

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 *

senatorboucher@gmail.com

Please share your name

Toni Boucher

What office and district are you a candidate for?

State Senate 26

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?

I have been an overseer of the Weir Farm Art Center in Wilton/ Ridgefield, Member of the Wilton Historical Society, Wilton Play shop, Ridgefield Keelers Tavern Museum, attended performances at the Ridgefield Playshop, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Westport Country Playhouse, Westport Museum of Modern Art. Supported the work of Weston Historical Society, Lachat Farm, Earth place Nature Center, Wakeman's Farm, Mark Twain Library, New Canaan Historical Society, Waveney Art Center, There are more cultural and art events than can be listed here.

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, I have supported art grants to our local cultural alliances ,art and music teachers throughout the district and been a strong advocate in the State House and Senate. As a result , I received the following recognitions: • Distinguished Legislative Advocate for the Arts Award, Connecticut Commission on the Arts 2002

- Outstanding Contributions in Arts Advocacy Award-Association of Arts Administrators 2006
- Connecticut Arts Advocate Award from the Connecticut Arts Educators Association 2008
- 2008 Music Education Outstanding Advocate Award from CMEA

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?

We have an exceptionally high number of art destinations on par with NYC and major cities in the world. Many of the artist and performers live in CT and preform here in Fairfield County. The residents support and appreciate them and our artistic centers.

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?

Connecticut Art Education Association Conference Speech by Toni Boucher

I began my journey into public service innocently enough, wanting to “Make a Difference” on my local board of education.

What I have learned over the years is that the too often cited noble goal of “Making a Difference” is extremely elusive. Very few endeavors even come close to making a true difference in this world. There are only two places where we have a real fighting chance to make a lasting, life-altering difference-- in the home and in the classroom.

And if the home fails a child, there is only one place left.

Henry Adams said, "A teacher effects eternity; he or she ever knows where their influence will end." Usually, the teacher is unaware of the powerful influence they may have over a particular student's life.

This was brought home to me during my early years on the local Board of Ed. A mother came to me in private barely able to contain her sobs. She despondently told me that felt she was about to lose her high school age son. She was shattered and could not bring herself to talk to anyone. Her son had taken to riding his bike to a wooded park every day after school. She suspected he was buying drugs there but

could not be sure. He was spending more and more time with questionable characters, his grades were plummeting and he had become reclusive and depressed, hardly speaking to anyone.

I asked if her husband was as upset as she was. She explained that he traveled all the time, had a very important position and was in complete denial. This simply did not happen in his family. Period. She felt completely alone and utterly hopeless.

I asked her if he had an interest--a talent of some kind. She had noticed that he was constantly drawing and painting when he was not listening to very loud music. I shared this family's plight in confidence with a dean I knew well along with the high school art teacher. We agreed to make an attempt to salvage this young man if we could. The art teacher casually started to take notice of his art work and encourage his talent. He was asked to take more art classes, which he did and his skills improved to such a level that this same art teacher featured him in a one man show for a month. She was hopeful that this added attention would gain him greater respect within the school community.

It worked well beyond what any of us expected. Classmates would stream by the exhibit and were amazed. They could not believe that this art work could possibly be a product of that weird guy in the strange clothes that they tried to ignore in the hallways. I must confess that I did take some heat from more than a few parents that were not sure that his nude in chalk was appropriate for a high school audience. They had no idea how much was at stake...and neither did our budding artist at the time. But the exhibit did the trick. We were elated. His mother was overcome with secret joy.

He had lost his desire to make those daily trips to the park and had no time for "old friends." His work became his life. His improved performance, positive recognition by his teachers and other classmates gave him the confidence to follow his art teacher's advice. He applied for a scholarship to attend one of the nation's best art institutes. He got in, graduated and later worked at ESPN and CNN. He now owns his own art business in Georgia. Nearly 20 later, his mother still pours out a heart full of gratitude to this art teacher every time that I see her. The art teacher most likely is in this audience right now. If so, thank you, thank you, thank you.

You have saved a life and made a productive citizen in our society. And I have no doubt there are many more heroes out there in this audience as well.

If this is not making a difference than what is? If art is not a core subject than what is?

You may not always get the respect that you deserve and it may not be easy. But, what other profession provides the opportunity to change a young person's life or has the potential to leave an indelible mark every single day you show up for work?

You may not have concrete evidence most of the time you but you ARE making a difference in a way that most of us will never have an opportunity to do. So be proud of our work!

Another teachable moment In my journey to a higher level of political awareness came in 1994 as a member of the State Board of Education where I first learned that in the Hartford schools, for budget cutting purposes, had eliminated nearly half of the art teachers in every one of their K through 8 grade schools. The out cry by parents became so great that in the following year some of the cuts were restored. It has taken until just this year – 12 years to return to pre-1994 levels. This was and still is permissible in Connecticut schools.

I was crestfallen. Had not Hartford just argued that their students were not receiving an equal educational opportunity? How could we as a state that prizes its educational system above all else let this happen? Is not Connecticut's educational system the only really great competitive advantage left in attracting new residents and businesses?

I was told that the state board had no power to change state statutes. The issue could only be resolved within the education committee of the legislature. Well, I can tell you that this issue and a few others like it were enough to persuade me to hold my nose and dive fully into the legislative process.

Right off the bat, I felt great strides were made, a college trust fund for Connecticut kids, preschool services for the disadvantaged, early reading success, bi-lingual reform and yes even a Hartford school system reform bill. This was getting exciting. So, I braved one more bill that would add a mandatory art credit for high school graduation, all the while thinking about what had happened in the Hartford schools to our neediest kids.

Predictably, the dispute of what is a core subject was hotly debated. After countless hearings, testimonies and one on one meetings, I had over a 100 house members signed onto this proposal. Wow, it actually felt like this battle would be won. But I made a fatal error.

As a newcomer in the House and having been told that "Your Word is Your Bond" I took the bonded word of top Ed leaders that our arts requirement would be included in next year's high school graduation recommendations. That it would sail right through if I would just drop the amendment this year... that all good things would follow and the world would be as one.

Well, I do not have to tell you the ending of this tale.

When reminded again of its commitment in 1999, the State Board of Ed stated that arts foster success in the world of work. They went on to say "The arts develop problem solving skills, creative thinking, effective planning, time management skills, teamwork, management of information, communication skills, and understanding of technology. The board also stated that a quality arts education should be an integral part of the core curriculum for all Connecticut students."

We are still looking for the fulfillment of that commitment.

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?

This is an example of my work on promoting arts education:

Rep. Boucher's Arts Bill Passes Education Committee

Legislation Would Guarantee A Semester in Art Prior to Graduation Beginning in 2007

Legislation sponsored by State Rep. Toni Boucher (R-143rd, New Canaan, Wilton) gained approval on Tuesday (April 10) from the legislature's Education Committee to guarantee that Connecticut students take at least one semester of Art before graduating from high school.

Rep. Boucher introduced House Bill 5475 that would require students, beginning with the high school graduating class of 2007, to complete at least one year in an arts course or a semester in the arts and a semester in arts-related multimedia communications technology. Numerous other legislators have joined her as cosponsors.

"Since 1984," said Rep. Boucher, "the state Department of Education has proposed a requirement in the arts for graduation. The board took an official position in 1999, stating that arts foster success in the world of work."

Rep. Boucher added, "The arts develop problem solving skills, creative thinking, effective planning, time management skills, teamwork, management of information, communication skills, and understanding of technology. The board also stated that a quality arts education should be an integral part of the core curriculum for all Connecticut students."

In urging passage of the bill, Rep. Boucher said, "It has been especially gratifying to receive so much mail from every region of Connecticut, all stating that students in vocational education deserve the same opportunities and resources as all other Connecticut high school students. The writers have all very accurately pointed out that the arts also promote social skills and cultural understanding, so necessary today in our multicultural society.

"In addition," Rep. Boucher stated, "these skills are also necessary for all students to succeed in this new multimedia, technology-driven century. Yet, as we become a technology-driven society, we may be in jeopardy of losing our sensitivity and our humanity that cross cultural boundaries and that, in many cases, only the arts can teach us and touch us."

Rep. Boucher's bill was the subject of a public hearing during February in Hartford. Several state and local officials spoke in favor of the bill. It requires approval of the full House and Senate before going to the governor for his signature.

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!

This form was created inside of ctartsalliance.org.

Google Forms