Delegates Assembly, and explored the city with some of my most influential mentors. Regional leadership retreats and planning meetings gave me the chance to collaborate with others who shared a deep sense of service.

This mindset started during my preservice training, where we were encouraged to volunteer at state conferences and immerse ourselves in this creative community. That early sense of belonging carried through to regional and national gatherings. Conferences soon felt less like obligations and more like reunions—annual opportunities to celebrate one another and our students.

In 2015, I returned to New Orleans—this time as a presenter and award recipient (2014 National Elementary Art Educator of the Year). I was lucky to have mentors who believed I had something to contribute. Their encouragement led to more leadership and service roles, including the School for Art Leaders and the Connected Arts Network.

What are you curious about? Answer the call to volunteer. Apply to present or introduce a session. Join a professional learning community and discover your strengths! You have something meaningful to share. This community will sustain you during tough days in the classroom or when you feel isolated at school. You'll have people to lean on—and opportunities to lift others up. We laugh together. We cry together.

What will be your legacy? How might you serve?

See you in Chicago!

# The City as Classroom: Experiencing Chicago With an Art Educator's Eye

By Leslie Grace

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When the National Art Education Association convenes in Chicago, the city itself becomes an extension of the classroom. Known for its bold architecture, rich museum collections, and vibrant neighborhoods, Chicago offers art educators countless opportunities to view culture, community, and creativity through a teaching lens.

Start with the skyline. Architectural icons by Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies van der Rohe, and Jeanne Gang frame the city, and an architectural boat tour along the Chicago River provides a moving lesson in how art and design shape human experience. For educators, these structures reveal how history, technology, and culture intertwine in built spaces.

Museums expand that story. The Art Institute of Chicago houses everything from ancient artifacts to modern masterpieces, where works like Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* or Kerry James Marshall's depictions of Black life invite reflection on curation and cultural voice. The Museum of Contemporary Art and the National Museum of Mexican Art highlight how contemporary artists and community stories challenge and reframe narratives.

Public art brings creativity directly into the streets. Picasso's sculpture in Daley Plaza, Anish Kapoor's "Cloud Gate" in Millennium Park, and colorful murals in neighborhoods like Pilsen and Bronzeville spark conversations about accessibility, identity, and belonging.

For art educators, Chicago illustrates how learning thrives beyond the classroom walls. Every gallery, mural, and skyline view demonstrates how place-based experiences can inspire dialogue, joy, and connection, reminding us that the city itself is a powerful teacher.



Got ideas, suggestions, or questions? Get in touch!



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