

To: The Appropriations Committee/Conservation and Development

From: Sophia Gevas, Education Outreach Director at Silvermine Arts Center
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Subject: The Importance of Arts Funding

Since 1992, Silvermine Arts Center's Educational Outreach *Art Partners* program has been providing quality arts education to Stamford and Norwalk schools. This program has provided free or subsidized professional Teaching Artists to design and execute classes for students in elementary, middle and high schools, either during school, after school, or on the Silvermine Campus.

The distinctiveness of this program resides in the quality of our Teaching Artists and their ability to tailor programming that is both age-appropriate and geared to the developmental needs of the students, assisting them to reach their full potential through joyous self-expression.

Connecticut has the largest achievement gap in the country, with schools that have as much as 78% minority populations, and free and reduced lunch at populations at 60%.

Studies, such as that done by James S. Catterall (2009) "*Doing well and doing good by doing art: The effects of education in the visual and performing arts on the achievements and values of young adults*" using 25,000 secondary school students, tracked over 4 years, have shown that academic success as well as social outcomes such as volunteerism, and involvement in the community, have benefitted significantly from involvement in arts learning. Attending arts-rich schools was especially beneficial in terms of academic grade achievement and levels of terminal college degrees for students of low socio-economic status.

We have many opportunities to more fully collaborate on the education of our young people while also fulfilling the goals of the Arts Catalyze Placemaking grants, to create signature community spaces. Silvermine Arts Center's Outreach Education program, entitled "Art Partners" received an ACP 1 grant to execute the following project that would not have been possible without State support.

"Garden People" is a collaborative project between the Silvermine Arts Center's *Art Partners*, the 3rd grade at Brookside Elementary School, Fodor Farm (a public community garden), and the Recs and Parks Department of the City of Norwalk.

This project includes professional teaching artists collaborating with classroom teachers to teach science, literary and visual arts to the third grade classes; creating an informative, useful and exciting art installation at a public venue that the city would like to see better known. Improving the quality of the visual landscape from the street and on the farm, while enhancing community connections in a shared public space, will be celebrated at a culminating public reception for students, parents, teachers and city officials.

Brookside is a Priority 1 and Title 1 School with support for grades k -5 in literacy and math. It is one of the schools with 78% minority population with a free and reduced lunch population of 60%. The school is located within walking distance of Fodor Farms, one of Norwalk's significant agricultural landmarks. The 1809 Fodor homestead is currently, the scene of an active restoration project surrounded by an all-organic farm with 300, 5' x 7' plots shared by the community. The farm also offers educational and recreational activities, such as the farm to table tasting event held last October.

The Brookside 3rd grade will work with Paige McBrier, a COA Integrating artist. Each class will choose either vegetables, fruits, herbs or bees (to include learning about the hives that are on the farm) to research. They will create non-fiction reports about them based on their questions and interests, enhancing their curricular goals. Students will learn about poetry and write "odes" to their chosen garden item. In small, collaborative groups, the students will decide which information they want to include and "publish" on the laminated cards.

To ensure their safety, the City's Recreation and Parks Department has agreed to build and install the nine permanent wooden structures for the 6' tall "Garden People". With Marta Kot, a Silvermine Arts Center teaching artist, the students will learn about sculptural public art installations, and their criteria while creating the physical heads and bodies, and attaching the laminated information cards, so that they can be both readable and flappable, keeping humans engaged and birds away.

Placed in groups of three as if having a conversation; one group inside the upper garden fencing, the second group placed outside the garden fencing (both of which can be seen from the street), to entice and entertain visitors to the farm, and the third placed inside the lower garden (where the 2nd grade garden plot is located).

Each year, the Brookside Elementary teachers can duplicate the learning project with the students, using the lesson plans provided by the Teaching Artists, and the reusable wooden structures. This project has the possibility of a long life of teaching the arts through science and literary curriculum, while providing a third grade tradition for the school.

Art Partners Teaching Artists and COA Artists have worked with Brookside Elementary in the past, designing and executing short-term curriculum-integrated art projects. This grant provides an opportunity to create an arts rich curriculum for our students. While we had some of the matching funds, this could not have been executed without the State's assistance.

We ask that you restore funding to at least the \$2M previous levels to ensure that these programs can continue to more fully educate and invest in our students' future, as well as providing the opportunity for us to animate our public spaces for our communities.