



It's that time again. Students are heading back to school, with new backpacks and fresh haircuts, ready to tackle a new year of learning. And teachers are ready to welcome them. The carefully decorated classrooms are just one sign of teachers' preparations. I asked three veteran MNPS arts educators how they get ready. Rest and recharge, professional learning, and planning are high on the list.

Christopher Blackmon, music teacher at Thomas Edison Elementary, plans to incorporate storytelling and story-based music in a more intentional way, hoping that students' musical experiences are anchored in stories that are meaningful for them. Mr. Blackmon plans to develop his successful after-school Music Video Production program to be a model for other schools and become self-sustaining over time. He's most excited about the team of seven arts professionals (including library) and "arts-hearted" classroom teachers that are ready to work as a team to offer robust arts learning experiences. He will attend Tennessee Arts Academy to recharge and reboot in an environment where arts teachers become students again. And to make it all work: "The thing I need the most to start the school year is collaborative planning time."

Carrie Bryant, art teacher at Oliver Middle School, plans to work on ways to build relationships with her students, especially as she sees most for only nine weeks. Mrs. Bryant worked with the Nashville Design Center during the summer and is excited to implement her new STEAM and Project Based Learning (PBL) units. During the summer, she reviews lessons, standards, and behavior management ideas, with the goal of reading at least one education book each summer. Mrs. Bryant is a facilitator at Tennessee Arts Academy at Belmont University and values the experience as a way to revitalize her own creativity. Like Mr. Blackmon, Mrs. Bryant will work in the coming year to address her students' need to process current events. Last year, students had the opportunity to express their ideas, concerns, and



personal feelings as a way to relate to Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. What does Mrs. Bryant need? MORE TIME! And on a personal note, she is loving being a new grandmother.

Nita Smith, choral director at I.T. Creswell Middle School, is excited about bringing back piano to the curriculum with a new piano lab. She believes students are able to progress faster and make stronger connections to choral scores through keyboarding skills. She is also excited to start a Tri-M Music Honor Society at Creswell, focused on developing future leaders, serving the community through music-based service projects. An arts department project that is generating enthusiasm is the launch of theme-based houses at Creswell in an effort to build community and create opportunities for older students to mentor younger ones (think Gryffindor, etc.). Mrs. Smith recharges in the summer with swimming, yoga, and dance classes at the Northwest YMCA and making music, of course. Greater parental involvement is on Mrs. Smith's wish list. Maybe her students will develop some magic-wand skills to help her on that score.

Very best wishes to all teachers for a fulfilling and successful year. Your students are indeed fortunate to be the beneficiaries of such dedication and enthusiasm for learning.

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