

Terry Davis

Mister Chairman,
Members of the committee
Thank you for allowing us this time today.

Please allow us to introduce ourselves.

Mandolynn Browning

Mister Chairman, I am Mandolynn Browning, Instructor of Theatre Arts for Aztec High School and Koogler Middle School, and Director for Aztec High School PlayMakers.

Reed Meschefske

Mister Chairman, I am Reed Meschefske, Head of Theater and Film at Santa Fe High School.

Terry Davis

And I am Terry Davis, co-executive director for the New Mexico High School Musical Theatre Awards. We've received guidance from my co-executive director, Laura Maness, who is here today on Zoom in support of our efforts.

Mister Chairman, members of the committee, did you know that students enrolled in arts courses are more likely to attend, be engaged in, and graduate from school?

And that teachers in schools with higher levels of arts education report greater parental engagement? Also, students who take multiple arts courses show greater overall academic success?

Did you know that, through the arts, students gain confidence in their achievements and show improved writing abilities and more aspirations for higher education than their peers?

This is especially true for students from financially challenging backgrounds as arts education helps level the academic playing field for them.

Did you also know that several surveys tell us that 70% of companies say creativity is the primary skill they seek when hiring?

Performing arts offers direct and indirect lessons in creativity every day.

This is part of the backdrop we want you to consider as we make the case today for our proposal.

One final statistic that is central to this conversation:

Any high school student body breaks into two nearly equal halves: athletes or those who take part in athletic activities of any kind in their school — who make up approximately 55% of the student body — and non-athletes, those who do not participate in any sports activities — who make up approximately 45% of the student population. There is an unknown number who participate in both athletic and non-athletic activities.

So any school that spends capital project, extra-curricular, and discretionary funds solely or predominantly on facilities and equipment for its athletes is ignoring the other half of its students.

Importantly, students notice this and instantly calculate the value they have been assigned in their own schools. That calculation critically drives student engagement results. If schools are only willing to engage with some of the students for their interests — sports — why should the other students engage with their schools at all?

The funding we seek is for a significant segment of that 45%: those who participate in the performing arts. Funding performing arts upgrades makes students in those programs as excited to come to school as funding sports facility upgrades excites athletes.

We want to make something very clear. We're not telling you that expenditures for athletes is bad.

How many of you have attended the state high school basketball championships in The Pit? Those are thrilling games, aren't they? Each team, playing hard to be the best in the state. How many of you know about the New Mexico All State Music Festival? Student musicians from all over the state gather in Popejoy Hall to form one All-State Band or Orchestra. Or sing together in an All-State Chorus. There are other ensembles as well. It's very thrilling — there's that word again — to hear these excellent young musicians play together.

I daresay the same thing happens in early May when our program, the Enchantment Awards, brings the best musical theater performers from high schools across the state together to perform — together — in our show. Again: thrilling.

These are different thrills for different people. Expenditures for young athletes give us one kind of thrill. Expenditures for young performing artists give us another. That's the metaphor for what we're proposing.

Our proposal:

Allocate \$20 million from the public school capital outlay fund to upgrade performing arts facilities and equipment in New Mexico's public and charter high schools.

The fund would be made available for different needs in individual schools, such as:

- Equipment updates to bring analog and older digital devices — light boards, sound boards, lighting equipment, sound equipment, projectors or video walls, etc. — up to current standards;
- Curtains and other soft goods, rigging, and any structural changes to accommodate technical upgrades;
- Support facilities such as rehearsal rooms, scene shops, dressing rooms, or similar spaces;
- Tools; equipment; pre-built set stock — stairs, platforms, wagons, doors, and windows — or materials for basic set stock, to give schools the essentials for theatrical and related productions;
- Other theater/performing arts-related needs identified by individual schools.

Funds might also be allotted in such a manner that would accommodate needs for non-capital purchases.

This list was created after our survey of high school drama teachers, who use and most often manage and maintain their school's theaters. In too many instances, their schools did not have appropriate facilities for 21st century performing arts instruction, especially for technical theater students.

For example, teaching students about lighting controls on an analog board or for analog instruments is pointless, yet there are still analog boards in use in New Mexico's high schools. Lighting equipment in collegiate and professional circumstances — film, concert, or theater — are digital.

Students must know how to program a light board to make it and the instruments it controls fully functional. There are even people in the industry whose only job is to program the hundreds of cues required for live theatrical, dance, and music events. None of that can be accomplished on an analog board.

In our survey, teachers reported that their facilities need:

Digital light and/or sound boards to replace analog equipment; and intelligent, moving and LED lights — standard equipment in theatre and film — that can only be fully operated with digital boards;

New microphones and speakers to improve live audio and to allow students to work with industry-standard equipment;

Dedicated shop space to allow schools to build and store sets, costumes, and props;

New stage curtains and other soft goods to replace those damaged by wear and tear or dry-rot;

Dressing room facilities — some schools have none, others need upgrades;

Repairs to or replacement of dangerously damaged stage floors;

Proper tools, basic but costly set stock (stair units, platforms, casters, doors, windows), and safety equipment;

Computers for scenic, lighting, and costuming design labs, and for video and audio editing, with appropriate software;

Rehearsal space for the drama program which would free up more time on the stage for all performing groups;

An array of repairs to school facilities to fix leaks, broken seats, inoperable exhaust vents, electrical circuits damaged by lightning, nonfunctional microphone jacks in the stage floor, and much more.

These upgrades would bring high school facilities and their equipment into the 21st century and address some of the inadequacies of these spaces as both academic and public-facing facilities.

They would be more of a match to other high schools in the country, such as this one in Van Buren, Arkansas. Pay attention to the lighting in particular. While we don't recommend the design — it's a little too hectic — it shows what's available in other high schools around the country. Our students cannot do this with the equipment they have now, so they are not keeping up.

High school auditoriums in New Mexico serve as theaters, concert halls, assemblages, rehearsal rooms, technical theater laboratories, dance recital halls, classrooms, community gathering sites, town halls, and — in some cases — churches. All of these performances and presentations require technical support.

Reed Meschefske

Good afternoon. My name is Reed Meschefske and I am the Head of Theater and Film at Santa Fe High School, a position I have held for the past 14 years. Being the theater program at the namesake school in the oldest capital city in the country, we take great pride in providing a totally immersive performing arts department, allowing students to learn theater, film studies, dance, choir, band, orchestra, and guitar.

We attempt to allow students to become fully immersed in the performing arts and to provide a college ready curriculum, while also spending equal effort on the casually interested students as well. We produce 3-5 full productions a year, have multiple dual credit college level film studies classes, we have taken multiple productions to the prestigious Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and have produced hundreds of young artists,

many of whom are still pursuing or maintaining a professional theatrical career since their graduation.

Our ¾ thrust theater has had thousands pass through its doors, as we provide college level quality productions that are recognized as some of the most diverse and professional level plays in the state.

We operate as the other arm of the school, the counterpoint to sports (an important and essential element of any school) providing a safe and creative space for students of any background, socio-economic status, religion, or identity.

Despite operating a department of this caliber, I receive absolutely NO funding on an annual basis for the operational costs of my program.

A student's educational experience is only as strong as the opportunities afforded them. And while theater is an art, it is also a teachable craft that is an invaluable prep for a career in the technical and trades spheres. My students annually participate in both The Lensic Student Apprenticeship program and the Santa Fe Opera Young Artists program.

Here they are immersed in Career Technical Programs, using top of the line digital light and sound boards and being instructed by working professionals. It gives them an introduction to a career pathway that not only is available in New Mexico, but is thriving. They then return to their home base and must work with antiquated instruments that were cutting edge when I was in college. Due to the size limitations of these programs, only a handful of students can participate, leaving out other students who are equally curious and/or passionate about learning these technical skills. This is not equitable. It does a disservice to the workforce of our state.

A student who sees opportunities here, with professional level and instruction AND equipment, will stay here, maintaining our level of professional opportunities we so often lose to out of state facilities.

And my theater, for the record, is fully functional. While antiquated, we do the most with it. We have made it work, despite having NO upgrade to our light system in almost 20 years. What about the schools that don't have access to even these tools? How many young

artists are being lost before we can even give them a chance? If New Mexico wants to be a leader, we must support ALL avenues for career and technical growth in this state, and that includes Stage and Film Technology.

In our backyard we have employment opportunities for our young people, but we need to make that investment and give them ALL of the tools that we can to provide an educational foundation that prepares them for the future. Support CTE in the performing arts and support our student's future. Thank you.

Terry Davis

Providing \$20 million from the public school capital outlay fund for performing arts facility and equipment upgrades would bring our schools into the 21st century and offer students real-world experience in the entertainment industry.

It would allow students interested in a career in theater, the music industry, or film (many theater skills cross over into film) to have the knowledge and experience that comes from working with current technology.

Students going on to post-secondary education would no longer start behind their college classmates because their high school equipment was outdated, broken, nonfunctional, or nonexistent.

But funding for the arts and its facilities provides more immediate academic results as well. Arts education improves student engagement by providing multiple ways of accessing educational content.

You can't design sets or costumes without geometry.

You can't design lights or sound without physics.

Every theater project is a history or sociology problem, or both,

and carries students into some of the world's richest use of language. While it offers great practical education advantages for most students, studies have shown that arts education delivers even more benefits for those who come from financially challenged backgrounds.

Mandolynn Browning

I am Mandolynn Browning, Instructor of Theatre Arts for Aztec High School and Koogler Middle School, and Director for Aztec High School PlayMakers.

According to national statistics, low-income students highly engaged in the arts are twice as likely to graduate college as their peers with no arts education and all theatre students, regardless of economic background, have more aspirations for higher education and greater levels of student engagement than their peers. Why?

Many theatre programs participate in state and national activities (such as the NMAA One-Act Competition).

Student thespians in those programs must be academically eligible to participate. Academically eligible high school students are more likely to be admitted to college and have the study skills necessary to succeed.

Theater students gain confidence, leadership and collaborative skills, time and workflow management capabilities,

and develop their sense of self, as they work individually and as a team to produce each production.

Theatre and performing arts internships, scholarships, grants, and work studies provide much needed economic support to students who may not financially be able to attend college. Due to scholarships and work study, I never had to take out a single student loan to attend either undergrad or graduate school, despite growing up in a low-income household.

Theatre arts education supports core classes by giving students real-world applications with which to practice and supplement what they learn in the classroom. Students with greater access to arts education show improved writing abilities. My students write performance reviews, self-critiques, character and script analyses, and student-written 10-minute plays. So do many others across the state. Math and physical science are also an integral part of theatre education, as you'll see.

Social-Emotional Learning has quickly become foundational in our educational systems and continues to grow and transform policies and procedures at school, state, and national levels. Theater classes, specifically, have been shown to create rich and promising atmospheres in which students develop social-emotional skills with which to help them understand and interact with those around them.

In fact, theater students show greater emotional/cognitive empathy than their peers. Telling others' stories and connecting with characters— their desires, fears, successes, and failings, nurtures students' abilities to connect with each other and other members of the community. I see this first hand every day and feel it's summed up best in our theatre troupe's mission statement that the students wrote this year:

Eric Cooper, founder and president of National Urban Alliance for Effective Education, states that, "Arts education enables those children from a financially challenged background to have a more level playing field with children who have had those enrichment experiences."

In particular, he talks about things that families in a higher socio-economic status (SES) do commonly — visit art museums, watch musicals, attend concerts, participate in community theaters, join bands. These are not activities that children from families of a lower socio-economic status do. Arts education in our schools can quickly broaden the worlds of those students who have not had those advantages.

In Aztec, theatre students travel across the state on overnight trips while attending festivals. They go to community theatre productions together as well as productions at other high schools in our county. They engage in workshops and talkbacks with professionals in the industry and participate in showcases and talent night.

Lastly, theatre creates safe spaces for students to find creative outlets, create life-long friendships, and even gives them a reason to continue coming to school at all. Many students in theatre programs across New Mexico,

feel that theatre arts classes are the only places they are free to express themselves, take risks, and be supported. Investments in creating and maintaining theatre programs– their classrooms, stages, equipment, and materials– are investment in the hundreds of students that call those programs homes away from home.

Terry Davis

Our high school facilities serve our students from the time they are kindergartners through their last days as high school seniors, even hosting graduation ceremonies for them.

Many students will perform in our high school theaters as elementary, middle, and high school students, singing, dancing, acting, playing musical instruments, orating, and debating.

High school performing arts spaces are far too often ill-equipped, outdated, and incomplete facilities, in particular for the many performances they host. That is also true for those spaces as classrooms, rehearsal rooms, and technical theater or performance laboratories. These sub-par facilities hamper the classes and performances they are intended to host. Since drama programs provide training for students interested in working in the state's booming film industry, those shortcomings become even more problematic.

Many schools do not have a full complement of facilities and equipment to suit the educational and co-curricular needs of their student performers and technicians. Cases in point: Marshall Middle School Auditorium in Clovis, used for high school, community, and touring shows, has no dressing rooms. Mayfield High School has only four makeup stations in each of their two dressing rooms with no private changing spaces or bathrooms, so their students use the public restrooms as cast bathrooms and changing

rooms. Several high schools, including Organ Mountain High School, Aztec High School, and Atrisco Heritage Academy High School, have no scene, prop, or costume shops or storage facilities. How can a drama teacher offer a proper curriculum in technical theater with no scene shop? How can we expect any performers — high school and others — to perform in theaters that offer no dressing room space? We would never build a gymnasium without locker rooms.

The number of students affected by this \$20 million would be significant. Consider this: in most schools, drama programs involve more students than play on any of their schools' football teams. The number in drama is often double the number of varsity football players. When you add in all students who perform in musical programs — band, orchestra, chorus, jazz ensemble, show choir, etc. — the number of students affected by the poor condition of their performing arts facilities, attendant spaces, and equipment (or lack thereof) becomes extraordinary to consider for each high school in the state.

Given the wide-ranging needs in schools across the state, we compiled a list of costs for some of the most requested upgrades.

These costs, some of which you can see on the screen, are based on our research, and are intended to provide you with an idea of the expense for these upgrades and serve as an indication for the need of the overall amount of funds requested.

These costs should not be regarded as final for any one project. Costs will vary for each school depending on their specific circumstances, priorities, and purchasing process.

We make no recommendation for any of the brands listed. Any branded item listed serves only as a reference point for cost estimating purposes.

There could be three different ways for the state to distribute the money. The first would be a proposal process, where schools submit proposals to either the PSFA or PED — possibly both, if non-capital funds are included in this allocation — which would be ranked by merit. Not all school proposals would be funded.

The second would be an opt-in process where PSFA (and possibly PED) send letters to all schools to tell them that if they have a performing arts program, they are eligible for

funding. Once the schools opt-in for that funding, the state distributes funds based on SEG formulas.

The third is an award process where schools submit proposals to spend a specified amount. Submissions are reviewed and all proposals that qualify are funded, likely at a lesser amount than indicated in the request for proposals.

We recommend that any requests or applications for funds from the schools, or progress reports after funds are received, bear the signature of the drama teacher for that school. Those drama teachers will serve as the local experts on any facilities upgrades and technical equipment purchases. They will also verify that the money was spent as intended.

All capital funds distributed should be given a three-year window for completion in case of unexpected delays, though most drama teachers will do everything in their power to get upgrades completed quickly.

A side note: as we were researching this issue and determining why so many schools had insufficient spaces, we encountered the adequacy standards for public school buildings and grounds.

The only sentence included in the standards specifically pertinent to the performing arts is this:

“Dedicated art classrooms, excluding performing arts, shall have a sink.”

Drama programs need paint sinks and sinks in dressing rooms. Performing artists need rest rooms with sinks backstage. And, obviously, this doesn't even begin to cover the other needs for performing arts instruction. We understand that the standards are meant to provide very general guidelines to school districts of all sizes in our state, but surely more guidance for performing arts spaces could be given to schools and the architects who design them.

We hope this allocation, if provided, is not a one-and-done exercise. In the performing arts, as in all academic pursuits, things break or wear out. Technology advances. Paint cans and nail buckets need refilling.

And, critically, this funding will not fix everything that needs fixing. It will, however, be a much needed beginning.

Approximately 5 million people are employed in the United States in the performing arts. Millions more sing, dance, play music, act, or create theatre in their communities as amateurs, adding vibrancy to the lives of so many. Those performers, professional and amateur, often continue doing so late into their lives, bridging generations on those many stages and demonstrating a love for the work they do willingly. That happens here in New Mexico just as it does all over this country.

We hope you will help give the next generation of performing artists — and the technicians who support them — better spaces and equipment with which to explore their passions. We know they will repay it to you many times over throughout their lives as they apply what they learned in their high schools to all the stages in our state.

All Three

Thank you!