

Comments for the House's Education Policy Review and Reform Task Force Meeting
March 23, 2015
Dillon Middle School

My name is Staci Stevens. I am the visual arts teacher at Lake City Early Childhood Center, a Pre-K through 2nd grade school in Lake City. We were formerly Lake City Elementary, a Pre-K through 5th grade school. I have been in this position for 12 years.

We are a Title One school with a population of 528 students and we have approximately 95% of our students are on free or reduced lunch. Lake City is a rural community. Our community is changing and we are experiencing what could only be called a rebirth. However there is still a gap that our teachers struggle to bridge every day to give our students the education they deserve and need. Some of our students come to school unclean and hungry, but they still come to learn. If we do not meet these students' needs, we will never be able to teach them all that they need to know.

I feel that my school has found one of the answers to bridging the gap. My school has been an Arts in Basic Curriculum Site and grant award recipient since 2007. This grant funding allows our school opportunities that other schools do not have in the arts. We organize dance and drama residencies for the school so that our students have the opportunity to work with a professional artist for a week long intensive study. We have organized a Fairytale Ball that connects what kindergarteners are learning in ELA to dance by learning to waltz. This ball is an incredible experience for our students. They not only get to show off their new waltzing skills but they also learn social dance manners and ask each other to dance. This teaches them valuable cooperation skills. The students also dress up in their finest attire and wear tiaras and crowns for the day. It is a special event that builds confidence in our students while still connecting to their everyday learning.

Our school also organizes professional development for teachers to encourage arts integration in the classroom. Our teachers sing, dance, use drama skills, and visual arts techniques to teach on a daily basis. Our students create shapes with the bodies to learn shapes. Our students sing songs that help them remember math facts, letter sounds, science, and social studies concepts. Creating artwork before beginning to write, allows our students to create creative and innovative writing rich with details.

Not only do we organize professional development, but I have also been able to co-teach arts integrated lessons with classroom teachers. This gives me the opportunity to present quality arts integration lessons to our students and present art techniques to the classroom teacher to use in future lessons. In past years, my third grade students and I have built 3-D models of the regions of SC. This helps make very abstract concepts concrete and easier to understand.

The ABC grant funding also allows us to take field trips. We recently took 159 second graders to the Columbia City Ballet to see *Dancing the Art of Jonathan Green*. This was an incredible experience because most of our students and some of our staff had never been to the ballet. These experiences give my students real world connections that they then can take back and make connects to their reading and math lessons. These experiences also help my students develop their critical thinking skills, their creativity, and their social skills.

Benjamin Franklin said "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." I firmly believe this to be true. I believe that learning should be hands on experiences that connect to the student. Arts education allows students to problem solve, think critically, have creative play, and make art.

My school is in the beginning stages of organizing STEAM based projects and initiatives. The arts are working at my school. Our teacher morale is higher than it ever has been and our students are learning. The arts are bridging the achievement gap caused by the high poverty rate in my school. Please continue to support arts education and STEAM initiatives. Please continue to help these programs grow. Our school would benefit greatly from having full time dance and drama teachers. These arts areas teach valuable cooperation skills, critical thinking skills, and creativity. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

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