

Adrienne R. Hill, Hedgepeth/Williams Middle School for the Arts, Trenton

Program Description

In the Spring of 2016, the staff at Hedgepeth/Williams MS set out to change the school's climate & culture by integrating the arts into their daily practices. With the help of a newly formed Creative Leadership Team, we decided that we would:

- Write a Board of Education resolution to change the school's name to Hedgepeth/Williams MS of the Arts. It was approved.
- Connect with community arts partners who could support the vision of becoming a school that utilized the arts to turn around student/staff/community thinking from what our school had been to what it "could be and would be..."
- Ascertain student and staff levels of creative juice. Once we determined how parched or thirsty everyone seemed to be, we set out to fill their cups with as many arts experiences and exposure as we could find (and afford). (i.e. museums, performances, a guest artist series, nontraditional teacher PD, a first annual art exhibition, Dance Night...)
- Seek out "interested" teachers to allow some true arts integration lesson creation and implementation to spill over into their daily practices and classrooms.
- Soak up all available arts opportunities that supported our mission. (i.e. Title funding, Young Audiences NJ grants, BucksAir, McCarter Theatre and the MET Opera Guild partnerships...)

Impact on Schools

Right away, we noticed drastic changes to...

- Student (and staff) attendance—We experienced notable reduction in our chronically absent students—cited in the new ESSA plan for our work.
- Student engagement
 - in school
 - in learning
 - in activities
 - in arts clubs
- A severe decrease in student discipline referrals
- An increase in smiles, hugs and laughter for all stakeholders
- Increased parent engagement

Special Insights

1. The process strengthened what I already knew and believed--The arts can save lives; connect individuals; reignite teachers; cross all language barriers and restore hope.
2. Teachers NEED to be a part of the creative process! Everyone must have and be encouraged to use their voice!
3. Arts Matter.

Shawna Longo, Hopatcong Borough Schools

Program Description

The concept for STEAM was created 3-4 years ago by Dr. Olga Edgerton (Director of STEAM) and Emil Binotto (Hopatcong Middle School Principal) and then fleshed out collaboratively with the Superintendent of the Hopatcong Borough Schools. The idea came out of the arts integration initiative that already existed in our district, as we have attended the Educational Leaders as Scholars Arts Integration Conference for the past four summers. STEAM was an outgrowth of the Arts Integration concept coupled with our need to convert to the Next Generation Science Standards and revise the Math curriculum.

Starting in the 2015-2016 school year, we initially hired three STEAM Facilitators with Arts Integration responsibilities. As we begin our third year, we have expanded to five STEAM Facilitators. They are tasked to specific challenges and specific schools working with the Creative Leadership Teams in each building. The STEAM Facilitators are now charged with the task of working with individuals to plan STEAM programs, activities, and lessons in the five buildings and to redesign Hopatcong High School.

In our first year, we spent a lot of time and energy on researching programs across the state (school-based, non-profits, and other organizations) as well as visiting various schools to tour their facilities and meet with administration, teachers, and students. Our next step was to take all of the information we gathered and start brainstorming how the STEAM Program was going to look in Hopatcong. After numerous meetings with teaching staff and administration, we began to develop a strategic plan. This strategic plan is a living, breathing, evolving document.

Based on the STEAM Facilitator's work, we realized that we needed to further engage our students and staff. We took a deep look at our facilities and realized that they needed to be upgraded as well. We now have a Makerspace at Durban Avenue (Grades 4-5) and another in the design phase at Tulsa Trail (Grades 2-3). We also realized that a hands-on, technologically rich space was needed at Hopatcong Middle School where kids could be engaged in projects and make connections to real-world experiences with a focus on STEAM subjects. This space will be opened

by the end of September as the 'HMS Innovation Lab' with professional development workshops already planned for the staff in the coming months.

Impact on Schools

Here in the Hopatcong Schools, we have witnessed a huge increase in the energy found within the schools. Not only have we increased student engagement, but also we have seen a growth in collaboration amongst the teaching staff, which, in turn, has increased morale.

Another shift amongst the teaching staff is to focus is on the process of learning, not the product. This shift takes time...honestly, years...and is still a work in progress, but worth the effort.

We have also created a "buzz" and excitement around our buildings due to the renovations going on and creation of Makerspaces and Innovation Labs. We have increased the number of curriculum-driven field trips and partnerships with outside organizations.

Special Insights

Nothing good ever comes easy! It takes a lot of time, patience, and a knowledge base (research and professional development), as well as planned financing. A strategic plan with specific, measurable goals is imperative to the success of a new initiative like our STEAM Initiative.

We also realized that we couldn't force this down people's throats. They had to see the value in doing this. Some teachers jumped on board immediately. Others took a little longer, and some are still on their journey. But, to truly understand the value of teaching and learning this way, they had to experience it. And, experiences are at the heart of our STEAM Initiative.

Corey Petit, West Avenue School, Bridgeton

Program Description

Our project at West Avenue was created in order to increase arts integration into our students' daily activities throughout multiple disciplines. Our vision MAS ALTO: Meaning and the Art of Storytelling: Arts and Literacy Together as One, was put into place in order to help our students become more engaged in their own learning and improve our overall student active participation in school as a whole. Over the course of our two years as an arts integration team, we have seen a great turnaround in grades, F & P scores, attendance, and behavior. Our most recent accomplishment during the 2017-18 school year was 6 of our bilingual students tested out of their bilingual programs and transitioning into their new homerooms just this past week. Our program has knocked down language barriers and proved that arts integration paves the way to an

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education without boundaries. Being a Title I district, our program is growing larger, and our main goal is to focus on building an Arts Integrated Curriculum that our teachers can access for direction with arts integration, units, and lesson plans.

Impact on Schools

For our school, we have seen improvement in student involvement in extra curricular activities, such as our Robotics club, music, band, choir and art club. Our numbers have greatly increased for grades 1-3 from last year. Our school was hesitant at first and our teachers thought the program was not suitable for our school. We had to speak to the teachers in small group settings, map out plans and explain that this was a chance to make the work more engaging and fun for the students *and* our teachers. Our principal was more than happy to let the teachers experiment, and with this support our outcomes were fantastic. Our visiting artist, Queen Knur, a storyteller, was able to help the kids retell stories the students were reading and learning about in their classes. The stories came to life when the students had to recall, narrate, and perform their stories during our culminating event at the end of the year. Students of all different levels of learning were able to stand up in front of a large audience and retell the stories in their own way. We now have a free library of stories where the students can “take one, and leave one” to encourage their reading beyond the classroom. I believe it has greatly impacted our school, our district, and our faculty’s perception of arts education.

Special Insights

The best part of our project was being able to work with other teachers and learn how others set up and establish learning communities in their classroom. Our school slogan is “West is The Best”, and I truly believe that. When we started working on our arts integration program- we only had three people. Our program has now increased to a large committee of 20 people, several in-house and out-of-house Professional Development, reaching every grade level in our building (K-8) and grant funding for the last two years. Our goal not only as an arts integration team, but also as school, is to make sure the kids in our community are taking the first steps outside the box. When our kids are excited about school, the future looks bright for all of our students.

Lisa Vartanian, Paramus Public Schools, Paramus

Program Description

In 2007, New Jersey Arts Education Partnership (now Arts Ed NJ) published the findings of the statewide survey on arts education entitled, *Within Our Power: The Progress, Plight and Promise of Arts Education for Every Child*. The survey highlighted the status of existing programming in arts education among New Jersey Public Schools and made recommendations for how to improve those programs. Administrators and teachers from Paramus High School used data from these

findings as a tool to assess and improve the arts program. In addition to modifying curricula and creating meaningful assessment tools (performance-based and portfolio-based) to measure student growth in the areas of music and art, a dance program was established and modifications were made to the theater arts program. In 2011, the arts survey was administered again. Paramus High School met the qualifying criteria to apply for Model School in the Arts status. *The definition of a model is a school that scored in the top 10% of the New Jersey Arts Education Census Project and a school that is teaching all four arts disciplines: dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts.* The comprehensive application process included a visit by representatives from the New Jersey Arts Education Partnership who spent a day at Paramus High School assessing the program, reviewing curricula, and interviewing teachers and administrators. In 2012, Paramus High School received the distinct honor of being recognized as a Model School in the Arts.

Impact on Schools

Data from the 2007 report, *Within Our Power: The Progress, Plight and Promise of Arts Education for Every Child*, was analyzed and reviewed by Paramus administration. The findings brought validation to strengths within the program and identified areas where growth was needed. The district utilized recommendations found in the report to create an action plan. The plan included visits to Model Schools in the Arts and use of the Model Schools rubric. Additionally, the professional development model was improved, curricula were modified, new programs were proposed such as dance and theater arts, and improvements were made to the art and music departments. The transformation resulted in Paramus receiving the Model Schools in the Arts status in 2012.

As New Jersey approaches 'Universal Access' to arts education, it is important that school administrators, teachers, parents, and students continue to advocate on behalf of arts education. The Paramus Public School district is fortunate to have an extremely supportive superintendent, board of education, and community who embrace the arts. **We believe that the arts are not only essential and part of a well-rounded education, but should also be accessible to all children, and are core academic subjects taught by highly qualified, certified teachers.** We found Arts Ed NJ to be the most useful tool in our 'advocacy toolbox' as the organization provides stakeholders resources, such as research, to utilize in order to take action and be active members of the arts community. The advocacy resources that Arts Ed NJ provides are used not only in presentations to the community, but also to enhance communications send home to parents. Last year, Paramus hosted a K-12 District-Wide Arts Festival. As part of the festival, the district launched the Arts ED NOW campaign. Through this campaign, hundreds of parents, students, and community members had a chance to learn about the importance of the arts in the education process. The Paramus community proudly took pictures in front of the Arts ED NOW sign resulting in a variety of beautiful Arts Ed NOW posters displayed on the walls of Paramus High School. The ARTS ED NOW campaign generated conversations about arts education for weeks after the arts festival.

Special Insights

I learned a number of important lessons through the process of modifying existing arts programs as well as establishing new programs.

1. Do your homework-research, visit model schools, ask a lot of questions.
2. Reach out and collaborate with arts supervisors and arts colleagues- network.
3. Get actively involved in associations such as the New Jersey Music Administrators Association, The Arts Administrators Association, etc.
4. Involve all stakeholders in the process of expanding or developing a program—get them excited about the possibilities for growth!
Stakeholders include: students, parents, teachers, administrators, school boards, community members.
5. Partner with the community, arts organizations, and arts advocacy groups
6. Create an action plan. Be mindful in your planning. Prepare and present a comprehensive 4 year plan. If you encounter an obstacle, find a way around it- don't give up!
7. Continually advocate for the arts program even when you have a supportive school board and administrative team.
 - a. Advocate for your arts program during monthly board meetings, PTA meetings, and at local organizations such as Rotary and the Chamber of Commerce. Send letters home to parents about the importance of arts education for every child.
 - b. Use the resources and tools provided by the Arts Ed NJ organization as well as other arts advocacy organizations when preparing presentations.
8. Keep the programs visible- have students share their amazing artistic talents with the community and beyond.

As the 2017 NJ Arts Education Census Project just released their 3rd report entitled, "Every Child, Every School," I urge school board members and administrators to read and reflect on the key findings from the report and use recommendations made by the organization to create an action plan for school improvement as "we still have more than 40,000 elementary students and another 40,000 middle schools students who should be participating in the arts (based on state policies) that are not. There are another 40,000 or so high school students who could also be participating... that are not (2017-NJ-Arts-Ed-Census Report-Final)". In the powerful words of Bob Morrison, "In a world where imagination, creativity and innovation are sculpting our future, ensuring we provide the inspiration for these skills for all students must be our goal."