

Struggling schools leverage arts to improve student engagement

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Perpich Center for Arts Education has chosen Bethune Elementary School in Minneapolis as one of four schools to participate in Turnaround Arts: Minnesota, a national initiative designed to narrow the achievement gap and improve student engagement through the arts.

The other schools selected to participate in this two-year school improvement program are: Northside Elementary School in St. James; Northport Elementary, Brooklyn Center, Robbinsdale School District; and Red Lake Middle School, Red Lake.

Participating schools were selected through a stringent, nationally-vetted process. Selection criteria included demonstrated need and opportunity, strong school leadership and a commitment to arts education. Minnesota's Turnaround Arts schools represent a diversity of student demographics in urban, suburban and rural settings. "Minnesota has some of the highest achieving students in the nation, but we also have one of the highest achievement gaps between white students and students of color," Rep. Keith Ellison said. "Turnaround Arts will use arts education and our community's rich culture to inspire our students and close that achievement gap."



Schools in the program receive intensive arts education resources and expertise and the schools' communities will be involved in strategic planning processes with guidance from Perpich, a state agency serving all schools, students and educators in Minnesota. Created in 1985 by the Minnesota state legislature, the agency seeks to advance K-12 education throughout the state by teaching in and through the arts (perpich.mn.gov). Selected schools will

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receive arts education training and resources to address their individual needs as well as access to community arts and cultural organizations and a national network of school leaders and teachers.

"We are looking forward to the prospect of building new partnerships with the growing arts community," said Minneapolis Public School Superintendent Bernadeia Johnson.

This next school year, MPS will have a visual arts teacher at Bethune in addition to a full-time music teacher. The state also is contributing funds in support of the arts effort. The state legislature approved \$750,000 specifically for the Minnesota Turnaround Arts initiative. In addition, the Minnesota State Arts Board has committed \$300,000 for grants—up to \$75,000 per school per year. Each school also will receive \$25,000 in arts supplies, musical instruments and play licenses through national Turnaround Arts.

The President's Committee has appointed high-profile artists – songwriter Clarence Greenwood (aka Citizen Cope), actor/rapper Doc Shaw and actor Sarah Jessica Parker – who will "adopt" Minnesota Turnaround Arts during the next two years to support the schools' educational reform efforts. Minnesota artists and cultural organizations also will participate with funding from the Minnesota State Arts Board.

"The act of creating art brings great joy to children," Johnson said. "The arts can increase children's engagement at school and the Minneapolis district is committed to building up the presence of arts at Bethune."

Bethune faces severe challenges as the sixth lowest performing school in the state. All have committed to the new arts-based approach of Turnaround Arts.

"We look forward to working with the dedicated leaders and teachers of these schools," said Sue Mackert, executive director of Perpich. "Perpich has a strong tradition of collaborating with schools and communities across Minnesota to use arts education as a tool for addressing the systemic issues affecting achievement."

Arts education has been shown through numerous studies to be an important part of education as a whole and able to give students tools for success. Decades of research show that arts-engaged students perform better than their peers.

For example, recent studies show that students that participate regularly in the arts:

- Are more self-confident and better able to express their ideas;
- Have higher attendance and high school graduation rates; and
- Are more likely to go on to a four-year university, graduate from that university and go on to a career with potential.

While affluent public schools have high rates of arts education, high-poverty schools often have almost none. There are over 5 million students in public elementary schools in this country without either a music or an arts class in their school. Turnaround Arts hopes to change this picture.

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"In Minnesota, we have seen a trend in schools cutting back on arts education to balance tighter and tighter budgets," Sue Mackert said. Perpich, in concert with our national and local partners, will show that arts education makes a difference." The program will provide both uniform and customized resources to respond to the particular arts education-related needs of the individual schools selected to participate.



A preliminary assessment of pilot schools in the Turnaround Arts program in other states shows that the hypothesis is holding true, with math and reading scores going up and students and families increasing engagement. The report leading to the establishment of the Turnaround Arts program as well as a new interim report on its effectiveness can be found at www.pcah.gov/publications