

# Annual Report



Image credit: Oaklee Thiele, "Deep Pressure." VSA Emerging Young Artists Program

# 2018-2019





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# Letter from our Director



This has been a wonderful year of learning, collaboration, and community building. Much of our energy and enthusiasm was invested in solidifying our presence, partnership, and impact with and within community. This was reflected in COOL Schools through longer programs and increased opportunities for family and community engagement. In our professional development work, it meant developing new partnerships with cultural organizations, and extending opportunities for teachers and teaching artists to learn and grow together.

We have also been working to better understand and communicate the many ways in which disability intersects with other identities. This work has been deeply examined and reflected in our Open Door Gallery exhibits, and become a priority in our professional development efforts. Most important, this examination has helped us to re-frame and re-conceptualize community, and more deeply understand the beauty, complexity, and nuance of our humanity.

As we continue to better understand our role within the community, and in response to some changes within the larger VSA network, we are gearing up for a name change later this fall. We are excited to define a new identity that reflects where we—and our community—are going, while honoring our history and legacy. Stay tuned for an announcement and new website, to be revealed in December!

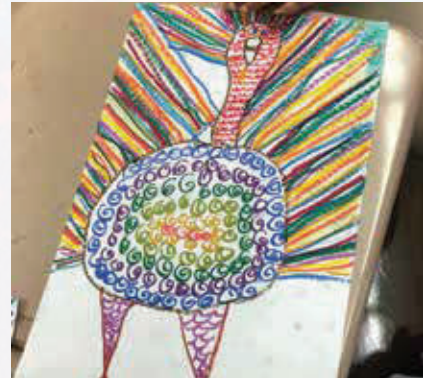
As always, I'm incredibly grateful to our committed staff, teaching artists, and partners for their dedicated work this year, and to you, our supporters, for your commitment and advocacy. We invite you to read more about our journey and impact this year on this report, and as always, I invite your comments, questions, and partnership.

With gratitude and appreciation  
of your support,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Nicole Agois'.

Nicole Agois  
Managing Director

VSA MA works with students, teaching artists, educators, and leaders of cultural institutions through innovative and inclusive programs, partnerships, and trainings that foster learning and collaboration, provide outlets for artistic expression and creative voice, and promote unlimited personal, academic, and professional possibilities for people with disabilities.



## Impact

- 1733** COOL Students
- 92** COOL Classroom Teachers
- 14** COOL Teaching Artists
- 109** Open Door Gallery Artists
- 552** Open Door Gallery Visitors
- 193** Community Event Participants
- 492** Workshop Participants
- 3185** Total Participants in All Programs

# COOL Schools: Program Impact

The COOL Schools model engages students and teachers through the arts to transform schools into inclusive communities where students of all abilities can have a Creative Outlook on Learning (COOL). COOL teaching artists and classroom teachers collaboratively designed and taught arts-integrated curricula, supporting students in a variety of ways to grow artistically, academically, and social-emotionally.



**1733** Students

**3-22** Range in age

**36%** With disabilities

**29%** English language learners

**10** Schools

**92** Classroom teachers

**102** COOL Classrooms

**2982** Hours in COOL Classrooms



# Growth + Outcomes

COOL Schools partner teachers rated proficiency in four goal areas before and after the program using the COOL Tool. Analysis of their observations demonstrated the following growth:

## 85% of students demonstrated artistic growth



My students transferred the skills learned in COOL Schools and applied them to other opportunities for making new artwork. Students are more comfortable in their artistic ability.”

—Teacher at Adams Elementary School

## 73% of students demonstrated academic growth



Students really seemed to develop a stronger sense about how stories are developed, how they emerge, evolve, and end! I saw some students reminding their classmates about the need to have a beginning, middle and end in order for the story to make sense.”

—Teacher at Condon School

## 72% of students demonstrated social-emotional growth



I can't tell you how many times I heard encouraging words from peer to peer!”

—Teacher at Ellison Parks Early Education School

## 77% of teachers feel more confident integrating the arts into their own teaching



Having COOL Schools this year has given me a variety of tools and methods in which I can use literacy and arts to teach a lesson. The art projects taught me that language and communication come in different forms and that art is one way in which many students can comfortably express what they have learned about a given topic.”

—Special Education Teacher at Elm St. Elementary School

# COOL Schools: Meet our Schools

## Boston College Campus School Chestnut Hill

**38** students in **K-12th** grade deepened their communication and choice-making skills while exploring instruments such as keyboards, ukuleles, and drums during weekly **music** programming alongside undergraduate mentors from Boston College.



## Adams Elementary School East Boston

**241** students in grades **preK-5th** participated in **visual arts** programming, creating 2D and 3D forms out of found materials.



## Boston Green Academy Brighton

**31** high school students in the Learning for Independence program explored various **visual arts** media such as quilting, spray painting, and fashion design to support the creation of a school store.



## Community Academy of Science and Health Dorchester

**38** high school students in the Occupational Social Development Skills Center program combined mathematics, creativity, and personal narratives to create original **fashion designs** and model them for their peers during an end-of-year celebration.



## Charlestown High School Charlestown

**42** students in **9-12th** grade developed instrumental, composition, and improvisation skills during **music** programming and applied them to create a performing ensemble.





## Condon K-8 School South Boston

**253** students in **K-2nd** grade and the **DDC** brought story structure to life in **drama** programming by using their body, voice, and imagination to create original characters and plots. **11 DDC** students in **K-6th** grade used **drama** to reinforce science and literacy standards.



## Ellison Parks Early Learning School Mattapan

**127** students in **preK-3rd** grade reinforced math and science concepts while expressing their ideas and creativity through hands-on **visual arts** projects involving puppet making, woodworking, clay sculpture, and collage.



## Elm Street Elementary School Gardner

**191 2nd** graders explored **visual arts** including painting, sculpting, and puppet making with a connection to topics explored in their geography curriculum and music class.

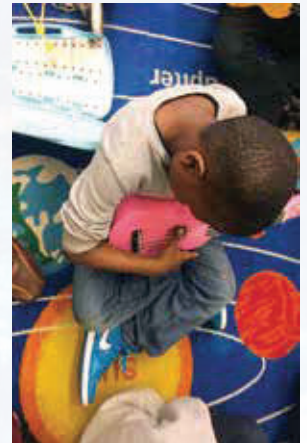


## Henderson Inclusion K-12 School Dorchester

**412** students in grades **2nd-12th** explored self-expression and collaboration through **visual arts and music**. Projects included singing and drumming in the Winter Wonderfest, as well as designing logos in response to social issues.

## Everett Elementary School Boston

**253** students in **preK-5th** explored genres from folk to rock as they worked in **music** programming on vocal, ukulele, and performance skills. **96 preK-1st** learned **visual arts** techniques that helped them write and illustrate their own non-fiction books.



# Open Door Galleries

In Boston and Worcester, our Open Door Galleries (ODGs) exhibit and elevate the work of aspiring, emerging, and established artists with disabilities, providing a platform to convene and engage the community in powerful conversations that examine beauty, humanity, identity, and disability through the arts.

## **ODG Boston – The NonProfit Center**

89 South Street, Boston

Following a visioning process for the ODG Boston, VSA MA released a “Call for Socially Engaged Art,” inviting artists with disabilities to exhibit work that promotes dialogue about disability and intersectional identity. Four artists were selected from 25 applicants, and their work was curated into a series titled “Prisms: Perspectives on Hidden Disability.” The series offers artistic explorations of their experiences with disability that are not initially visible to others, including learning and physical disabilities, chronic pain, and mental illness, and how those experiences intersect with other parts of their identity, including race and gender identity.

## **ODG@WAM – Higgins Wing, Worcester Art Museum (WAM)**

55 Salisbury Street, Worcester



New accessible entrance to ODG@WAM

A year since the re-opening of the Open Door Gallery @ WAM, we are already seeing the wonderful impact of this ambitious partnership—one that capitalizes on the resources and expertise of both partners to promote wider access to and engagement in the arts and culture for people with disabilities. VSA MA partnered with the museum to make access-related capital improvements, including the addition of a ramp leading to the ODG from the museum’s courtyard off of Tuckerman Street, and the installation of an accessible restroom on the first floor of the Higgins Wing, where the gallery is located. We also welcomed Sean O’Gara to the team as the ODG@WAM Coordinator. Our team provided additional training to WAM docents, and WAM educators offered an “Elements of Art” class to ASPIRE! artists, who participate in ODG@WAM programming weekly and exhibit regularly.

## ODG Boston – The NonProfit Center



**Dominic Killiany:**  
“What I See”

Killiany’s interpretation of the world reflects his knowledge of order, balance, and symmetry with a touch of abstract expressionism in a symphony of color.



**Tyler Cala Williams:**  
“In the Colophony,  
A Sticky Mess”  
(Prisms series)

Williams creates a space for Black people with multiple identities to choose for themselves how they want to be heard and represented, as he finds a place within his work to do the same.



**VSA Emerging Young Artists Program Winners:** “Detour”

A mesmerizing selection of 2D and 3D works by artists with disabilities ages 16-25, exploring themes of material transformation, storytelling, and identity.

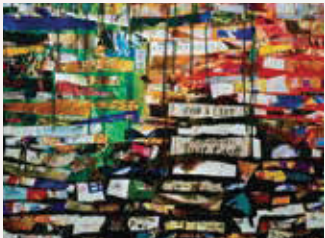


**Arielle Gray:**  
“Dreams and Tings”  
(Prisms series)

Treading the line of surreal and grotesque, Gray turns her dreams and hallucinations into visual points of entry for the exploration of mental health and Afro-Caribbean identity.

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## ODG@WAM – Higgins Wing, Worcester Art Museum



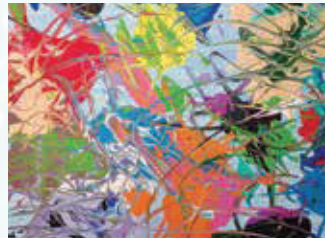
**ASPIRE! Artists:**  
“Bringing the Outside Inside”

Drawing inspiration from art found in public, ASPIRE! artists explored works of art in their communities to translate into a hybrid public/private, indoor/outdoor space.



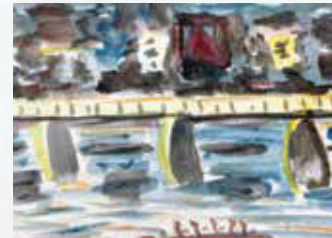
**Liz Doles:**  
“Nothing is Wasted in God’s Economy”

Through the eyes of a painter, Liz Doles transforms discarded garment labels and scrap fabrics deemed useless in our consumer-driven culture.



**ASPIRE! Artists:**  
“Reflections:  
Mirrored Narratives”

Drawing inspiration from artists like Pollock, Warhol, and Tiffany, ASPIRE! artists created a visual landscape that reflects their own aesthetic, vision, and ideas.



**Creative Minds:**  
“Our Minds, Our Art”

Work by artists with brain injuries participating in the Creative Minds program, reflecting their interpretations of art seen while visiting the Worcester and Fitchburg Art Museums.

# Professional Development



## **Professional Development for Educators and Teaching Artists**

VSA MA PD helped educators and teaching artists develop skills and strategies that utilized the arts to make their instruction, environment, and communication accessible to all students. Additionally, PD cultivated a community of best-practice professionals that provided ongoing support for growth and development.

Boston Public Schools (workshop) • Concord Carlisle High School (workshop) • Worcester Public Schools (year long) • VSA Intersections Conference (workshop) • COOL Educator Training (2 workshops) • COOL TA Learning Community (year long)

## **Training for Arts and Cultural Institutions**

VSA MA provided training and support to help staff, administrators, and educators in Arts and Cultural institutions to ensure that their policies, practices, and programming were welcoming and inclusive to all patrons and participants.

Massachusetts Cultural Council Universal Participation Learning Network (workshop)  
• Worcester Art Museum (workshop) • Training for Cultural Institutions in partnership with Cultural Access New England (workshop) • ArtsEmerson (workshop and follow-up discussion) • National Arts Education Association Museum Education Pre-Conference (conference session) • Arts Connect International Arts Equity Summit (panel) • Wheelock Family Theatre at Boston University (2 workshops)

**“The impact is already being felt in our classrooms. We now have a common language and a common set of practices, which I know will support us in creating safe and creative spaces for all our students!”**

—Wheelock Family Theatre at Boston University

**As a leader in the field of inclusive practices, VSA MA provides training and professional development to cultural institutions, educators, and artists to support the growth of programming and practices that welcome and include people with disabilities. This year, VSA MA staff designed and presented 22 professional development opportunities that reached 492 participants including classroom teachers and school administrators, artists and arts educators, arts and culture administrators, and service providers.**

# Community Engagement

Opportunities for connection, celebration, and creation through the arts are at the heart of VSA MA's mission. This year, VSA MA organized conversations, events, and experiences designed to bring together inclusive communities by enjoying and making art. Special attention was given to connecting with our COOL Schools families through family nights and arts showcases.

## A COOL Day at the ICA

High School students from Boston Green Academy and Community Academy of Science and Health came together to celebrate their COOL work in a day-long program at the Institute of Contemporary Art. Through engagement with contemporary art, students' concepts of art expanded as they toured the exhibitions and participated in an art-making workshop.

## Creative Minds

People with acquired brain injury (ABI) participated in monthly social art experiences at both the Worcester and Fitchburg Art Museums, as well as other community outings, designed to help them engage with the world of art through studio experiences and museum visits. Their work culminated in an exhibit, "Our Minds, Our Art," at the ODG@WAM.

## ArtWeek Events

As a statewide collaborator for ArtWeek, VSA MA led two events: "Get COOL with the Adams School" engaged the Boston community at the Paris Street Community Center in East Boston, where participants interacted with an art display by Adams Elementary School students and celebrated together by making art. In addition, VSA MA hosted a photography workshop in conjunction with Tyler Gala Williams' exhibit opening, where participants took and reworked photos of themselves to reflect how they want to be represented.

## ASPIRE! Elements of Art

ASPIRE! Artists participated in an 8-week Elements of Art class taught by a Worcester Art Museum educator, where they developed artistic skills, explored new media, and created a new body of work.

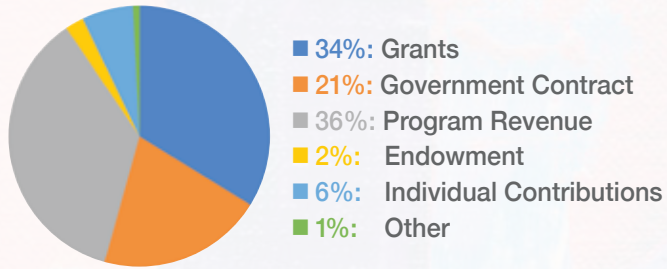
## ODG Community Events

In conjunction with exhibit openings, the community gathered to engage in conversations, artist talks, resource sharing, and art making, while celebrating the work of exhibiting artists.

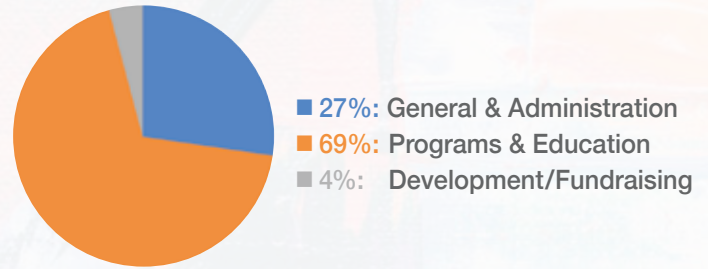


# Financials

## INCOME



## EXPENSE



## Funders

Amelia Peabody Charitable Fund  
Boston Cultural Council  
Boston Public Schools Arts Expansion Fund at EdVestors  
Charlestown Community Fund  
Greater Worcester Community Foundation  
J. Irving and Jane L. England Charitable Trust  
Liberty Mutual Foundation

Massachusetts Cultural Council  
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission  
Samantha's Harvest  
Unibank  
Wellington Management Foundation

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Thomas Clough	David and Kathleen Jordan	Paula Skog
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Julianne Ferguson	Deborah Norling	
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Nicole Agois Hurel  
Managing Director

Portia Abernathy Brown  
Director of Operations

Mia Branco  
Director of Education

Jon Ezrin  
Business Manager, Webmaster

Ali Blake  
Communications & Gallery Associate

Sean O’Gara  
ODG@WAM Coordinator

Marian Brown,  
Organizational Consultant

## Interns

Emma Farnham

Lauren Shron

Lindsay Tanner



## VSA MA Teaching Artists

Ali Blake

Leo Colon

Alexandra D’Amico

Danielle Devellis

Ellen Donaldson

Maureen Finnerty

Donna Folan

Dawnmarie Giltner

Andy Holiner

Tito Lugo

Kathleen Moye

Krina Patel

Jodi Schmidt

Alissa Voth



## “Art of Variability” Instructor

Elizabeth Fortin



Image credit: Oaklee Thiele, "Deep Pressure." VSA Emerging Young Artists Program

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