

The Transformative Power Of Dance

An Interview with Jermaine Jones, Executive Director, National Dance Institute



Jermaine Jones with his wife, Yasmin, a fellow NDI alum



Jermaine Jones with multiple generations of NDI alumni

EDITORS' NOTE Jermaine Jones was appointed Executive Director of National Dance Institute (NDI) in March 2023. A lifelong advocate for the arts, he brings a unique blend of professional management acumen and a deep-rooted passion for dance to his leadership role. Jones' relationship with NDI began at age 11 as a student participant in Harlem, later performing with NDI's Celebration Team and studying at the Alvin Ailey School. He holds a BS degree in accounting from the Indiana Institute of Technology and has more than two decades of corporate leadership experience in the insurance and financial services industry. Throughout his professional career, Jones remained actively engaged with NDI.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Founded by the late New York City Ballet principal dancer Jacques d'Amboise (1934-2021), National Dance Institute (nationaldance.org) holds at its core the belief that the arts have a unique power to engage children of diverse backgrounds, abilities, and socio-economic positions and to motivate them toward excellence in all aspects of their lives. NDI's goal is to support the social and emotional development of children through active, participatory arts experiences. It celebrates the creative, compassionate, and confident young adults who emerge from its program with a strong sense of self and an enduring belief in their ability to succeed. Since its founding, NDI has impacted the lives of more than two million children.



Jermaine Jones with his son Shawn (left) and Board Member Helen Stambler Neuberger at an NDI event

Will you discuss your career journey?

I was one of the many thousands of public school children who learned to dance with NDI as an 11-year old in Harlem. I was a very shy kid, and dance was life-changing for me – it showed me that I could achieve anything I put my mind to. NDI helped me build my self-confidence, which was invaluable to my career journey. I absolutely loved dancing and continued to pursue it with the help of NDI and received a scholarship to the Alvin Ailey School. I was also always good with numbers. Math was my thing at Bronx Science (one of New York City's specialized high schools), and so I decided to pursue accounting in college after completing my training with Ailey.

As a college freshman, through the INROADS program, I was offered an internship with PricewaterhouseCoopers, and my corporate career really took off from there. I stuck with PwC for over 10 years, working my way up from an intern to a manager in their insurance practice. I worked in finance and insurance for another 12 years, moving on to work as a Controller at Guardian Life Insurance and MagnaCare.

All the while, I stayed connected with NDI – originally as a volunteer with their in-school program at the Lighthouse Guild, assisting dance classes to children with visual impairments. The program touched my heart and I just kept coming back, eventually finding more ways to get

involved with NDI. I merged my math skill set with my passion for the organization and joined the finance committee as an advisory council member, serving on it for over 15 years. I continued to follow my passion for NDI's mission and asked to join the board. After two years on the board as the Chair of the Finance Committee and Treasurer, NDI's executive director moved on from the role, and I was caught off guard when I was tapped for the position. Another board member, Helen Stambler Neuberger (who was also my 4th grade art teacher), said to me "Jermaine, you know so much about NDI, you were a child of NDI, what do you think about stepping into the nonprofit world?" And I haven't looked back since then.

How do you define NDI's mission?

NDI provides access to dance and music to students who otherwise may not have access to it. Jacques truly believed in the transformative power of dance, and growing up in Harlem, I experienced that transformation firsthand. At NDI, I made new friends of all backgrounds, developed a passion for the arts, and became exposed to different parts of the city. Our mission isn't to create professional dancers, but to introduce the arts to children at a young age to build self-confidence, nurture creativity, and expose them to new opportunities.



Jermaine Jones (in yellow, far left) performing with NDI students at the 2026 Gala



Jermaine Jones speaking at the 2026 NDI Gala

Will you provide an overview of NDI's programs?

We provide dance and music education to children throughout New York City, with our in-school program at the heart of our work. We are in 50 schools across New York City, and we partner with schools so that in every grade we serve, every student participates. Our in-school program includes two dance teachers and one musician, with live music that can adapt to the tone and mood of the class – all free of charge to the students and their families.

NDI also offers scholarship programs, for which we select two to three students from each school to join us for additional sessions on Saturdays and during our Irene Diamond Summer Institute. These students can work with NDI for three to five years, which is an incredible opportunity for a world-class dance education and allows for students to develop new friendships outside of school and deepen their relationship with NDI and the arts.

We believe that all children should have access to dance. Through our DREAM (Dancers Realize Excellence through Arts & Movement) program, we match children who identify as having a disability with students in our scholarship programs, meeting each child where they are.

We also provide collaborative teacher training based on the NDI Method™, which has been proven to work for students of all ages and abilities, combining a joyful and rigorous approach to learning dance.

As NDI celebrates its milestone 50th year, how important is it for the team to take time to reflect on NDI's impact over five decades?

For a nonprofit to be around as long as we have means we're doing something right. Our founder, Jacques d'Amboise, took something as simple as a free dance class to a classroom full of boys, and rooted that work with his belief that everyone should have access to the arts. With that mission embedded into our foundation, NDI has impacted more than 2 million students over our 50-year span. That impact is due to collaborative relationships with other nonprofit arts organizations, including our ANDIs (Associates of National Dance Institute program) across 12 states, and international programs in Shanghai and Lebanon (despite challenges, NDI continues to build relationships with students around the world). To celebrate this milestone, we are asking our alumni – anyone who has ever danced with NDI – to come back to the organization and share their stories with us.

What are your priorities for NDI as you look to the future?

We have just launched a new strategic plan that will guide our work in the years ahead. A key priority is growing our in-school program, where more than 6,500 students participate each week with classes integrated into the school day.

We are also focused on expanding our scholarship programs and teacher trainings so that more students can access the advanced training we offer and deepen their engagement with dance over time. And we're looking forward to hiring more teaching artists to increase our school partnerships and student participation.

As we look to grow, we are determined to do so thoughtfully – ensuring that our programming reaches communities where the need is greatest and that any expansion aligns with our mission and capacity. ●