



PROGRAM SUMMARY

Academics and Arts Alive is an innovative arts-integrated education program designed to strengthen students' academic proficiency, standardized testing performance, and college readiness through meaningful, arts-based learning experiences. In addition to supporting academic achievement, the program cultivates essential skills in communication, self-expression, social-emotional learning (SEL), leadership development, collaboration, and community building.

Under the guidance of trained arts and education professionals, students take an active role in the creation, production, management, and execution of a live performance. Each performance is intentionally developed around an academic or social area identified as a priority for improvement within the school community. These areas are thoughtfully integrated into the creative process, encouraging students to engage with academic concepts and social issues in ways that are relevant, experiential, and personally meaningful.

Rather than simply receiving information, students are challenged to understand, interpret, and apply what they have learned in order to transform their ideas into creative expression. Through this process, students strengthen critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and leadership skills while developing a deeper connection to their academic learning.

Academics and Arts Alive utilizes a combination of classes, workshops, clubs, collaborative projects, and guest artist performances to achieve its educational and developmental goals. By connecting academic learning with artistic expression, the program creates an engaging environment in which students can strengthen their academic abilities, discover their creative potential, build confidence, and develop skills that support success in school, college, and beyond.

*The program can be run during school hours or after school.

*For schools who are on target with their academics, we have alternative programming.

Objective

- Obtain school's standardized testing scores and percentages over the last 5 years.
 - Identify areas of testing that need the most improvement
 - Identify other areas of development that need improvement
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- Work with school administration and teachers to identify the school's culture, methodology, and students in need of academic improvement.
- Obtain teachers' syllabi and lesson plans
- Create a curriculum that utilizes the performing arts to improve students' standardized test scores, academic proficiency, and college preparation skills.
- Partner with Bamss non profit organization to develop the program curriculum and train teaching artist.
- Partner with various tutors and teachers to develop the program curriculum and train teaching artist.

Goals

- Improve student's/school's standardized test scores.
- Improve student's confidence, self-expression, and communication skills.
- Equip students with alternative methods to achieve academic proficiency
- Equip students with skills that will give them ownership over their academics, and mental well being.
- Equip students with skills to have a competitive edge when applying for colleges and job opportunities.
- Help students put their academics into action!

PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

According to the Center for Education Policy Research, student test scores in the United States have experienced a notable decline since 2010. Some researchers have attributed this decline, in part, to the growing influence of cell phones and social media. What makes these technologies so powerful is their ability to provide users with immediate access to information and the opportunity to interact with it instantly. More importantly, they give users a sense of ownership over that information and the freedom to apply, interpret, and share it as they see fit. The challenge, of course, is that the information being consumed is not always accurate or reliable.

As students have become increasingly accustomed to this immediate and highly interactive relationship with information, educators face the difficult task of engaging students through traditional and even non traditional methods of instruction that seem to fall short. The question, then, is not simply how we compete with technology, but how we create educational experiences that offer students the same sense of access, ownership, interaction, and application while maintaining academic integrity.

The arts, when strategically integrated into a school's curriculum, can provide a powerful answer.

The arts give students access to information, a sense of ownership over what they learn, and virtually unlimited opportunities to apply that knowledge creatively. Unlike the passive or often unstructured consumption of information through cell phones and social media, arts education simultaneously develops discipline, responsibility, leadership, critical thinking, communication, and peer collaboration. Students are not simply asked to receive information; they are challenged to understand it, interpret it, question it, and ultimately transform it into something meaningful.

Equally important is the relationship between the arts and academics. Art cannot be created effectively in isolation from academic knowledge. Mathematics is present in rhythm, music, design, architecture, and movement. Science informs sound, light, color, anatomy, and the physical principles behind movement and artistic materials. History, literature, language, and culture provide the context from which countless works of art emerge. Academics and the arts are not competing disciplines; they strengthen and inform one another.

Likewise, creativity—the foundation of artistic expression—is essential to academic discovery and innovation. Knowledge gives us an understanding of what already exists; creativity allows us to imagine what might exist next.

The greatest advances in mathematics, science, engineering, medicine, and technology have required not only knowledge, but also imagination, experimentation, problem-solving, and the willingness to approach familiar questions in new ways.

History provides compelling examples of societies in which artistic, philosophical, mathematical, and scientific inquiry developed alongside one another. Ancient Greece, in particular, produced influential advancements in mathematics, science, philosophy, architecture, literature, and theatre. These disciplines were not viewed simply as isolated areas of study; together, they contributed to a broader culture of inquiry, creativity, and intellectual development whose influence remains visible throughout much of modern society.

Perhaps education today can learn something from that model. Rather than asking students to choose between creativity and academics, we should create educational environments in which the two continuously reinforce one another.

If we examine where we have come from, we can better understand how to prepare students for where we want to go.

Arts, Mental Health, and Social-Emotional Development

Mental health concerns among young people have increased significantly in recent years. In my view, the diminished role of the arts in many schools may be one contributing factor. Students are often presented with enormous amounts of information but given limited opportunities to explore how that knowledge connects to their lives, identities, communities, and experiences. They are then expected to retain and reproduce that information with a high degree of accuracy. When they struggle to do so, the educational response can become focused more on correction and consequences than on curiosity, discovery, and personal growth.

Within this model, students may have few opportunities to express themselves through what they are learning. The arts can help address this gap because they provide a creative outlet for processing and applying information. Artistic expression encourages students to transform knowledge into something personal and meaningful. Through that process, students can develop confidence, a sense of personal value, adaptability, social awareness, communication skills, and a stronger connection to their peers and communities.

Creative expression has also been associated with important social and emotional benefits, including stress reduction, increased engagement and focus, greater motivation, and stronger collaborative skills. For these reasons, the arts can serve as a powerful complement to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). When thoughtfully integrated into education, the arts provide students with opportunities not only to acquire knowledge, but also to process emotions, communicate ideas, develop empathy, work collaboratively, and understand themselves in relation to others.

Art as the Application of Knowledge

Art can be understood as the creative output of processed information. To create meaningful art, an individual must do more than simply acquire knowledge; they must interpret, contextualize, and apply it. In this sense, artistic practice can encourage a deeper understanding of a subject by requiring students to transform information into action.

Theatre, in particular, is an extraordinary vehicle for human development because of its interdisciplinary and inclusive nature. It incorporates literature, history, music, movement, visual design, mathematics, technology, communication, psychology, and social interaction. It also provides opportunities for people of different cultures, genders, religions, nationalities, economic backgrounds, and skill sets to contribute toward a common objective.

The skills cultivated through theatre extend well beyond the stage. Communication, presentation, storytelling, collaboration, improvisation, adaptability, empathy, leadership, technical production, and creative problem-solving are utilized throughout business, politics, education, technology, and everyday social interaction.

Interestingly, many of these creative methods are fundamental to early childhood education. Young children regularly learn through movement, music, storytelling, drawing, role-playing, experimentation, and imaginative play. As students grow older, however, education often becomes increasingly centered on academic specialization, memorization, assessment, and measurable outcomes. The opportunities to creatively apply knowledge can consequently become less prominent.

This transition can leave students with considerable information but fewer opportunities to understand its practical, emotional, cultural, and human significance.

Moving Beyond the “Left Brain/Right Brain” Misconception

The traditional idea that people primarily operate from either a logical and analytical “left brain” or a creative and intuitive “right brain” is an oversimplification of how the brain functions. Contemporary neuroscience demonstrates that complex activities—including both artistic and academic tasks—depend upon interconnected networks across multiple regions of the brain. Yet education is still frequently organized as though creativity and academics belong to fundamentally separate categories. This program seeks to challenge that separation.

Rather than positioning the arts as an extracurricular supplement to academic education, the program integrates artistic and academic learning so that students can engage multiple cognitive, emotional, social, and creative capacities simultaneously. The objective is not simply to create better artists or higher-performing academic students. It is to develop more complete learners—young people who can acquire knowledge, think critically, communicate effectively, collaborate with others, adapt to challenges, and creatively apply what they know.

Culture as a Bridge Between Arts and Academics

For students who have become accustomed to viewing the arts and academics as separate disciplines, immediately combining the two may initially feel unfamiliar. Therefore, integration should be thoughtful, gradual, culturally relevant, and organic.

Culture provides a natural bridge.

The arts emerge from culture, and culture reflects humanity's ongoing effort to communicate, survive, celebrate, understand, and improve the human experience. Music, dance, theatre, storytelling, visual art, architecture, fashion, food, language, technology, and ritual all contain opportunities for academic exploration.

When students begin by examining artistic and cultural practices that already exist within their lives and communities, learning becomes more personal. Instead of being passive recipients of information, students become participants in the educational process. They discover academic concepts within experiences that already have meaning to them.

This sense of ownership can be a powerful source of motivation. Students are more likely to remain engaged when they understand not simply **what** they are learning, but **why it matters and what they can do with it**.

A culturally responsive approach can also create opportunities for greater family participation. Parents and caregivers possess valuable cultural knowledge, professional experiences, traditions, stories, and skills that can contribute to a child's education. By inviting families into the learning process, schools can strengthen the relationship among students, educators, families, and communities.

My Educational Experience: Jefferson Junior High School

The philosophy behind this program is informed not only by research, but also by my own experiences as a student in the Washington, D.C., public school system.

I attended Jefferson Junior High School, which at the time was recognized for its strong mathematics and science programming. One of the school's most extraordinary resources was a replica NASA space station permanently installed inside the building. For a young student, it represented an exciting intersection of science, mathematics, engineering, technology, and imagination.

Yet, looking back, I recognize an important missed opportunity.

The space center was largely treated as a reward for academic achievement rather than as a tool for producing it. Students who performed well academically were given access to the facility and its technology. The space station contained sophisticated simulators that required us to enter specific codes to produce particular outcomes. We learned how to operate them, but much of the experience involved memorizing procedures rather than understanding the mathematics, science, engineering, and technology behind them.

Imagine the educational possibilities if that space station had been fully integrated into the curriculum.

Students could have learned mathematics through navigation and trajectory calculations, science through principles of physics and space exploration, English through mission reports and communication, technology through coding, and the arts through design, storytelling, performance, and visualization.

My own academic experience demonstrated this connection in another way. Mathematics became more accessible to me through my participation in concert and jazz band. English became more meaningful through my involvement in the drama club. These artistic experiences provided a context through which academic concepts became tangible and relevant.

Years later, I began to recognize that the arts had not distracted me from academics. **They had provided another pathway into them.**

My Educational Experience: Duke Ellington School of the Arts

My experience at Duke Ellington School of the Arts further shaped the philosophy behind this program.

At Duke Ellington, I experienced tremendous personal, artistic, and academic growth. However, that growth was not immediate. During my freshman year, I struggled with focus and academic commitment to the point that my continued enrollment at the school was in jeopardy.

My department chair, who was also my drama teacher, ultimately decided to give me another opportunity to adjust to the demands of my new environment. Rather than addressing the problem solely through punishment, she gave me responsibility.

She challenged me to create a performance for my peers and partnered me with another student in my grade who excelled both academically and artistically.

At fifteen years old, without fully realizing its significance, I produced my first show.

Together, we raised funds, secured a location, cast performers, constructed props and set pieces, coordinated lighting and sound, marketed the production, organized other students, and ultimately brought an idea from concept to completion.

We thought we were simply producing a show.

In reality, we were learning entrepreneurship, budgeting, project management, leadership, communication, marketing, engineering, design, technology, time management, collaboration, and creative problem-solving. We were applying academic knowledge in a real-world environment where our decisions had immediate and visible consequences.

Just as importantly, I was given ownership of my education. Instead of being told simply to improve, I was entrusted with something meaningful enough to make me ****want**** to improve.

That experience changed the trajectory of my life.

The classmate who partnered with me became a lifelong friend. Today, we are both successful business owners working in different professional fields. I continued my career in the arts while expanding my work into education and technology. My former classmate built a career in technology and now operates a successful company utilizing coding and artificial intelligence.

Although our professional paths ultimately diverged, the foundation was remarkably similar: an education that required us to balance artistic creativity with academic knowledge and then apply both to real-world challenges.

The Vision

These experiences form the foundation of this program.

The objective is not simply to increase arts programming within schools. It is to reconsider the relationship between arts and academics altogether.

A student should not have to choose between being creative and being analytical. They should not have to choose between imagination and discipline, artistic expression and academic achievement, or emotional intelligence and intellectual development. These abilities can—and should—strengthen one another.

My goal is to combine my personal educational experiences, professional work in the arts and education, and continued research into a model that can be implemented, evaluated, refined, and ultimately scaled for schools and communities around the world.

At its core, the philosophy is simple:

Education should not merely teach young people what to know. It should teach them how to understand what they know, how to apply it, how to communicate it, and how to use it to contribute meaningfully to the world around them. The arts provide an extraordinary vehicle for making that possible.



PROGRAM DIRECTOR

DeWitt Fleming Jr. is an educator, producer, Broadway performer, and entrepreneur. He received his Bachelor's degree in Theater Arts from Marymount Manhattan College in New York City. DeWitt has taught the performing arts all over the world. In New York City, he was taught at NYU, Pace University, Harlem School of the Arts, and Queens College to name a few. Internationally, he has taught at Limerick College in Ireland, Souza Lima College and Celia Helena Conservatory in São Paulo, Brazil, Maple Bear School in Angola, and various others. He has created arts and education programming for Kean University, Tadah Children's Theater, Limitless Health Institute, New York City Library, Maple Bear School, and various other institutions. DeWitt has been teaching young people, and adults for over 25 years.

DeWitt started producing at the age 15. The first professional show he produced in New York City was Broadway Underground, which was the inspiration for the Cirque Du Soleil show Banana Shpeel, in which he performed and toured. DeWitt has produced shows for Nike, Marriott, Clorox, Teremana, Jack Daniels, and many others.

As a performer, DeWitt has traveled all over the world performing with Grammy award winning artist such as Alicia Keys, Wynton Marsalis, Bobby McFerrin, and Brandford Marsalis to name a few. Most recently he choreographed and starred in the Broadway show A Wonderful World: The Louis Armstrong Musical. He received two Chita Award nominations for his performance and choreography in the show. DeWitt was featured on the Emmy award winning show Boardwalk Empire, and has been in over 10 movies and TV shows. DeWitt continues to travel the world performing. This summer he was invited to perform in Venice, Italy representing the United States for the 2025 Venice Biennale.

DeWitt founded and runs two successful small businesses; **DeW It Right Tap Mics**, the only company in the world dedicated to making microphones specifically for tap dance, and **DeW It Right Productions**, a boutique production company that provides it's clients with top tier talent from Broadway stars, to Grammy winning musicians, to Emmy award winning actors, and everything in between.

PRODUCING PARTNER



Founded by Tony Award winning Broadway actor Ben Harney, By All Means Save Some (BAMSS) Theatre Works is a community based 501 (3)(c) non profit theatre company founded in 1998. This non profit organization and its various ensembles and productions have performed at The Brooklyn Academy of Music, Symphony Space, Christian Cultural Center, The Klitgord Auditorium, The Lambs Theater, Kumble Theater and many other venues in the tri-state area.

BAMSS has created programming for the NYC Public school system for over 20 years. As a result, it's students have gone on to study the theatre arts and technical theatre in major institutions throughout the United states and abroad. BAMSS alumni have performed in productions with Music Theatre International (MTI)/Disney, off-Broadway, on Broadway and through-out the United States, Europe and Asia.



MORE ABOUT BAMSS FOUNDER BEN HARNEY

Ben Harney is a NYC based theatre director, actor, and educator. Born in Brooklyn, NY, he entered the thriving arts culture of New York City through the eyes and heart of his mother at age four. By age seven, she enrolled him in modern dance class with Syvilla Fort at the Katherine Dunham School of Dance. That same year he made his television debut on the Emmy winning CBS Special, *Tonight with Belafonte* - and that began the journey. Church, community and borough-wide choruses and productions then the Laguardia High School of Music and Art. Dance scholarships with the Fred Benjamin School and The Dance Theatre of Harlem. Then, at eighteen, he

landed his first Broadway gig, in the chorus of *Purlie*. Broadway was his career calling and he found consistent work. Wanting stronger technique, he began a hiatus from the industry in 1974, to attend the Juilliard School with a full scholarship in Dance. By the end of that year he was cast in the original Broadway production of *The Wiz*, while still juggling classes at Juilliard.

The pattern of work and study continued in New York City and on tour. In time, he garnered a long list of credits as lead actor on Broadway including: *The Wiz*, *Treemonisha*, *Pippin*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Tap Dance Kid*, *Brownstone*, *Williams and Walker* and *Dreamgirls* for which he won the Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical.

Work on television includes, District Attorney Peter Ramsey on ABC's *All My Children* and his own children's video series, *Ben & Eddie*.

Mr. Harney began directing in 1985. It soon became his passion. He has directed projects and readings around New York City including work with Urban Stages, New Federal Theater and the Negro Ensemble Company. He was as Artist-in-Residence at Fordham University Lincoln Center 1987-89 and Visiting-Assistant Professor at Medgar Evers College, Brooklyn 1992-93. In California, he taught and coached performers in the Los Angeles film and TV industry 1994-96. Notably, he taught acting at Harvest School of Performing Arts, and had ongoing gigs coaching the leads in two new TV series, Ralph Harris in *On Our Own* and Rondell Sheridan in *Minor Adjustments*.

Returning to New York in 1997, work with families and building young artists increasingly became his focus. Since then, he has been a program developer and stage director for public schools and director of the Drama Ministry and main-stage plays and musicals for seasonal and special event productions at the Christian Cultural Center in Brooklyn

In 2001 he and his wife founded By All Means Save Some (BAMSS) Theatre Works – a community based, not-for-profit theatre company in Brooklyn, NY. BAMSS Studio Theatre became the home of BAMSS Youth Theatre Ensemble (BYTE), BAMSS Adult Repertory Company (BARC), BAMSS Workshops and Summer Musical Theatre Workshops. Summers since 1998 were spent directing camps and musical theatre workshops for BAMSS, then Summer 2013 – 2016 Musical Drama and Dance intensives for BAM, the Brooklyn Academy of Music and Medgar Evers College Pipeline Outreach.

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