

POWERFUL FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PRINCIPLE 7: POWERFUL FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Implement strong family and community engagement programs that build leadership capacity and value and draw upon community funds of knowledge to inform, support, and enhance visual and performing arts teaching and learning for each specific group of students.

DESCRIPTION

Active parent and community engagement is a hallmark of schools in which students thrive. The collaborative nature of the arts leads to strong partnerships between schools, county offices of education, community arts providers, artists, parents with arts expertise, and parent volunteers. Vital community support and partnerships for art programs in schools help students develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of their local communities. Furthermore, strong partnerships are made to vital industries, businesses, and fields of work using new technologies. These partnerships may become valuable resources for grants, equipment, educational materials, technological expertise, job shadowing, and guest speakers.

Positive and supportive relationships develop among students, teachers, and the school community when they are involved in creating performances or responding to works of art. The arts change the school environment in ways that build a sense of community within and around the school. Participation in art activities helps students develop deeper understanding and connections to cultures and values different from their own. In these schools parents have the information to support their children's arts learning at home, are active in the arts classrooms, and help teachers bridge and connect to community resources for arts-related learning. It is important that parents monitor their children's arts learning and have the skills and knowledge to advocate effectively to create the conditions students need to learn and master the arts curriculum. Parents of English Learners, poor students, students of color, and special needs students, however, face linguistic, cultural, and other barriers to such involvement.

Schools with strong arts programs create inclusive, welcoming, and supportive conditions for families that are from other cultures and backgrounds. Arts programs can provide these families with powerful ways of making connections to the school and community. Powerful family and community engagement strategies include: a) leadership development for parents and active recruitment into leadership groups at the school; b) parent education to support students graduating from high school college-ready and with well-developed arts competencies; c) professional development for teachers and administrators in cross-cultural skills and competencies for building two-way communication with families of English Learners, poor students, students of color, and special needs students; d) resources allocated to enable arts teaching/learning projects in the community; and e) orientations for newcomer parents and others.

Vignette

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Teaching secondary ceramics classes requires many hours of extra time spent loading and firing kilns, preparing and recycling clay, and making and renovating glazes in order to serve over 175 students daily. Students, parents, and community members can be given the opportunity to learn responsibility for and contribute to this studio work. During the school day, daily classes are limited to fifty minutes or less, and studio work and creative activities often do not conform to these restrictive time periods. For these reasons and for the purpose of encouraging students to share these experiences with their friends and families, Open Studio was established at Valley View High School.

Open Studio has met every Wednesday evening on the traditional school schedule for over four years. Students take written notification home to their parents, encouraging parental involvement and also inviting siblings and friends of the students. Likewise, a general school notice goes out to the entire staff and faculty through the staff bulletin. Ceramics students are encouraged to invite their other classmates who might also have an interest. Three basic precepts have been established: whoever invites the guest (or family members) is responsible for “hosting” them and introducing them to studio; the ceramics teacher, Mr. Fisher, will not be doing any formal teaching, but will be an equal participant in the studio event; and, “as you teach, so shall you learn.”

Over the last three years, the community in general has become aware of this opportunity. No one is required to pay until they begin to

produce finished work. Donations are welcome, and several of the adults have been quite generous with their appreciation. These donations are used to secure extra help and time to keep a smoothly running studio. At first, students brought family and friends, but soon parents invited other parents and friends, and former students continue to return each year and bring other friends. The end result has been consistently, well-attended, resourceful, and productive open studio events.

Advanced ceramics students take responsibility for hosting and helping the guests. Through informal conversations, they assist parents and community members in understanding how the ceramic arts develop powerful and enduring learning and skills in students and where the ceramic arts fit into the larger school curriculum. Parents and adults who have ceramics experience often help the beginners, and frequently, parent participants in Open Studio take the next step of visiting ceramics classes during the school day to observe and contribute.

But the most exciting learning and community building episodes happen as young ceramics students witness and experience interaction between and with adult learners. They learn that ceramics and the study of fine arts is not just a subject in school, but is shared by a community that goes beyond the school. The Open Studio has developed a reputation within the Valley View High School community as a gathering place for the community, adults, and students to participate, learn, and celebrate creativity through the ceramic arts.

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