

Educational Theatre Association (EdTA) THEATRE AWARDS CEREMONY New York City 2026

Peter Avery was recognized as the 2026 EdTA Administrator for Theatre Education Leadership



Peter Avery with Lisanne Shaffer, EdTA Executive Vice President of Learning & Instruction

EdTA Theater Administrator Award 2026

TEXT OF LISANNE SHAFFER'S SPEECH AWARDING HONOREE PETER AVERY

Great theatre education does not flourish through the work of teachers and artists alone. It also requires administrators who understand its value, champion its place in our schools, and create the conditions in which educators and students can thrive.

Throughout his career, Peter Avery has been exactly that kind of leader. As Director of Theater for the New York City Department of Education, Peter oversees theatre education across the nation's largest public school system. He leads professional development for theatre educators and school leaders, develops partnerships with Broadway, cultural organizations, and institutions of higher education, advances arts education policy, and expands opportunities for students to study, create, and perform theatre.

Under his leadership, educators and students have benefited from major initiatives including the international Digital Theatre Project, the Shubert Foundation and MTI Broadway Junior program, the National Theatre Collection, the Arthur Miller Theater Teacher Fellows Program, and the All IN(clusive) All-City Theatre Ensemble. Each reflects Peter's deeply held commitment to expanding access to high-quality theatre education for students of all backgrounds and abilities.

But Peter's impact cannot be measured only through the programs he has created or the initiatives he has led. It can also be seen in the educators whose lives and careers he has changed.

When I became a theatre teacher, I was incredibly fortunate to have the support of Peter Avery. Peter is the kind of administrator who doesn't just email you resources. He shows up. He was there with guidance, materials, encouragement, and an unwavering belief in me at a time when I truly needed it. My success as an educator is due in no small part to Peter.

His constant advocacy for theatre education is matched only by the genuine care he has for the teachers he serves. He has the remarkable ability to make educators feel supported, valued, and capable, and that kind of leadership has a lasting impact.

Peter's leadership in arts education began long before his work with New York City Public Schools. He founded and directed Disney Theatrical Group's first Education and Outreach Department and served as Director of Education for TADA! Youth Theater. Earlier in his career, he was Director of Theatre Education at Imagination Stage and Assistant Director of Education at Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, D.C. Peter has also taught theatre at the University of Maryland, American University, and New York University.

Through his vision, advocacy, and genuine care for educators, Peter has strengthened the people, partnerships, and programs that make transformative theatre experiences possible for young people.

For his visionary leadership, steadfast advocacy, and lifelong commitment to theatre educators and students, it is my honor to present the 2026 EdTA Administrator's Award to Peter Avery.

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TEXT OF PETER AVERY's EDTA ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Thank you Lianne, you know how much I respect you as a colleague and a friend—means a lot. Thank you all so much for this wonderful honor from EdTA, an organization of so many of my peers from a field we all care so much about. My work and passion are for students to develop life-long skills for the stage and beyond, through opportunities to explore their creativity and collaboration, much like my focus for our theater educators to do the same. If we profess lifelong learning for youth, then we must provide such experiences for their teachers too. Certainly to learn about innovative trends in the field, but also for teachers to experience theater making and community with their peers, embodying the creativity they profess.

Quick show of hands: how many of you here, when you were a theater kid, thought to yourselves, someday I want to be an arts administrator! That many! Ha! And while none of us probably started there, we have lived lives in theater and education, which led us to be passionate about making a difference, improving the management work we do on behalf of so many. "Administration" sounds so officious and bureaucratic, like the human version of an office building compared to a theater space. So I was curious... the word "administration" traces back to the 14th-century Middle English word *administracioun*. It is rooted in the Latin *administrare*, which means "to help, assist, manage, or direct."

I kind of love that... and is not THAT what we all signed up for when we realized we had the theater educator bug? To help, assist, manage, and direct all aspects of theater and theater education for our youth and communities.

I realized early in my career that I was drawn to building theater capacities and solidifying sustainable programs to reach students of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. Just as we need artists to consider teaching, we need teachers to consider being administrators. If the following speaks to you, you too may become an arts administrator! (at some point):

- Do I keep my core values at the center of all decisions-- even the most challenging and complex circumstances can be simplified -my $e=mc^2$ is youth and theater.
- Does my work expand opportunities for some or all youth, and is there artistic integrity to the theater work?
- Do I identify opportunities to meet the needs and address gaps in the field for our students and their Teachers?
- Does my work build capacity and strengthen sustainability? • Do others see me as a leader who values listening and collaborating—valuing feedback when sharing potential new ideas?
- Do I get a bit giddy when Someone mentions piloting a new initiative?

Tonight is special, and like the rest of you—we needed this break! Thank you Lilli, Jay and to the EdTA and everyone who worked to make this conference amazing. However, like you, I look forward to rolling up my sleeves and getting back to the work which we love. I need to take a moment and thank my amazing wife Keren (who is here) and our two amazing daughters who make me feel as if I had won a TONY each and every day.

Congratulations to all my fellow honorees who contribute so profoundly as makers, teachers, defenders, and supporters. The work continues. And thank each and every one of you for the voodoo you do so well.

Break a leg next year, everyone!

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Peter with EdTA Board President Richard Frazier-Sostillo, Executive Director Jay Gerlach & EdTA Executive Vice President of Learning & Instruction



Peter during his speech