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More schools want to teach students through art

Program helped Tanglewood improve test scores, behavior

BY **CINDY LANDRUM**
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Students in a sixth-grade science class dance their way through a lesson about cloud formations.

At an elementary school, music is used to help students learn math.

Eight Greenville County schools use the arts to teach other subjects through Smart Arts, a program run by the Metropolitan Arts Council.

The program has been limited up until now to Title 1 schools, or schools with high percentages of students coming from poor families, because that was a condition of the federal grants used to pay for it.

But the \$2.1 million in grant money is almost gone and leaders of the program are looking for money to continue the program and expand it to non-Title 1 schools, said Gayla Day, arts education coordinator for MAC.

"It's a successful program and it needs to continue," Day said.

The arts integration program started at Tanglewood Middle and Grove Elementary.

Cindy Doolittle, Tanglewood's instructional coach in mathematics, wasn't sold on how the arts would improve students' performance in math when the program started in 2002.

But she was convinced after a lesson on the coordinate grid where a dance teacher taped off a grid on a classroom floor and students learned a dance routine using the grid.

"No matter how many times I taught that the traditional way, students always got it backwards," Doolittle said. But they didn't have a problem learning it through the arts integration lesson, she said.

Other lessons included science students using dance to learn cloud formations. In the class, dance movements are done at three different heights that correspond to where clouds form in the sky.

Students replicate cirrus clouds, those long and wispy clouds that form high in the sky, by flowing through the room, arms waving up above their heads. Others work waist-high, simulating round and billowy cumulus clouds. Others lie on the floor, representing stratus clouds.

The classes that use the arts to teach other subjects have been credited with helping raise test scores and improving student discipline at Tanglewood.

Since the school started using arts integration, the school has seen a nearly 20 percent



Julie Turner/Staff

ART INFUSION: In an arts-integrated lesson, Sonya Dawson and Lecyntorious Ragland conduct an experiment on refraction.

increase in students scoring basic or above on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test.

The school has also seen a 70 percent decrease in expulsions, a 22 percent decrease in out-of-school suspensions and a 54 percent decrease in in-school suspensions.

"This program is a contributing factor," she said.

That matches the findings of a national study.

"Champions of Change," a study done by the Arts Education Partnership, said students with high levels of arts participation outperform "arts-poor" students in virtually every measure.

The study concluded that a high level of arts participation makes a bigger difference to students from low-income backgrounds than to students from higher-income families.

At Grove, improvement on test scores hasn't been as consistent, but teacher Tara Jacobs said it has helped student confidence and self-esteem.

The program has since expanded to classrooms at Sue Cleveland, Slater-Marietta, Armstrong, Monaview, Cherrydale and Thomas E. Kerns elementary schools.

Thus far, about 150 teachers and more than 100 artists have been trained through the program, said Roy Fluhrer, director of the Fine Arts Center.

"Schools are changing, students are learning and teachers have a new tool to teach stu-

dents," he said.

The goal over the next five years, Fluhrer said, is to train more teachers in arts integration and expand the program to non-Title 1 schools.

That, he said, will take money. He told members of the Greenville County school board that SmartArts will submit a budget request to help continue the program.

MAC has sent letters to national and local foundations asking them to adopt one or several schools, Day said.

The program costs about \$500 per elementary teacher per year and \$1,500 per middle-school teacher per year if they have already received training, Day said. That pays for the artist and materials.

"We're not going to be able to do whole schools like Tanglewood unless we get another federal grant," she said. "That takes a monstrous amount of money."

Five non-Title 1 schools have expressed interest in the program, including Stone Academy, the district's elementary magnet school for the arts, according to Day. The school district has already funded a part of the program's summer institute where teachers go to get trained in arts integration, Day said. And the program will be allowed to present at the district's summer academy in July, she said.

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