

MUSIC AND ART TEACHERS GET A BOOST



Children learn to love music through fun-filled music education programs

Photograph Courtesy of QuaverMusic

Teachers are the unsung heroes and heroines in our education system. Becoming a great teacher is not easy today, especially in urban settings, where poverty and a rapidly diversifying student population bring increasing pressures to the classroom.

I celebrate the accomplishments of the almost 400 visual and performing arts teachers in Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) and wish to highlight a new Federal grant that is focused on making good music and art teachers even better.

The U.S. Department of Education has only two discretionary grant programs focused specifically on the arts in public schools. MNPS was fortunate to receive the Professional Development for Arts Educators (PDAE) grant in 2017. Granted to only 20 school districts out of a total of 70 applications, the \$1.2 million four-year grant provides intensive professional development for music and art teachers in all Title 1 elementary schools in the district (55 schools/65 teachers as of 2017). The grant funds will enhance teacher effectiveness through technology, blended learning, and hands-on experiential learning.

In my view this is significant for (at least) three reasons: First, the fact of the award itself, given the competition. It speaks highly of the leadership of the MNPS arts department and Metro's commitment to robust visual and performing arts programs, pre-K through Grade 12. The community can be proud that every zoned and magnet school has sequential music and visual art (and some also have theatre and dance) classes taught by credentialed specialists. This is not a given in other districts.

Secondly, the grant activities will be delivered by two respected community partners. A long-time partner with MNPS, the Frist Art Museum will guide teachers in an inquiry-based teaching approach designed to help students develop close observation, reflection, visual literacy, critical thinking, and communication skills. Also, an experiential process utilizing artist mentors



Teachers provide hands-on experience and collaborative learning

Photograph by Ardee Chua

paired with art teachers will model effective teaching strategies, collaborative learning, and hands-on experience.

QuaverMusic.com is a Nashville-based company that provides an engaging web-based learning platform that “teaches children to love music through a fun-filled state-of-the-art program of music education.” QuaverMusic will expand their school reach in MNPS from 30 schools to 55. The program is widely known throughout the country, supporting teachers in all 50 states.

Finally, you might ask why this is a big deal, beyond the turbo boost to enhance teacher effectiveness? The evaluation component of the grant will of course measure the increase in teachers' knowledge and skills. What makes the work really sing is the plan to measure the connection between the growth of participating teachers and reading literacy of students. Another important outcome objective is to promote the development of students' creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication, known as the 4 Cs.

Metis Associates, a national consulting firm with extensive experience and expertise in arts education evaluation, serves as the external evaluator. The evaluators will examine the extent to which students of participating teachers have increased academic achievement in literacy as a result of teachers effectively integrating core content standards into visual arts and music instruction.

Herein lies the brass ring: The development of the 4 Cs and the connection between teaching the arts and student achievement in reading literacy are significant outcomes with implications for future program support. We know that teaching the arts is beneficial to academic, social, and emotional development, and cognitive and creative skills. Having more good research that deepens our understanding of why and how the arts are essential is a great thing.

by Laurie T. Schell
CEO, Arts Education Advocate
www.ElevateArtsEd.org



Photograph by Donn Jones