Success Story: JumpStart Theatre — Fostering Creativity for Future Success

2020 Action Agenda for Advancing the Arts in Education – Priority Area 3: Transform the Teaching and Learning Environment

"When we 'Tell the Story' in JumpStart Theatre, we focus on the journey and where hard work and learning occur. It may not be perfect, it might get messy, but overcoming those obstacles and discovering one's own capabilities makes it worth it." – Ginny Butsch, Community Manager, Educational Theatre Association

Photo courtesy of JumpStart Theatre.

Arts Education Partnership partner organizations work to promote opportunities for high-quality, arts-based and arts-integrated learning opportunities that align with college, career and citizenship readiness goals. Studies show that arts education, and specifically theatre education, equips students with the foundational abilities to learn, achieve success in other core academic subjects, and develop the capacities, skills and knowledge essential for lifelong success.

Since 2015, JumpStart Theatre, a program of the Educational Theatre Association, has provided underserved Cincinnati-area middle schools with the training and materials necessary to present a musical theatre production in their schools. EdTA selects schools based on a rigorous application process and site visit, and schools receive materials, budget and training support to produce one full-scale musical production annually.

Recognizing that most underserved schools do not have the ability to hire arts teachers or teaching artists, JumpStart Theatre trains educators at each selected school on how to apply the basic concepts of musical theatre when teaching students and produce a musical from start to finish. Teachers also learn how to work with a limited budget and utilize the school's available resources. The program engages students in every aspect of the production, from performance and costumes, to sets and design. With "Tell the Story" as the guiding objective of every JumpStart Theatre production, the program emphasizes process and experience over polished stage presentations. The goal is to provide students the opportunity to build confidence, knowledge and skills that will help shape their future life and career choices.

Research and evaluation have been cornerstones of the JumpStart Theatre program. The Centers for Research on Creativity has led the three-year JumpStart Theatre Research Project, which measures the impact of the program in nine socio-emotional areas. JumpStart Theatre is designed to be adaptable in any school with a strong commitment to providing a meaningful arts experience — whether in a rural, urban or suburban setting. Students from a variety of backgrounds have participated, including those with learning and physical disabilities. In 2017, the program added a school with a large population of English language learners.

Current Locations: California, Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio.

Populations Served: Middle School Students and Teachers.

Conditions for Success: Support from school leadership plays a critical role in success of the program. Engaging the school principal not only helps ensure long-term sustainability, but can also help address unforeseen or immediate needs. For example, school leaders can identify rehearsal spaces and ensure staff have opportunities to participate in professional development activities.

A strong professional development and mentorship program can also foster success. The lead mentor serves as a coach and support system for each school, observing rehearsals and providing constructive feedback to help them succeed. JumpStart Theatre requires schools to send three teachers to three all-day professional development boot camps each year. These boot camps teach the basics of musical theatre, from choreography and costume design to fundraising, marketing and volunteer recruitment. The sessions give participants an opportunity to share advice and ask questions of their peers.

Community engagement and communication with participating teachers and school leadership have been a critical component of the program's ongoing success. Regular updates to stakeholders in monthly newsletters keep them invested in the program's success and provide a detailed account of efforts at each school, while simultaneously inspiring new sponsors, donors and partners. The newsletter also celebrates the work of invested teachers, volunteers and school leaders — creating a better understanding of how personal commitment can help overcome obstacles in schools and communities facing difficult social and economic challenges.

Questions to Consider:

- How can community arts organizations partner with schools and districts to strengthen their capacity to provide increased access to arts education?
- How will you build evaluation and research into program design?
- Are there creative funding streams, such as Title I, that schools and districts can use to support this work?
- How does the professional development and experience that invested teachers receive transfer to their classroom pedagogy?

Learn More:

JumpStart Theatre website.

JumpStart Theatre: Pilot Year Impacts in Three Schools — Year One Report, 2016.

Capturing Student and Teacher Creative Growth Through the After-School JumpStart Theatre Program — Year Two Report, 2017.

AEP *2020 Action Agenda for Advancing the Arts in Education.*

ArtsEdSearch studies on the effectiveness of theatre for improving academic achievement and student outcomes.

Beyond the Core: Advancing Student Success Through the Arts.

About AEP Success Stories

The Arts Education Partnership at Education Commission of the States is guided by *The Arts Leading the Way to Student Success: A 2020 Action Agenda for Advancing the Arts in Education*. To achieve its goal to expand access to high-quality arts learning opportunities for all students, AEP gathers detailed information on Success Stories with the potential to be replicated in communities across the country.

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