

Good evening. My name is Gloria Turner and this is my 25th year as a teacher in Florence School District One at Southside Middle School. I teach Theatre and Media Arts and serve as the Fine Arts Department Chair and grants manager. I have my Master's plus 30 hours and I am a National Board Certified teacher. I say all this to show that I am committed to being the best educator I can be for the students who pass through my classroom. I could be in administration, but my heart is in the classroom. I believe that I am still passionate about teaching because I teach in the Arts.

As I was preparing what I would say this evening, I received an email that included a bulletin from the Arts Education Partnership. The Arts Education Partnership states that, "Every young person in America deserves a complete and competitive education that includes the arts. America's global stature, culture of innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit depend on the strength of a world-class education system. Perhaps now more than ever—as the country becomes increasingly diverse, the world more interconnected, and the workplace more oriented around technology and creativity—arts education is key to such a system and to ensuring students' success in school, work, and life." I will focus on success in school.

Students' success in school is improved through involvement in the arts. The first year I taught theatre, I had Akim. I had taught Language Arts to Akim the year before and when he walked in my classroom, I wondered what I had done to deserve teaching him again. Akim was on the four-year plan at Southside meaning this was his fourth year in a two year school. His only goal was to play football, but he could not pass his classes. I made Akim the center of attention for everything we did. He performed at assemblies, he did stand up comedy at dances, and he had the lead role in the school play. He blossomed and it showed in all of his classes. He passed everything and qualified to play football the next year. He eventually played arena football. Students involved in the arts are motivated to come to school and have higher attendance rates than those who do. Akim is just one example of the many students we have seen excel in the arts and thus in school over the years. Arts education boosts literacy. Students become better readers and word fluency increases. Theatre students analyze text and characters in scripts and read with improved comprehension. Students involved in music instruction outperform their peers in math achievement. Arts instruction also promotes critical thinking. It has been my experience that the longer I teach the more students need coaching in creative and critical thinking. Students are used to rote recitation and being told what to do and what is right. The arts allow students to explore, play, create, fail and try again, which in turn fosters critical thinking skills. The arts are also collaborative and inclusive in nature. My favorite story is the year I taught Will who had Down's Syndrome. I put him in a group with four boys and assigned them an improvisation topic. The boys asked what they were supposed to do with Will. I told them to show him what to do and that he would do it. They performed the scene and Will turned to the class and gave a thumbs up. The class burst into applause and it was the beginning of an important learning experience for the 35 middle schoolers in the class. I also taught Dee who was autistic. We were preparing to perform Shakespeare's, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and during rehearsals, Dee who was nonverbal, would roar on cue every we read the line about the lion roaring. The night of the performance, the student who was cast as the lion didn't show, so I put the costume on Dee and he roared right on cue. Collaboration, compassion, and empathy are born in the arts classrooms. Finally, the arts impact the culture of a school. We have proven this at Southside. We have always had good arts programs, but we didn't work together as a team. Then in 2006, we wrote a grant to become an Arts in Basic Curriculum School. With the unwavering support of our principal, Mr. Craig Washington, we worked to develop arts integration as a basis for the curriculum in our school. Three years ago, we began our Fine Arts and Technology Academy as a school within a school. The entire culture of our school has changed. Our school was the one that realtors would steer new Florentines away from and in just three short years, we have students moving to our area just to attend our academy. We have worked hard and we are positive that the arts impact the success of students in school.

Finally, I leave you with a student comment. When asked if they could change one thing about education in SC, what would it be, a 7th grade student responded, "Embrace technology, don't be afraid of it!"

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.