

SUSTAINABILITY HERO

January 2018



Kristin Wenger
Co-Director, Arts Ed NJ

Kristin Wenger is the co-director and visionary leader of [Arts Ed NJ](#) (formally the New Jersey Arts Education Partnership), the unifying organization and central resource for arts education information, policy and advocacy in New Jersey. She is the co-chair of the Sustainable Jersey for Schools i-STEAM Task Force Subcommittee that was responsible for developing new actions for the Sustainable Jersey for Schools program and a member of the Sustainable Jersey Arts Task Force for the municipal and school program.

With a reputation as a creative thinker and collaborative partner, Kristin has spent over thirty years making arts education a priority in New Jersey. Shy about accolades, she credits her success to surrounding herself with outstanding colleagues. Kristin likes the Margaret Mead quote, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” She explained, “Sustainability means protecting the community as a whole; we need to work together to improve our future. To do this, we need to involve everyone to make a creative and positive change. When we empower people and work together like a choir, we sing with a unified voice and that is what Arts Ed NJ and Sustainable Jersey do well.”

Kristin is a fellow of the Prudential Foundation Nonprofit Executive Program, a member of the [Newark Arts Education Roundtable](#) Leadership Council and [Creative NJ](#). She is a past president of the Alliance for Arts Education/New Jersey and is a founding member of the [NJ Arts Education Collective](#) and the [Artists in Education Consortium](#). As a recognized arts education advocate, Kristin has facilitated numerous workshops, written articles and participated on many funding panels. In addition, she received the Tribute to Women in Industry Award presented by the YWCA and currently serves as the board president of the [Susan G. Komen North Jersey Affiliate](#). She has been selected to receive a 2018 NJ Governor’s Award in Arts Education for her work with Arts Ed NJ.

Kristin is retiring in 2018. Bob Morrison, the co-director of Arts Ed NJ said, “We, as a statewide community, have been truly blessed by Kris’ contributions to arts education across the entire arc of her career. As an organization, Arts Ed NJ would not be thriving without her critical contributions.” Michele Russo, president and CEO of [Young Audiences New Jersey & Eastern Pennsylvania](#), agreed saying, “Kris’ contribution to arts education in New Jersey is immeasurable, as she is part of the foundation of all of our work. In her steadfast, passionate and committed career in arts education, she’s forged partnerships and developed programs that have gone on to reach millions of children with essential arts experiences. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to work closely with Kris know that she has always brought humor, imagination and fun into the workplace while remaining vigilant in our efforts. “

Sustainable Jersey for Schools i-STEAM Task Force

Kristin has been involved with Sustainable Jersey as a partner since the municipal program launched in 2009 and served on the Arts Task Force. Most recently she has been on the Sustainable Jersey for Schools Arts Task Force and the co-chair of the i-STEAM subcommittee. The volunteer committee, with about fifty members, has experts from academia, the non-profit sector, the business community and state, local and federal government. Kristin said, "I'm proud to have had a seat at the table as Sustainable Jersey evolved. The program is successful because it provides an entry point for those just beginning and additional levels to make more progress toward sustainability. The actions are clear and obtainable." The i-STEAM Task Force Subcommittee was hard at work this past year preparing a suite of actions for the 2018 Sustainable Jersey for Schools certification cycle.

While the subjects of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) have been a focus of integrated learning systems in schools across New Jersey, there is a movement to add the "A" in "arts" to turn STEM into STEAM, acknowledging that art and science are better together than apart as drivers for innovation. The "i" in i-STEAM is for "integrative," recognizing that STEAM education needs an integrative approach across the disciplines.

Kristin explained, "Arts Ed NJ recognizes that an integrated approach to teaching and learning provides students with the knowledge and experiences needed to cultivate creative, thoughtful citizens. Including i-STEAM in Sustainable Jersey for Schools will help schools understand and implement action steps which are designed to deepen students' understanding of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math. New Jersey has a long tradition of prioritizing the arts as an important component of student learning, which is critical to the implementation of i-STEAM in our schools." The i-STEAM Task force did tremendous work this year and has created and successfully added four new actions to the Sustainable Jersey for Schools program in under one year. The actions that schools and school districts can do include: iSTEAM Planning & Implementation, iSTEAM Strategic Plan Indicators/iSTEAM Policy (District Only), iSTEAM Collaborative Units of Study (School only) and iSTEAM Professional Development Plan.

Arts Ed NJ

Arts Ed NJ was created to be the unified voice for arts education in New Jersey. Kristin has served as the co-director since the organization was formed. Arts Ed NJ was established in 2007 in conjunction with the release of the first-ever Arts Education Census Report. Kristin's first task was to carry out the recommendations of the Report. To date, the efforts of Arts Ed NJ have led to increased access to arts education for more than 75,000 students. The statewide campaign to increase active participation in arts education at all schools in New Jersey is Arts Ed Now.

Kristin has been instrumental in the development of the Model Schools in the Arts Program, the State Pilot Policy Program with Americans for the Arts, the Arts Ed Now Campaign and the Governor's Awards in Arts Education.

By documenting arts education in every school, Arts Ed NJ has been able to issue three statewide school-by-school census reports, added the arts to the NJ School Performance Reports and has created interactive Arts Education Report Cards. In addition, Arts Ed NJ's



accomplishments include: identifying Model Schools in the Arts; becoming a central clearinghouse of information for all arts education resources and services in New Jersey; working closely with a diverse group of stakeholders; becoming the presenting organization for the Governor’s Awards in Arts Education; and providing professional development for teachers and school administrators. New Jersey is now reaching the point of “universal access” to arts education for all students, with 99 percent of schools providing and 99.4 percent of students attending schools with arts education during the 2015/2016 school year. Read the 2017 report: [2017 Report. ARTS ED NOW: Every Child, Every School.](#)

Board President of the Susan G. Komen North Jersey Affiliate

Kristin currently serves as the board president of the [Susan G. Komen North Jersey Affiliate](#). She is a breast cancer survivor and credits the organization with providing essential advice and guidance during her diagnosis and treatment. The Susan G. Komen North Jersey Affiliate saves lives by meeting the most critical needs in the community and investing in research to prevent and cure breast cancer. Kristin supported advocacy at the local, state and federal level, fighting for the screening and treatment programs that save lives and the research that brings us closer to the cures.



Education and Work Experience

For her high school years, Kristin attended the [George School](#) in Newtown, Pennsylvania. The George School is guided by Quaker beliefs in stewardship, simplicity and social justice. The school teaches the importance of a shared responsibility for the world and the need to care for it well. Kristin said she gained a greater appreciation for community during her time at the George School. After high school, Kristin achieved a BA in Government from Skidmore College and went to New York City to work for the NY Division of Human Rights as a field representative. At this challenging job, she became familiar with the limits of the anti-discrimination laws. Feeling her strengths were in communications, Kristin went back to school and received a MS in Mass Communication from Boston University and a certificate in Nonprofit Management from the Mandel Center of Case Western Reserve University.

Prior to her time with Arts Ed NJ, Kristin was the executive director of Young Audiences of New Jersey from 1986-2005. Kristin said, “Young Audiences is a fabulous organization. I feel lucky to have worked with teaching artists that transform children’s lives with their work.” During her tenure, Young Audiences grew over fourteen times in size and reached millions of children in New Jersey. Upon leaving, the Kristin Wenger Fund was established in her honor.

What You May Not Know About Kristin

Kristin grew up in Ewing, New Jersey with her parents and two older brothers. She remembers family dinners with vibrant political discussions at the table each night. After living in Maplewood for 22 years, Kristin and her husband Ken are moving to a home they have built in Woodstock, New York. Kristin enjoys collecting art, traveling, being outdoors and reading; she is an active member of a book club that she started thirteen years ago. She looks forward to finding rewarding volunteering opportunities in her new home. New Jersey is losing a great member of the sustainability community, but we look forward to seeing what Kristin does next! Kristin concluded, “The arts nourish the soul and are a natural part of creating a sustainable community. If we teach children to be creative thinkers, they will be better citizens and more equipped to deal with our sustainability challenges.”