

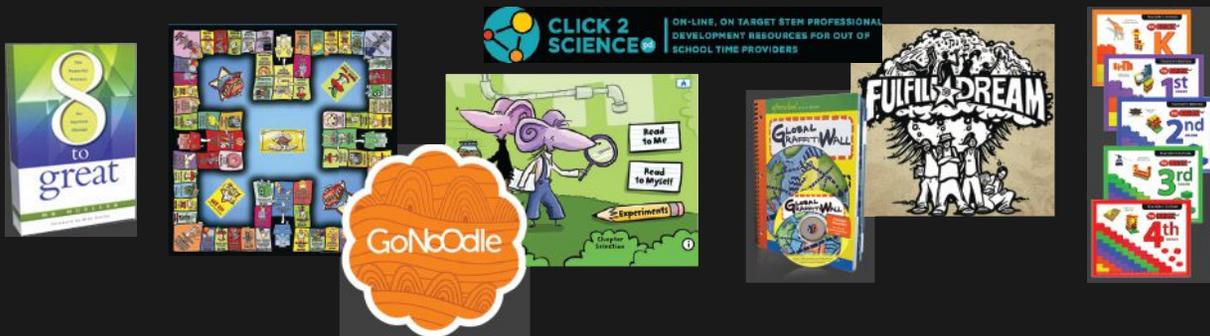
# AfterSchool

The Official Publication of the National AfterSchool Association/naaweb.org | Winter 2014

# Today



# 14 PRODUCTS TO WATCH IN 2014



**Straight to the Source:  
After School Products**

**Deepening Professional  
Development for STEM**

**The Power of Pinterest  
in Your Program**

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PHOTO BY JESSE BANKS III



# New Urban Arts

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

Executive Director Elia Gurna  
on the importance of art.

BY AMY L CHARLES

## Please tell us a bit about New Urban Arts.

The philosopher Giles Deleuze said, “It’s not important what art is, but what art does.” New Urban Arts is a free, drop-in youth arts afterschool mentoring program in Providence, Rhode Island. Our mission is to build a vital community that empowers young people as artists and leaders to develop a creative practice they can sustain throughout their lives. Our mentors are artists who apply and are interviewed and selected by the young people themselves. Young people and mentors collaborate on projects in multiple disciplines—animation, painting, drawing, comics, creative writing, sculpture ... We also provide homework help and college advising. Our studio is a multidisciplinary space with a silk screen studio, a dark room, computers, and resources for sewing, painting, drawing, sculpture, and other medium.

One thing that is special about New Urban Arts is that because the young people decide for themselves how to participate, the artist mentors do not use a curriculum. Instead, they construct how to guide the creative process with the young people, and without a preconceived notion about what or how young people need to learn. While we do have a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant from the state

department of education, we don’t feel that in the afterschool space we should be tied to a narrow set of goals or approaches.

## How did you become involved with the organization?

I came to visit New Urban Arts because I have always been interested in community arts and youth work. At the time, I was working as a teaching artist and trying to think of ways to bring the atmosphere of a print shop—collaborative, independently paced creativity and thinking through making into schools. I always found it disheartening to be the visiting teaching artist who would come into a building and get very little time or resources or space to actually have an impact or “change the air.” To me, working in a studio with other artists trying things is pure joy and deep engagement—I think all people need this.

## What is the greatest benefit of New Urban Arts and its programs?

New Urban Arts fills an enormous hole in public education. In the past ten years in Providence, more than half the art teachers have been laid off. Kids have very little, if any, access to meaningful arts education. I see art as integral to human health. Young people need opportunities to express themselves

and be creative in a supportive, nonjudgmental environment. New Urban Arts is a space that allows young people to form meaningful relationships with caring artists and to be creative, whole people; to define themselves as more than test scores and statistics, and hopefully to go out into the world demanding that for themselves and others.

## What do you hope to accomplish in your role as executive director?

I would like to see New Urban Arts have an impact on education in general. We have successfully modeled that young people can be in charge—that young people, when given the space, are able to make things happen. I would like for us as an organization to share our values and our mission and our work. I dream that New Urban Arts sends more caring artists into the world.

## Is there a single New Urban Arts success you’d like to highlight?

I think anytime we collaborate and share with other organizations and like-minded people is a success. We are part of a movement—struggling to humanize our society, our schools, our environment, believing deeply that artists change the world. •

RHODE ISLAND AFTERSCHOOL ASSOCIATION