

# School Through The Arts Philosophy

The essential verity that all areas of human experience are related to the Arts and Humanities can be related in the school classroom, and can, in fact, enhance and accelerate the acquisition of knowledge. As Jerrold Ross, director of the National Arts Education Research Center (NAERC) at New York University notes, "Arts education research has begun to demonstrate that in a variety of settings... with a variety of population groups... the arts have a significant impact on academic achievement."

In STTA, the Arts are a unifying theme for regular curricular areas. Classes use Fine and Performing Arts not only as teaching tools, but as threads that touch each of the other content areas. Students identify commonalities and begin to see that knowledge is not a compartmentalized hodgepodge of different content areas, but instead a tapestry of interwoven ideas linked by common bonds.

Educational research provides two key findings. First, an integrated program helps students understand why they are in school. Second, the block scheduling and partnership build a sense of community ideal for bringing multiple cultures together to enrich the learning experience. It is a cure to hazing, alienation, and racial prejudice.

## Implementation

- Freshmen: Students take Integrated History I-II, English 9 and an Art Studio class as a block. Similar in many ways to a middle school team.
- Sophomores: Students take Integrated History III-IV and English 10 in a block and are required to take an arts elective which may be Dance, Painting, Sculpture, Acting, Music or a variety of other arts offerings.
- Juniors / Seniors: Students take a series of rotating classes (Humanities, Individualized Writing, Shakespeare and Creative Writing) over the course of four semesters. Each semester they take an arts elective.

## Instructional Methods

The integrated team teaching approach is a key element in the STTA program. Teachers share conference periods to discuss curriculum, develop lesson plans, and to work in concert with students who may be struggling. Block scheduling allows instructional field trips of livable duration without affecting the rest of the school day.

While in the normal setting, students are reading "The Scarlet Ibis" in English and studying Greece in History. STTA students receive triple reinforcement of ideas by studying Greece in History, reading The Odyssey in English and studying Greek architecture in Art Studio. While in the traditional approach, students simply read plays in class, STTA students perform them in costumes of their own making. They do not only read about art or see pictures, they create art. They learn by doing and taking creative risks.

## Goals and Objectives

- to challenge students to strive for excellence within the range of their abilities, talents, and goals
- to promote a synthesis of problem-solving and other higher level thinking skills
- to foster innovative and creative thinking
- to promote cooperation and teamwork
- to enhance student personal responsibility

## Population Data

75 students are currently enrolled in STTA compared to 1897 total in the school. The chart illustrates STTA's comparisons to the total school population. Although there is no quantitative data, anecdotal evidence shows a higher than average number of dyslexic students in the program.

	STTA	West High
Female	64%	49.9%
Ethnic Total	33.3%	52.5%
Special Education	9.3%	11.6%
ESL	5.3%	16.9%

## What Students and Parents Say

- "I would recommend STTA to most people that need a more structured environment." - **Holland, Grade 11**
- "It is a new way of learning that makes it fun as well as educational." - **Noa, Grade 12**
- "Class becomes like a family. School Through the Arts is the example of how all school environments should be." - **Judy, Grade 11**
- "The teachers work together so we learn more." - **Katelyn, Grade 9**
- "Parents and students who desire an involvement in a smaller community of dynamic teachers, talented students and involved parents should check out West High School's - School Through The Arts Program. For our son it has been a connecting place within a larger school. It has been easy for him to develop friends as well as close working relationships with his teachers." - **Dianne, Parent**
- "STTA was a good way for me to broaden my perspective of studies as an entering freshman in high school. I found I had a love for technical theater which became my main pursuit. My area of interest led me to develop organizational & leadership skills that I now use in college." - **Rebecca, College Senior**
- "The STTA program at West was a great thing for me. Having smaller classes gives the teacher more of a chance to be one on one with the students." - **Alex, College Sophomore**