



## **Arts Advocacy – The Arts Connect the Curriculum**

In this age of accountability, the arts are frequently considered expendable. Arts classes are relegated to inadequate facilities with insufficient funding for supplies and equipment and earn last place in the master schedule. [Research supports and practice verifies that a diverse program of drama, visual art, music, and dance cause students to attend school at higher rates; allow them to be better decision-makers and make them more creative.](#) But the arts are a well-kept secret. Too few classroom teachers, principals, policy makers and parents truly understand how the arts link all subject areas, reach students of all learning styles and nurture higher order thinking skills. Arts educators and administrators have a responsibility to share their insight - to advocate aggressively for the arts and their positive effect on young people.

Our mission is: *The Wake County Public School System will significantly increase achievement for all students by providing a world-class education that equips students with the knowledge and expertise to become successful, productive citizens.* This will be achieved because every staff member and every system-wide activity supports the effort. [As energy, time and resources are invested in helping students meet this goal, the arts play a leading role.](#)

A typical school day is filled with challenging subjects that cross many areas of study. Time is limited and teachers are excited about making the most of every minute they work with their students. Some people may ask, “with so little time and so much information to address, why should the children know the music of Mozart, be able to identify the work of Vincent Van Gogh or create a modern dance about metamorphosis?” [Because, the arts provide students a way to communicate and understand the world; they link us across history and culture; and a strong base within the arts teaches practical skills, self-discipline and critical thinking.](#) Through the arts, students can arrive at a broad-based, well-grounded understanding of the nature, value and meaning of the arts as a part of their own humanity. From a practical perspective, corporations tell us that their employees need to be able to manage problems and think “outside the box.” The arts prepare our students to meet these challenges with confidence, skill and creativity.

In addition to the in-depth study in each arts discipline area of Visual Art, General Music, Vocal Music, Orchestra, Band, Dance and Theatre, student learning spans across the entire curriculum. Students who learn how to read music, compose choreography, create visual art, calculate and execute theatrical designs are able to transfer their skills into their other classroom experiences.

Supporting arts education through advocacy requires us to “practice what we preach.” A few may be temporarily moved by dramatic anecdotes of student success through the arts, but the real change occurs when an “audience” can understand so deeply that they can return to their own community and teach others about the value of the arts.

Pieces of Gold - An Annual Celebration of the Arts provides an ideal opportunity for the school community to share in the joy the students experience every day. The audience can see a variety of selections - from those that were developed based on the students' understanding of "calculation" in mathematics, through the historical influence of "Masters" such as Beethoven, to an exploration of many different cultures. Introductory remarks written and performed by the students give the audience insight into the process of making the art as well as connections across the curriculum. Rather than appreciate the performance as simply talented, entertaining young people, the audience will leave with a greater understanding of the value of arts education in all our lives.

Integrated curriculum and interdisciplinary instruction are wonderful tools for arts educators to connect with other classroom teachers. Arts educators are a passionate lot and can sometimes be seen as elitist. Arts teachers have a curriculum of their own to teach - invaluable concepts and ways of seeing humanity that cannot be replicated so efficiently in other classes. However, the most effective instruction takes place when all teachers plan together and assist students in making connections across the curriculum. This interdisciplinary teaching must be accomplished while maintaining the integrity of each area. In Wake County we contracted two highly successful arts educators from Meredith College to design a model for curriculum integration entitled "The Instructional Palate." In this staff development teams of educators design a curriculum that integrates the subject areas most conducive to a desired educational outcome. Teachers explore the common areas across the curriculum finding terminology and concepts that transcend many subject areas. This team approach also builds a greater understanding and appreciation for all teachers on the team.

Arts Advocacy workshops were the last phase of our public relations journey. A team of three elementary and middle school arts teachers developed an interactive workshop that could be replicated in whole or part at school staff meetings, PTA presentations and community events. When the audience is actively engaged in an arts experience, the value of the arts is clear. So far, 150 arts teachers have been trained and are returning to their individual schools to model these advocacy efforts. Arts teachers and administrators have a responsibility to the young people in each community. With a proactive approach, arts education will leave the role of understudy and join the ensemble of essential curriculum players.

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