What is a Model Cornerstone Assessment?
The National Coalition for Core Arts Standards Model Cornerstone Assessments (MCAs) were designed to encourage best teaching practices and the use of a variety of teaching methods, materials, and technology. Within the core standards, MCAs are embedded at the benchmark grades of 2, 5, 8 and three high school levels.

MCAs represent examples of the types of evidence needed to show attainment of learning reflected in the performance standards. The term "cornerstone" is meant to suggest that, just as a cornerstone anchors a building, these assessments should anchor the curriculum around the most important knowledge and skills that students should know and be able to in authentic and relevant contexts.

MCAs:
- Serve as formative and summative assessments throughout an instructional unit.
- Create the foundation for collecting and benchmarking student work that documents and illustrates the nature and quality of standards-based student achievement
- Produce authentic performance assessments that enable students and teachers to document a range of learning over a range of time.
- Capture students' higher order thinking and skill development in the four artistic processes of Creating, Performing, Reflecting, and Connecting.
- Contribute to the professional development of educators through the documentation of student knowledge and growth that helps them to refine their teaching and positively impact the quality and outcomes of student learning in the arts.

The Model Cornerstone Assessment Benchmarking Project
In winter and spring of 2015, approximately 300 arts educators nationwide piloted the new National Core Arts Standards in Dance, Media Arts, Music, Theatre and Visual Arts classrooms in a pilot project. Partially funded by a National Endowment for the Arts grant, the goal of the project was to collect and benchmark student work aligned to the performance standards' Model Cornerstone Assessments in grades 2, 5, and 8. In June-July, an additional 25 educators (5 in each discipline) benchmarked the collected student work, reviewing and scoring more than 6,000 pieces and ultimately choosing 200 samples as representing mastery of the standards' learning goals. The selected "at standard" student artifacts are intended to serve as exemplars of sound instructional practice.

The Model Cornerstone Assessment Benchmarking Project has demonstrated that MCAs are a sound strategy for articulating the quality of instruction and learning achieved in arts education programs. Beginning in January, 2016, NCCAS will launch the second phase of the project, focusing on the high school MCAs. You can learn more about the benchmarking process on the NCCAS wiki at http://nccas.wikispaces.com, or download and customize a sample Model Cornerstone Assessment on the National Core Standards website at www.nationalartsstandards.org

On the other side of this sheet, check out the takeaways we learned in phase one of the project, and the strategies we'll be applying next year.

Lessons Learned: Takeaways from the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards
Model Cornerstone Assessment Benchmarking Project

The goal of the Model Cornerstone Assessment Benchmarking Project was to have working educators "try out" the sample assessments of performance tasks embedded in the new National Core Arts Standards at the benchmark grades 2, 5, and 8. While many things were learned from the work done by our piloting teachers and assessment experts, the four overarching takeaways that emerged from the project were the need to:

1. *Improve the Model Cornerstone Assessments and their rubrics.*
2. *Increase the support for pilot educators.*
3. *Refine the collection process of student work.*
4. *Clarify the benchmarking process for inter-rater reliability.*

With these lessons in mind, here are some strategies the National Coalition for Core Arts will be applying in the second phase of piloting with the high school MCAs.

✓ **Always begin with well-defined assessments.** A review of an existing MCA prior to piloting should ensure that:
- The task represents essential learning in the discipline that is tied to standards-aligned learning goals and can produce reliable process and product evidence in a reasonable length of time within a variety of classroom environments by teachers of varying levels of experience and skills.
- The scoring tool is clear and easy to use to assess the evidence of student learning that will be collected and there must be well-define protocols organizing and documenting the evidence.

✓ **Offer ongoing support for classroom instruction.** In order to collect high quality evidence of student learning, it is important to provide educators:
- Detailed orientation to the standards, MCAs, benchmarking process, and performance task.
- Professional development throughout the performance-based assessment.

✓ **Provide clear guidance for collecting evidence of student learning.** To insure a reliable benchmarking process, teachers must be trained to:
- Document student work to include all types of student learning evidence needed for a given MCA and data collection methods (i.e. journals, video recordings, artists' statement's, etc.) that can be embedded into lesson plans.
- Apply skilled technical execution of assessments—whether video, audio, or other media—to ensure that artifacts are thoughtfully captured in a way that will enable consistent adjudication and inter-rater reliability.

✓ **Utilize sound benchmarking protocols.** The process of creating, collecting, and scoring samples must:
- Produce student work that is clearly labelled, aligned with the task, anonymous, and easy to read and/or view for scoring.
- Select benchmarkers with teaching experience that matches the discipline and grade level.
- Provide benchmarkers with a clear protocol for benchmarking and a detailed orientation to the MCA or performance task.
- Guide benchmarkers to score only the evidence—student work that they *see* or *hear*—and to do so based on the MCA rubric criteria, not personal perceptions.
- Ask benchmarkers to score work independently before coming together in teams to discuss the work. This preliminary scoring will lay the groundwork for in person discussions.
- Allow time for independent and group norming of scores in order for adjudicators to discuss their scores and reach final consensus on the inter-rater reliability of samples.