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Position Statement on Materiality and Sustainability in Art Education [Adopted March 2026]

PLATFORM: RELATIONSHIPS

NAEA acknowledges that art education is deeply connected to materiality. Artmaking has been widely recognized as a central pillar of preK–16 art education. In school settings, these creative practices tend to involve significant material usage, ideally with dedicated art budgets, tools, supplies, equipment, and facilities supporting these activities.

As NAEA values ecological sustainability and restoration, we recognize the material practices of art education as meaningful opportunities for ecological inquiry, innovation, and learning. Building upon the ongoing efforts of art educators, we advocate for sustained attention to the material culture of art education as a means of aligning creative practice with environmental responsibility.

NAEA recommends that art education:

- Transition to using ecologically sustainable materials and supplies;
- Reduce energy consumption associated with art activities;
- Implement systems for reuse, recycling, upcycling, and composting within the classroom or surrounding learning environments;
- Foster an ethic of care toward materiality of the classroom, including regular maintenance of quality art tools;
- Promote classroom inquiry and dialogues surrounding the environmental costs of material manipulations and ecological alternatives;
- Establish partnerships and collaborations with ecological experts, including traditional knowledge keepers and scientists, to enrich environmental insights surrounding materials; and
- Develop curriculum-based artmaking experiences that use minimal manufactured materials, emphasize resource cultivation, and promote ecological sustainability.

To realize such cultural change within preK–16 art education, collective effort beyond the classroom will be essential. NAEA encourages collaboration among the following groups:

- Material manufacturers and suppliers to offer affordable, quality eco-friendly supply options and information regarding the manufacturing processes and environmental footprint of supplies;
- Districts and schools to recognize local vendors and approve the purchase of nontraditional art materials;
- Community partners to deliver safe materials and supplies otherwise destined for the landfill to art classrooms (in cases where art educators have expressed a desire to use



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these materials in their classrooms);

- Art education certification and licensure programs to teach and model mindful methods associated with the use of alternative materials in art, including the safe, responsible harvesting of outdoor materials and the collection and reuse of discarded objects; and
- Educators and institutions to establish partnerships with ecological experts, including traditional knowledge keepers and scientists, to deepen understanding of sustainability in art education.

Moreover, NAEA maintains that achieving these transformations will require shifts in how art and materiality are understood across diverse stakeholders. These shifts include efforts to:

- Challenge assumptions of material abundance and disposability;
- Broaden concepts of artistic expression beyond conventional materials, forms, and skills; and
- Expand understandings of art itself to encompass both object-based practices (art as object) and more temporal, relational, and conceptual approaches (art as gesture, dialogue, or meaningful interaction).

Definition of Materiality

In this context, *materiality* refers to the physical properties of art materials (e.g., clay, paint, fabric, pixels, sound waves) and, more broadly, the active role these materials play in shaping an artwork's meaning, the creative process, and the viewer's experience.

Resources

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