

# Announcing Johnny Merrifield as Executive Director & Honoring José Ochoa's Legacy

*The ChiArts Foundation is excited to share an important leadership transition with our valued ChiArts community members.*

ChiArts Foundation President José Ochoa has been a cornerstone of ChiArts since its inception in 2009, serving as the founding Executive Director of the School, President of the Foundation since 2021, and now a proud ChiArts parent. After 15 years of dedicated service to the ChiArts community, José Ochoa is beginning an exciting new chapter. The entire ChiArts community expresses heartfelt gratitude to José for his unwavering commitment to accessible arts education and creative opportunities for Chicago's youth. His vision and leadership have been incredibly instrumental in making ChiArts what it is today.



The Foundation Board has enthusiastically announced that Johnny Merrifield will serve as the new Executive Director. Johnny has been dedicated to Chicago's nonprofit fundraising community for 15 years and shares a deep connection to the ChiArts mission since joining as Director of Development and Marketing in 2019. ChiArts Foundation Board Chair Mirja Spooner Haffner shares, "I hold immense gratitude and admiration for the 15 years José has dedicated to ChiArts. Building on an already strong foundation and inspiring legacy, Johnny's vision and leadership skills are set to continue this momentum and elevate the Foundation to new heights of success and impact for ChiArts."

José Ochoa shares, "As I reflect on the past 15 years, I am so proud of what we have built. Words will never capture how meaningful this journey has been. I am forever grateful to the supporters, educators, staff, families, colleagues, and community members who have helped bring the idea of ChiArts to life. One of the greatest gifts has been seeing the growth of our students, the amazing accomplishments they achieve, and knowing that we are forever a part of their story just as they are ours. Like our students, I take with me so many valuable lessons and treasures as I embark on my next chapter. I continue to be in awe of Tina Boyer Brown's inspiring leadership at the School, and after working in partnership with Johnny for the past **Continued on page 2**



*several years, I can say with great confidence the future is bright. It is because of leaders like Tina and Johnny that I have the confidence to move on, knowing ChiArts and the Foundation are in the most capable and dedicated hands. Chicago and its youth deserve a place like ChiArts. As the founder and now as a ChiArts parent, thank you for being with me and for making this vision a reality."*

Founded in 2021, the ChiArts Foundation is the philanthropic partner of The Chicago High School for the Arts and raises the funds needed to sustain ChiArts' five arts conservatories in a public school setting. We steadfastly believe that emerging talent deserves every opportunity to thrive, regardless of prior exposure to arts education or income level. ChiArts Executive Director Tina Boyer Brown shares, *"It has been a true joy to work alongside José for many years, witnessing his remarkable dedication and vision in shaping ChiArts into a leading model of arts education for our students. His contributions have been invaluable, and his legacy will continue to inspire us all. As we welcome Johnny as the new Executive Director of the Foundation, I am excited about what lies ahead and look forward to collaborating to ensure a bright and sustainable future for ChiArts."* Under Johnny's direction, and in partnership with the School and its leadership, the Foundation is committed to ensuring ChiArts' private-funded music, theatre, dance, creative writing, and visual arts programs continue to create equitable access to arts education alongside the School's public-funded traditional academic offerings.

Johnny Merrifield shares, *"I am truly honored to become the Executive Director at the ChiArts Foundation. My own journey in the arts started with access to education and programs that provided not just skills but also a nurturing environment for self-discovery and personal growth. Having these experiences at a young age profoundly shaped the person I am today, and I believe these opportunities should be accessible to every young person. This belief has fueled my career and will remain at the heart of my work as Executive Director. ChiArts is that transformative space for so many Chicago students thanks to José's founding vision and the collective efforts of supporters, educators, and leaders who continue to bring that vision to life. In partnership with the school's Executive Director Tina Boyer Brown, our dedicated boards, and the entire ChiArts community, I am committed to ensuring ChiArts has the resources to thrive for years to come."*



Thank you for being a part of the ChiArts family. Your support means everything to us. We invite you to join us in embracing this exciting new chapter and look forward to sharing a new era of growth and opportunity with you. To learn more and connect with the ChiArts Foundation, visit [chiartsfoundation.org](https://chiartsfoundation.org).