March 13, 2020

Dear Partners,

We at Arts Connect have been paying close attention to COVID-19.

Last night, HISD put out an [official announcement](https://www.houstonisd.edu) cancelling classes until March 30th. About two hours ago Governor Abbot declared a state of emergency for Texas, and President Trump made the same declaration just a few minutes ago. HAA, the operational home for Arts Connect, has activated its disaster response protocols. It is quickly gathering resources and compiling information to share with our community. Arts Connect is doing all it can to support our students, arts partners, educators, and other members of our school communities.

First and foremost, please follow all federal and local public health guidance.

In regards to the Fund, the Leadership Committee convened this morning and determined the following for all approved applications:

- Whatever Arts Connect related expenses you have incurred as of today's date will be covered by the Fund, including those programs that are not complete as of today.
- Arts Connect encourages you to consider the stability and long-term needs and relationships with teaching artists and other contractors. Arts Connect will also support expenses committed to these individuals, as a measure of care and stewardship of our community.
- As much as it is possible, please seek opportunities to reschedule approved programs this year or next to maximize the fund and our collective work for students.
- We will be flexible to support you as a partner to our fullest ability.
- Arts Connect will establish protocols for reporting and invoicing for these expenses as the situation evolves over the next few weeks, and will share as we have more information.

In addition, HAA has activated critical response systems to support the arts community:

- HAA's COVID-19 guidance will be delivered through our social channels and our newsletter. We ask that you invite your constituents to [subscribe to the HAA newsletter](https://www.houstonarts.org/mailing-list). 
- HAA has built a "help desk" to properly solicit and track any and all tips, needs, requests, or concerns. Please share this broadly and invite any and all input.
- If you have resources, needs, questions, or tips, please send them to HAA via the help desk.

Arts Connect is also in direct contact with the HISD Fine Arts Department to support the district.

Finally, we recognize that arts organizations are an important part of a larger ecosystem of support for our students. Below are several resources with important information on ensuring education continuity and equity during school closures.

- [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Childcare Programs](https://www.usd.gov/)
- [School and Coronavirus: What You Should Know](https://www.coronavirus.gov/)
- [Educational Equity & Coronavirus](https://www.ed.gov)

Know that the power of a community like ours can bring stability during uncertain times like this. If there is anything else we can do to support you and your work with students, please let me know.

Thank you for all you do, and stay safe,

Deborah Lugo
Director, Arts Connect Houston