

# Iowa Conservatory Receives Arts Schools Network New and Emerging School Award

**Houston, Texas (May 2026)** – The Arts Schools Network Board of Directors has named Iowa Conservatory (ICON) in Iowa City, Iowa, as the recipient of the 2026 Arts Schools Network New and Emerging School Award in recognition of the school's exceptional vision, thoughtful planning, and rapid development as an innovative model for arts education.

Presented annually by Arts Schools Network (ASN), the New and Emerging School Award recognizes a promising school in its first three years of development that demonstrates strong organizational planning, clearly defined goals, and the potential to become a school of excellence. The award celebrates institutions that are building a strong foundation while creating meaningful opportunities for student success through innovative educational practices.

ASN will honor Iowa Conservatory during the Awards Ceremony at the ASN 2026 Annual Conference, October 20–22, 2026, in San Diego, California.

Founded in 2023 by Leslie Nolte and co-created with Dr. Beth Brown, Iowa Conservatory was established to eliminate the traditional divide between rigorous academics and intensive arts training. Guided by its philosophy of "Brilliance at Every Stage," the school provides a learner-centered, competency-based educational experience where students develop as artists, scholars, and engaged citizens through interdisciplinary collaboration, authentic creative work, and individualized mentorship. In just three years, the Conservatory has earned regional accreditation through Cognia, achieved accredited non-public school status in the State of Iowa, expanded enrollment from four to more than thirty students, and developed innovative programs including middle school arts STEAM education, a comprehensive arts conservatory for grades 8–12, a post-graduate preparatory program, and a growing residential boarding program.

Through project-based learning, professional artistic experiences, wellness programming, and strong community partnerships, Iowa Conservatory empowers students to discover their creative voices while preparing them for success in higher education and professional artistic careers. Its unique partnership with the local public school district expands access to specialized arts education, while collaborative productions, exhibitions, and capstone experiences provide students with authentic opportunities to create, perform, and lead.

Nicole Michel, Managing Director for ASN, said, "The New and Emerging School Award recognizes schools that combine bold vision with intentional planning to create exceptional learning environments from the very beginning."

Dedicated to excellence and leadership in arts education, Arts Schools Network, a nonprofit association founded in 1981, provides arts school leaders, innovative partners, and members of arts education institutions with quality resources, support, and networking opportunities. Visit [www.artsschoolsnetwork.org](http://www.artsschoolsnetwork.org) to learn more.