



Your contributions have supported opportunities for ACES students and staff

Annual Update 2026



**OVER \$106,000 RAISED
AT THE MARCH 2026 GALA**

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STEAM Food Insecurity and Sustainability class



Culinary Creations at the Bridge



Healing Salt Cave

Save the date-23rd annual Gala-March 26, 2026

Special thanks to our 2026 Gala Top Sponsors



22nd Annual Gala Highlights

On March 26, 2026, the ACES Education Foundation celebrated its 22nd Annual gala at Anthony's Ocean View, New Haven, CT. The Foundation honored Erika Forte and Anton Kot.



Erika Forte

Winter Guard performance and I was deeply moved. Brian and I felt that since we had knowledge about winter guard and with my special education background, we thought we could bring this to CT. In January 2006, we started The CT Tigers Winter Guard as co-directors. Our first season had 8 performers with special needs and 8 buddies. We performed at competitions throughout CT such as World Guard International, Special Olympics of CT Opening Ceremonies for the Summer Games, CT Sun WNBA pregame shows, the NCAA Women's Basketball Elite 8 halftime, the Middletown Pride March and the WGI Power Regional in Bethlehem, PA. Every year the Tigers perform in front of thousands of people, giving our members opportunities they might not otherwise get to perform and receive standing ovations. There have been a few other special needs Winter Guards (many in the mid-west) but we are the only one on the East Coast. In 2025, there were 25 Tigers and 27 buddies from throughout CT. CT Tigers are 100% funded by donations, sponsors and merchandise sales.

At the end of the 2025 season, Brian and I decided to step down. We were thrilled that another family volunteered to take over. The CT Tigers continue to perform throughout CT.

Erika taught special education in MA and CT, then went into administration before coming to ACES in 1998 where she was the principal until 2013. From 2013-2017, she was Assistant Executive Director of Curriculum and Programming until she retired. In 2005, my son Brian was competing with the Cheshire Winter Guard at the World Championships in Dayton, OH. During intermission, I saw a special needs



Anton Kot

Anton Kot is an award-winning multi-instrumentalist and composer known for his work on drums, piano, and gamelan. He is recognized by Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI) as a 2025 Future Jazz Master who continues to push the boundaries of music by combining contemporary genres with jazz idioms.

Born in New York City, Kot was raised by visual artist parents who were also educators. Kot credits his early exposure to the arts with broadening his musical palette and shaping his multifaceted sound. His Connecticut roots run deep in the New Haven music community: Kot graduated with an Artist Certificate from the ACES Educational Center for the Arts in 2020, earned his bachelor's degree in music performance on both piano and drum set from NYU, and is currently a M.M. degree candidate at The Juilliard School (class of 2026).

Kot has performed credits encompass leading clubs, concert halls, and festivals at home and abroad: Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Sunset/Sunside (Paris), Jazz at Lincoln Center Shanghai, Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, Guggenheim Museum, JZ Club (Shanghai & Hangzhou), Chengdu City Concert Hall, the International Gamelan Festival (Solo, Indonesia), the Detroit Jazz Festival, Vail Jazz Festival, and the Newport Jazz Festival, and more.

2026-27 Foundation Grant Awards

Due to your support, \$54,950.00 will be awarded, to the following grants as listed below, during the 2026-27 school year to benefit ACES students.

ACES at Ansonia

- A Taste of Academics \$2,500.00

ACES Basset Rd.

- Adapted PE Fitness Program-\$6,000.00

ACES Chase

- Mindful Motion & Campus Safety-\$1,820.00

ACES International & Child Care

- The Pipsqueak Podcast-\$1,300.00

ACES Security

- Facility Dog Heidi-\$2,600.00

Brightwell Academy/The Bridge

- Roots to Regulation: A Mindfulness Garden Initiative-\$1,736.65
- The Level Up Lab-\$2,619.31

Early Head Start

- Mom & Me Care Pack-\$2,000.00

Family & Community

- Resource Room-\$8,000.00

Mill Road

- Augmentative and Alternative Communication-\$1,136.00
- FCS Room Growth-\$1,500.00
- Heart Tech Monitors "Take2"-\$3,950.00
- Sprout and Learn-\$2,034.25

West Haven High School Collaborative

- Field Trips-\$2,000.00

Whitney Academy

- Fun Fridays for All-\$297.81
- Video Editing-\$3,400.00

Whitney High School North

- Fitness Room Equipment Update-\$4,400.00

Wintergreen

- Math Inquiry-Based After School Program-\$5,000.00
- Family Learning: College Connections-\$5,000.00

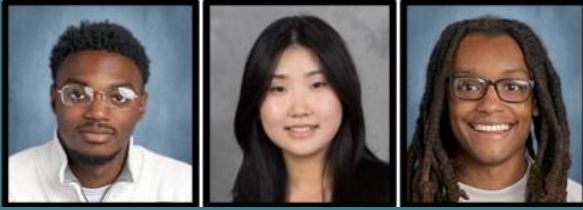
Fund-a-Need

The 2026 ACES Education Foundation's Fund-A-Need appeal raised \$10,575.00 to support Wellness & Mindfulness. Thank you to all who contributed to the appeal at the gala. Fund-a-need grant applications were approved in the amount of \$6,579.00 for the 2026-27 school year. Arts grants in the amount of \$4,565.00 were also funded.

Scholarship Fund

Alfred E. Hopkins Memorial Scholarship Fund for Advanced Study in the Arts

Congratulations to our 2026 Hopkins scholarship recipients!



Dante James Anna Kim Jason Thomas

ACES ECA Student, Dante James of New Haven will attend Juilliard

ACES ECA Student, Anna Kim of New Haven will be attending Rhode Island School of Design and Brown University

ACES ECA Student, Jason Thomas of New Haven will be attending Berklee College of Music

The ACES Education Foundation's Alfred E. Hopkins Memorial Scholarship Fund for Advanced Study in the Arts was established in memory of Alfred E. Hopkins, a beloved ACES central office administrator who appreciated and collected art. The scholarship began in June 2012.

The 2026 scholarship awarded three students \$1,000 each at the ECA graduation in June. Since its inception, the Hopkins Scholarship has been awarded \$63,500 in grant funding to students pursuing the arts. Principal Stefanie Savo is grateful for the recognition her students received.

ACES students that benefited from some of the grants awarded during the 2025-26 school year.

2025-26 Foundation Grant Awards

Grove and Grow Dance Class-Mill Road



Mrs. Plamieri and the students at Mill Road School were very excited to have this grant application approved for the 2025–2026 school year. The students worked hard while learning their dance routines and had a wonderful time throughout the program. They especially enjoyed performing for their families and the Mill Road School staff.

Fieldtrip Frenzy-Brightwell Academy-Bridge at ACES



Kerry Del Giudice "This opportunity allowed students to build relationships with one another, learn about science in a practical and engaging manner, and strengthen community awareness at the Norwalk Maritime Aquarium"

Blooming Expressions-Mill Road



Michelle Blouin and David Coan were able to show students how to make a winter floral arrangement, the students were able to take the arrangements home. The students were very responsive and did a great job following directions. They created beautiful arrangements.

The Link Project-Bridge at ACES- Brightwell Academy



This unique mentorship/community engagement initiative paired students from an alternative high school with peers who have high-functioning autism. Through this program, the alternative ed students had the opportunity to "link" back to their community by visiting local establishments, including Bishop's Orchards, alongside their mentors

Thank you to all the volunteers who helped make the gala a success!

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Judith Terrill
Kevin Walton
Kristopher Zabrensky

MUSIC PROVIDED BY ACES ECA STUDENTS

Aoife Adsit, Cello
Gianni Cardentey, Viola
Audrey Holt, Viola
James Hunter, Piano
Eden Levy-Roginsky, Violin
Avalene Morrison, Violin
Bernadette Sheehan, Violin
Elijah Shevelkin, Violin
Jason Thomas, Cello
Naruna Vora Camp, Cello

**ECA STRINGS
ENSEMBLE DIRECTOR**
Polina Nazaykinskaya

**PHOTOGRAPHY
PROVIDED BY ACES ECA
STUDENT**
David Fulton

**ECA PHOTOGRAPHY
INSTRUCTOR**
Paul Duda

**FOUNDATION
DEVELOPMENT
COORDINATOR**
Joan Hillo

The Mission of the ACES Education Foundation

The ACES Education Foundation exists to support the educational purposes of ACES, educate the public about the programs & services that ACES provides.

About ACES

ACES dedication to better serve its community is exemplified by the wide array of services and programs offered. These include adult and vocational programs, interdistrict programs, open and magnet school parent choice programs, minority teacher recruitment initiatives, behavior services for individuals on the autism spectrum, occupational/physical therapy, professional development and technology services.

Established in 1969, ACES strives each day to fulfill its vision of creating an equitable and socially just world, one life at a time. ACES serves its member districts and others through an ever-growing array of programs, services and schools that meet the needs of a changing educational landscape. For more information, go to: www.aces.org.

About the Foundation

The ACES Education Foundation exists to support high-quality programming that strengthens the academic achievement and social skills of ACES students, consumers and staff by providing grant opportunities to ACES schools and programs. Since its inception, the ACES Education Foundation has raised more than \$1,725,000 benefiting thousands of ACES students and families.

2027 ACES Education Foundation Board of Directors

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To make a donation, contact Joan Hillo
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