

2022 Create the Vote Candidate Survey

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on Arts and Culture in advance of the 2022 election. We'll post your responses on our website so that voters can make informed decisions about who will best represent the Arts and Culture community at the legislature.

We ask that you complete the survey by Friday, September 23rd. **We know your time is limited so we understand that your responses will be brief.**

Don't miss out on this important opportunity to be an Arts champion!

Email *

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Please share your name

Rachel Chaleski

What office and district are you a candidate for?

State Representative H.D. 138 (Danbury)

Every town in Connecticut can boast cultural assets that contribute to a vibrant community and improve the quality of life for its residents.

What are some exciting arts and cultural events and organizations that you have experienced in your community?

Danbury boasts many exciting arts and cultural events and organizations! When I first came to Danbury over 20 years ago, I joined the Danbury Music Centre (DMC) and have been a member ever since. My involvement began as a member of the DMC Concert Chorus, which performs classical pieces several times per year at no cost for our community, including an annual Messiah performance accompanied by the Danbury Symphony Orchestra. Through the Concert Chorus, I was recruited to volunteer as an usher for the annual Danbury Music Centre Nutcracker Ballet, a 55-year-old tradition and the only area Nutcracker production that is accompanied by its own live orchestra! I have since moved on from usher, and now, my entire family and I join each other on stage each year for this time-honored tradition that hosts dancers, musicians and audience members from all over the Greater Danbury Area.

As a parent and Board of Education member in Danbury, I am proud of the array of opportunities the public school system offers its students in art, music and theater; and I am happy to show my support at concerts, events, and fundraisers that connect our community. My own two children have participated in the orchestra program throughout elementary, middle and high school. Annually, the Danbury Public School hosts a Celebration of the Danbury Arts (CoDA), to highlight students' work and talents from across the entire district.

The Danbury Museum and Historical Society provides programming for all ages. The museum has provided school field trips for our students for many years.

My family and I also enjoy taking in shows and concerts by Musicals at Richter, at Ives Concert Park, and at The Palace Danbury.

Danbury is known for its many cultural events in celebration of its rich diversity. It is host to various flag-raising, festivals, events, and parades that offer ethnic foods, music, dance, etc. that our community can look forward to every year.

If elected, will you work to strengthen the arts and culture community in the town(s) you serve? If so, how? If not, why?

Yes, by continuing to participate in and support our local arts and cultural community. As a Board of Education member, I was glad to be able to serve as a conduit of information for the Danbury Music Centre to permit the Nutcracker productions through District COVID policy. I would aim to serve in the same manner at the state level to bridge communications. I would also look to garner funding for the arts and arts education.

Sandwiched between Boston and New York, Connecticut is often dismissed as a “pass through” state when it comes to tourism. Yet, our state has many world class arts institutions and a rich cultural landscape.

Why do you think arts and culture are important in Connecticut? What is unique about our state’s arts and culture?

The arts and culture in Connecticut are so important to the benefit and enrichment of its own residents. I believe Connecticut offers an array of opportunities comparable to those major cities and can be more easily accessed.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many people discovered that arts and creativity play a critical role in helping us cope with emotional stress and sustain our mental health. Art helped us process loss, fight loneliness, stay connected and feel hopeful.

Can you share a way that the arts have helped you, your family or your community get through the difficult times of Covid? How will that experience influence choices about the arts you would make as a legislator?

With the incredibly heavy weight of the pandemic on our minds and souls, it was the arts that kept our family busy and our spirits up during this difficult time. We took advantage of free online dance and art classes provided by local, regional and worldwide art education providers. Through these virtual activities, we found connections in isolation and a bit of restored routine in our daily lives. I will always recall these days with gratitude for those organizations and what the arts meant to our family and community throughout the pandemic.

The arts and creativity have a proven track record of economic benefit to our state. The National Endowment for the Arts' Office of Research & Analysis and the Bureau of Economic Analysis report that, in 2020, arts and cultural production in Connecticut added \$8.9 billion to our economy and accounted for 3.2 percent of our gross state product, while the arts and cultural industries employed 49,159 workers with wages and benefits totaling more than \$5.1 billion. (https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/creative-economy-state-profiles/)

Despite these contributions, the arts have historically been first on the chopping block when it comes to budget priorities. What would you do to help keep arts and creativity funded in our state at a level that recognizes their economic importance?

One way would be to keep myself and my colleagues apprised of such statistics. During budget discussions, it is important to remember and convey the return on investment, while also recognizing the value added to living in CT, when we invest in the arts.

Connecticut has not had an Arts Education Specialist at the State Department of Education (SDE) since 2016, when the last specialist left. This position is critical to assuring that our State and National Arts Education Standards are consistently implemented in all of Connecticut's school districts, especially those in under-resourced communities where students' access to the Arts is often extremely limited compared to affluent communities.

If elected, would you support refilling the Arts Education Specialist at SDE? If not, why?

Yes, there are so many benefits for students through arts education. Research shows that the arts can help students develop various skills that in turn help them succeed academically and beyond. The arts can contribute towards the social-emotional needs of students and overall school climate, which are at the forefront of Boards of Education's concerns following the pandemic and its effect on students and schools right now.

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