

Name: Ariel Beverly
Title: Miss Illinois

#IncludeTheArts - Advocating for Arts Education

Arts programs are slowly being phased out of curriculums in school districts across the country because of a system that rewards successful schools with more funding and punishes struggling schools with funding reductions. Studies have shown that low-socioeconomic status students who participate in the arts are five times more likely to graduate from high school, and two times more likely to graduate from college. If the arts keep kids in school, why are we cutting them from the programs that need them most? I became an art educator because my experiences in the arts have helped to build the foundation of who I am, giving me purpose, confidence, and community. While I knew that I could help my students find these qualities within themselves as their teacher, I could also see the significant disparities in art programs in our state. I knew I had to do something to ensure that ALL students had equitable access to arts programs that could set them on a path to success. My first journey into advocacy began in 2014, and in just 3 years, I raised more than \$8,000 in art supplies for schools in need. While projects like this help on a small scale, I quickly learned that in order to make a lasting impact I would need to forge partnerships with like-minded organizations, strategically utilize the media, and rally community support for policy change all with two concrete goals in mind: Every school should have a certified art teacher and at least one fine arts credit should be required for graduation.

As Miss Illinois, I've joined forces with several state and national organizations that recognize the important role that the arts play in young people's success. Together, we have already made direct impacts through advocacy, funding grants, and policy. As the spokesperson for the Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools (AIRSS), I work to shine a light on the funding struggles that these schools face. Together, we are working to give identity, voice, and recognition to more than 500 disadvantaged schools. I have also partnered with Arts Alliance Illinois to work on various policy change initiatives that will impact every school across the state, particularly Chicago Public Schools. Because of this organization's efforts, Illinois is the FIRST state to consider arts education as an indicator of K-12 school quality in concurrence with the Every Student Succeeds Act. I am incredibly proud of my #IncludeTheArts Postcard Project that I have implemented in schools statewide. I ask students to create their own masterpieces illustrating why the arts are important to them. With the support of my corporate partner, Blick Art Materials, I have awarded winning artists \$1,000 grants for their classroom's art supplies. This project is ongoing and I will be announcing the next round of winners in March, during Illinois Arts in Education Week. Once the project is complete, I will personally deliver all of the cards to Illinois Governor, J. B. Pritzker, to spark a discussion about the importance of arts education in schools.

It is critical for Miss America to have both a purpose and a plan for her year of service and I am ready to hit the ground running. My work with AIRSS is easily scalable, and has already garnered attention from other state affiliates of the National Rural Education Association. Together, we can bring more attention to rural schools and communities across the country. In association with the National Endowment for the Arts, I will encourage other states to adopt the arts as an indicator of school quality, just as their affiliate, Arts Alliance, has done in Illinois. Since strategic media usage is an integral component of my strategy to raise awareness for these programs, I am excited to be able to utilize my skills as an artist to create my own visual media to use online, in press releases, and in other marketing campaigns. As a licensed educator, my voice carries enough weight of experience to command respect in a roomful of policy makers.

Before diving into this initiative, I accepted that only material or monetary assistance could make a difference. Now I know that even the toughest obstacles can be tackled with determination, the right connections, and a creative mindset; the kind of mindset you learn from arts education. Doing my job as Miss Illinois has shown me that I can be a voice for those young people who need support, outlets for self-expression, and inspiration the most - just like I needed as a child. As Miss America, I will have a platform to continue my work, state by state, advancing toward a future where every student has equal access to the arts and a well-rounded education.

 11/12/19

Signature/Date