A MIXED METHODS CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE A+ SCHOOLS IN NORTH CAROLINA:

AN ARGUMENT FOR HIGH STANDARDS IN IMPLEMENTATION

by

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July, 2021

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This study provides an update on the effectiveness of the North Carolina (NC) A+ Schools Program, a program focused on integrating the arts disciplines into the core curriculum to bring about more effective and engaging instruction. This study builds from related research in the field that connects arts integration curriculum to greater academic success in the form of student creative inquiry, social well-being, and higher achievement scores. Schools that described a cohesive arts-integrated framework demonstrated higher proficiency scores. This study questions the low achievement of most A+ schools. Interviews in this study were conducted with an administrator for NC A+ schools, an arts director of an A+ school, and a principal of an A+ school. Topics included their priorities within their school(s), their definition of arts integration success, and how an arts integration framework was managed. Coded categories included: arts integrated frameworks, school climate, and evidence of success. School chronic absenteeism data and proficiency score data suggested a range of effectiveness of this program. The combined statistical data and interviews suggested that frameworks are key in successful implementation of arts integration reform.

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CAROLINA: AN ARGUMENT FOR HIGH STANDARDS IN IMPLEMENTATION

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis to my son, Emanuel Jack, and my husband, Raymond Wheeler, for their unwavering support and love that has helped me tremendously on my path to achieving my masters. May we continue to support each other in challenging tasks and pursue each of our dreams.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As both an art teacher and previous classroom teacher, my experience in a variety of school settings has given me first-hand experience with children of all levels and capabilities in situations of arts integration, as well as more traditional settings. My experience using visual art to engage children's critical thinking skills and my interest in closing the achievement gap led me to investigate the A+ arts integration school program in North Carolina (NC). With the same claim of "arts integration," a variety of methods are currently being applied in public schools all over the world. Defining it can be challenging, because it is being redefined in some instances and various conditions have caused it to be implemented differently according to setting (Robinson, 2012). Arts ed NC has defined it "as a catalyst for learning across the curriculum creating deeper learning experiences that support content mastery and the development of critical and creative twenty-first century skills" (NC Department of Public Instruction NCDPI, 2016). Some researchers, like Robinson, define it in several categories, "arts integration as learning through and with the arts; arts integration as a curricular connection process; and arts integration as a collaborative engagement" (Burnaford, 2007, as cited in Robinson, 2012, p.371).

In NC, only about .02% of its students attend A+ program schools, begun in 1995, currently with 69 schools. Although a small initiative compared to the larger picture of NC public schools, I was intrigued to learn more about this reform and discover how efficacious the programming has been for engagement and boosting grade performance within a state where the majority of schools have had significant difficulty maintaining highly qualified teachers and raising the proficiency of students in core academics (West Ed, 2019).

A simplified way to describe arts integration is, "an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form" (Stoelinga et al., 2015,

p.1), including drama, dance, music, visual arts, creative writing, and media arts (National A+ Schools Consortium, 2001), and often simplified to fewer art forms such as dance, music, theater, media arts and visual arts (Wolff et al., 2018). The way arts integration has been implemented and structured within the NC programs also comes in several forms.

The A+ Arts integration program, as described by the NC arts council, can be summarized as a school reform that heightens student engagement and teaches 21st century skills without a specific focus on increasing academic skills (The A+ Schools Program of the NC Arts Council, 2014). Some NC schools in the A+ program have shown strong academic gains while the majority have struggled with recurring academic failure (The A+ Schools Program of the NC Arts Council, 2014). The aim of this research project is to compare arts integration program schools to their district counterparts through quantitative means, learn from three arts integration program leaders about challenges they encounter and their frameworks for success and provide suggestions for stakeholders and educators to promote arts integration success.

According to West Ed, (2019), "about *two thirds* of NC students in grades three to eight *failed* to reach proficiency in one or both (English Language Arts and Math tests from 2013 to 2019" (p. 22). According to this report, most students in NC have not been able to learn the most basic core skills expected of their grade level. Many factors may be at cause for this prolonged failure but solving student engagement issues is considered by many researchers to directly affect students' ability to learn content (Franco & Unrath, 2014; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005; Stoelinga et al., 2015). True engagement in learning as I define it extends beyond enjoyment of the lesson and includes meta cognition and critical thinking skills, abilities that support success in standardized tests.

The arts are becoming more common within restructuring initiatives in school curriculum across the US (Chappell, 2005, as cited in Lajevic, 2013). However, according to Parsad and Spiegelman's (2012) study of arts teachers and arts programs, the quality and the quantity of K-12 arts education classes in the United States has shown significant decrease from 2000 to 2010. Drama and dance have practically disappeared from public schools altogether (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012). The relevancy of this data lies in the greater challenge arts integration reform programs have when starting out with a feeble arts foundation. The National Arts Education Partnership's Action Plan revealed findings that demonstrated a limited capacity of arts being used to teach critical analysis, creativity, and collaboration (Best et al., 2018). The limitation was heightened to an even higher degree at high-poverty schools (Best et al., 2018). In Kim's research into results from the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking in school-age children; since 1998, creativity has shown a steady decline in the areas of originality, divergent, and critical thinking (Kim, 2011). All this while innovation is rated by many analysts as the most important aspect to individuals working under the new creative economy (Howkins, 2001, as cited in Ritter & Mostert, 2016), and this is made evident in the current push for 21st century skills (Heilig, et al., 2010). The fact that the breadth and depth of arts in schools are decreasing and student creativity is declining suggests that the arts are being marginalized within the educational world. The arts are only one area of many being cut from school programs in NC, however, the "fury of budget cuts" to schools and teacher salaries in NC has created a difficult environment for arts integration programming (Strauss, 2015, p. 2). The arts are not included in the tested grades in NC, and NC public schools rarely offer more than music and visual art classes, even at arts integrated schools (NCDPI, 2019) although the A+ Schools of NC claim to be inclusive of six different art forms listed above (A+ Schools Program, 2001). The 2019 overview of NC's

education action plan talks at length about the poor test scores in the state and the need for reform change, however, the report does not include any overview of how the arts could support higher achievement (West Ed, 2019). This indicates a disregard for the impact arts might have as stand-alone subjects or as integrated through arts integration into core classes, even though researchers have found arts integration to boost both Math and English Language Arts achievement scores (Inoa et al., 2014; Stoelinga et al., 2015). While schools in NC are inequitably funded and as many as 20% of teachers are unlicensed (West Ed, 2019), whole-school arts integration reforms in cities and regions across the state indicate a renewed interest in the power arts programs have to enhance school climate, develop 21st century skills, and even turn-around poor performance. These contrasting frames of reference simultaneously affect the implementation of arts integration in NC.

The purpose of this research project was to look at how student engagement and student achievement scores have been affected by arts integration within the NC A+ School Program. The need for reform that supports student engagement and performance, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and equity in schools all give relevance to this study. This study provides a critical and realistic update on the A+ program. The study involved quantitative data analysis of school proficiency scores at A+ schools compared to district schools, and qualitative structured interviews with an arts integrated school principal, an arts administrator of an A+ school and an administrator for the A+ schools Program for NC. My research questions included: What are the methods used by these schools to implement arts integration? What challenges do arts-integrated schools face in implementation? How effective has NC's A+ program been at increasing performance test scores? Qualitative findings included methods of preparation and practice that may be central to success in arts-integration programs, challenges that schools have been facing,

and reports of high student engagement. Quantitative findings included minimal high-performing

A+ schools, many low-performing A+ schools, and a downward trajectory for proficiency in

both A+ and corresponding districts throughout the 2001-2019 data.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The effect arts integration has had on students and teachers in the teaching and learning process can be divided between the affective and the academic realms. Arts integration has been shown to bring positive effects to students' affective realm through multi-sensory engagement, emotional engagement, and social engagement (Biscoe & Wilson, 2015; Caracciolo et al., 2017; Davidson, 2009; Ludwig et al., 2017; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005; Snyder et al., 2014; Stoelinga et al., 2015, Woywood & Deal, 2016). Studies of arts integration programs have also demonstrated academic effects on students in the form of performance score improvements (Edens & Potter, 2007, Stevenson & Deasy, 2005; Stoelinga et al., 2015; Tyson, 2019). The strength of results and methods of implementation, however, have been shown to differ. As Bresler (1995) proposed and Robinson (2012) echoed, arts integration can be categorized into four main approaches: subservient, affective, social integration, and co-equal. The subservient approach is taken by schools who use quick arts activities as fillers in service of core content areas (Bresler, 1995, as cited in Robinson, 2012). The affective approach indicates use of arts in academic lessons for the change of mood and attitude. The social integration approach is based on performance and community events to demonstrate learning through the arts (Bresler, 1995, as cited in Robinson, 2012). Although some overlap occurs within schools implementing arts integration, in the co-equal approach, students are required to use higher order thinking skills in both their arts production and the academic concept (Bresler, 1995, as cited in Robinson, 2012). The schools' *framework* is the term used in this research to describe the (1) preparation and (2) methods for implementing arts integrated schools. Actual and theoretical frameworks for arts integration include professional development (PD), teacher collaboration, the employment of arts

specialists, and integration of arts in the curriculum (Davidson, 2009, Duma & , 2014; NC A+ Schools Network & National A+ Schools Consortium, 2016; Stoelinga et al., 2015).

Due to the hands-on and expressive aspects of the arts experience, multi-sensory learning is central to students' arts-integrated experience, and one that has been shown to facilitate learning (Broadbent et al., 2017; Shams & Seitz, 2008) "The ability to integrate information across multiple senses enhances the brain's ability to detect, localize, and identify external events" (Cuppini et al., 2018, p.1). The limbic brain is associated with both behavior and emotions, and when the limbic area is engaged before teachers guide connections to cognition (prefrontal), this brain-researched method has been shown to help students engage with learning topics. (Baines, 2008; Biffle, 2013). In Anderson and Valero's (2020) arts-integration interview study of 6-7th grade students,

> Many students described how the hands-on aspect activated their physical engagement in learning through the use of their bodies and a variety of materials. Hands-on learning was most meaningful as teachers set expectations about content, yet students engaged physically with materials to investigate their curiosities and cultivate and demonstrate understanding. Far from frivolous, play appeared necessary to produce a personally meaningful relationship to the work. (pp. 668-669)

Multiple studies have shown positive correlation between academic gains and multisensory learning through the arts (Anderson and Valero, 2020; Baines, 2008), the "art forms provide multisensory ways for teachers and students to represent and express ideas" (Anderson & Valero, 2020, p. 151).

Related effects on learning from arts integration have also been found in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies that have been shown to support student ability to

succeed in school. In a large scale randomized-control trial with elementary-aged children

attending an art museum field trip; critical thinking, historical empathy and tolerance were found

to be statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level (Bowen et al., 2014, as cited

in Ludwig et al., 2017, p. 44). Multiple studies show statistically significant positive effects of

arts integration on social-emotional learning (SEL) outcomes (Curva et al., 2005; Greene et al.,

2015; Ramsey et al., 2015, as cited in Ludwig et al., 2017). Focus on learning rather than

discipline problems is also an indicator of successful arts integration. In the Turnaround arts

integration program in Boston and New Orleans elementary schools, in-school suspension rates

decreased during arts implementation by *86% and 81%*, respectively. These results indicated

that students with previous discipline issues had a transformative experience potentially due

to arts integration, helping them "to better focus on their learning" (Stoelinga et al., 2015, p.

278). According to the NC Action plan, school culture needs to support "social, emotional, and

academic growth" for a successful school (West Ed, 2019, p. 272). It is likely that social and

emotional learning (SEL) needs have been well met through arts integration practices when there

is improved attendance and a decrease in behavior issues, providing a better basis for focus on

learning.

The implementation of arts integration has also been found to reduce stress, the

affective results pointing to the promotion of an encouraging learning environment (Anderson &

Valero, 2020; Caracciolo et al., 2017; Ingraham & Nuttall, 2016; Robinson, 2012). Stevenson &

Deasy's (2005) study of 10 high poverty arts integration schools in New Orleans reported higher

productivity because of arts integration's facilitation of "safe zones where children will feel

secure enough to engage in the challenging work of serious learning" (p. *vi*). The reduction

of stress and establishment of a positive emotional climate to promote student learning is of

utmost importance (Bernard, 2010). In Stevenson and Deasy's (2005) findings, the positive

emotional climate brought about from arts integration led to academic engagement in part from

the positive effects on teachers' instructional practice. Through the combination of teacher

and student experience of the arts integration process, a climate was created that increased

student engagement in learning.

The relation between arts integration and attendance rates has been found by multiple

researchers. Daily attendance at Roosevelt Middle School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, rose from

85% to 92% after the implementation of an arts integration program (Fowler & McMullen, 1991,

as cited in Tyson, 2019). In Thomas and Arnold's (2011) study of the NC A+ arts integration

schools, seven schools reported an increase in attendance after commencing and zero schools

reported a decrease in attendance. Within the Turnaround arts program, all eight schools showed

attendance rate growth during the two years of arts integration implementation (Stoelinga et

al., 2015). These findings correlate arts integration with student academic growth.

Studies on arts integration have shown a particularly strong effect on disadvantaged

student group, both in the affective and academic domains. References to disadvantaged students

in this study includes Economically Disadvantaged (ED) and English Language Learners (ELL).

Both these subgroups have shown steady increase in NC and nationally (Robinson, 2012), and

school pedagogy that support their learning is a growing need (Ingraham & Nuttall, 2016).

Findings from a bounded study of a southwest region elementary school with a high percentage

of ELL students found correlation between a four-year steady math score increase and the arts

integration program (Ingraham & Nuttall, 2016). Key to this school was (1) a culture of respect

and encouragement, (2) collaboration, and (3) data sharing, "allowing for expedited (student)

academic-knowledge acquisition" (Ingraham & Nuttall, 2016, p. 1). In arts integration schools

across the U.S., "Samples consisting of 75% or more racial/ethnic minority students benefited most from arts integration" (Ludwig et al., 2017). Robinson (2012) stated that a conceptual model for arts integration that supports students' self-esteem and self-efficacy, like described by Durham (2010), may increase students' efforts in school and lead to increased academic performance.

Teaching students critical thinking skills may be just as important for the improvement of academic achievement scores. The arts have many well-developed processes for teaching these skills. The following critical thinking frameworks have been used to guide arts integrated curriculum and instruction at schools that focus on improving academic outcomes: Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), Studio Habits of Mind, and 21st Century skills (Carlisle, 2011; Donahue & Stuart, 2010; Franco & Unrath, 2015). The Studio Habits of Mind have mostly been incorporated into rigorous visual art stand-alone classrooms and have been cited by multiple researchers as a helpful set of thinking strategies for students working through or with any of the arts (Anderson & Valero, 2020; Donahue & Stuart, 2010). These habits include (1) developing craft, (2) engaging and persisting, (3) envisioning, (4) expressing, (5) observing (6) reflecting, (7) evaluating, (8) stretching and exploring ideas, (9) understand the art world, and (10) community interaction (Donahue & Stuart, 2010, p. 4).

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) are geared towards engaging students in investigations of artwork through facilitated dialogue. These strategies may be useful for teaching critical thinking in any of the arts. From a year's implementation of VTS with K-5 ELA classes, Franco and Unrath (2015) "observed strong investigative initiative and the genuine desire to learn," (p. 30). Students learned to provide "concrete visual evidence" from artwork images, "justify their reasoning," and "routinely counter the diverse interpretations of peers" (Franco & Unrath, 2015,

p. 31). In studies where visual critical thinking skills were taught through evaluating and

analyzing art, students demonstrated using critical thinking skills necessary for fulfilling

Common Core State Standards (Lara, 2017; The College Board, 2012). The skills outlined in the

21st Century framework have largely been summarized as the four C's: (1) critical thinking, (2)

creativity, (3) communication and (4) collaboration; with the extended addition of (5) flexibility

and adaptability, (6) initiative and self-direction, (7) social skills and cross-cultural skills, (8)

productivity and accountability, and (9) leadership and responsibility (Battelle for Kids, 2015).

Due to the expressive, creative, and collaborative opportunities involved in the arts, it is

understandable that research has linked arts integration to 21st Century skills (Carlisle,

2011; Maneen, 2016, The College Board, 2012). This link between arts integration and

21st Century skills lends support to arts integration when implemented successfully.

The arts integration program evaluated in this study, the NC A+ program, was developed

with the 21st century learning skills in mind (The A+ Schools Program of the NC Arts Council,

2014). 21st century skill frameworks have been identified as part of the expectations executives

and managers consider crucial for successful workers (American Management Association,

2010). These practical capacities are considered by researchers to be supported by arts

integration practices (Carlisle, 2011; Maneen, 2016; The A+ Schools Program of the NC Arts

Council, 2014; The College Board, 2012).

The above findings have focused on the *affective* findings and frameworks utilized in arts

integration school programs. Multiple research findings also indicate that higher engagement

through the arts promotes higher academic performance (Bickley-Green, 1995; Duma &

Silverstein, 2014; Edens & Potter, 2007; Ludwig et al., 2017; Robinson, 2012; Wolff et al.,

2018). "Research shows that bringing the arts into the instruction of other classroom subjects

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benefits students' *academic*, [emphasis added] cognitive and personal outcomes... The challenge is how to best integrate arts learning in ways that support effective teaching and supplement and support other core areas of study" (Wolff et al., 2018, p. 1). Thomas and Arnold's (2011) study compared A+ program schools' academic achievement with NC public schools' academic achievement. The average reading proficiency for schools in the A+ arts integration program was 83.91%, *slightly higher* than the average of 83.6% for NC public schools; average math proficiency for A+ schools was 62.12%, about a 4% *decrease* compared to 66.4% at NC public schools (p. 99). As Thomas and Arnold (2011) summarized, these test scores were "at a level equivalent or nearly equal to traditional schools" (p. 102). Numerous researchers have agreed that academic standardized score improvement is not the only proof of arts integration success (Caracciolo et al., 2017; Donahue & Stuart, 2010; Franco & Unrath, 2014; Stoelinga et al., 2015). However, *some* arts integrated schools within the A+ program have made noticeable improvements in academic scores A+ Schools Program of the NC Arts Council, 2014).

Within the NC A+ Schools program, three schools were understandably highlighted as success stories in the NC Arts Council's 2014 report. The 2019 Action Report for NC reports the following to be the case for NC schools: "A school's performance is highly correlated to its poverty level...98% of the schools that receive a grade of F and 92% of the schools that receive a grade of D have school populations comprising 50% or more economically disadvantaged (ED) students" (West Ed, 2019). Despite the trend mentioned above, Bugg Elementary, a school with 65% ED student population, met growth goals set by the state from 2007-2012 and averaged *83.8%* grade level performance which increased 14% from the previous year (A+ Schools Program of the NC Arts Council, 2014). R.N. Harris Elementary, a school with *82%* low-income population, had six years of continued growth and *80.9%* student overall

proficiency in 2012 (A+ Schools Program of the NC Arts Council, 2014). Saluda Elementary, a

rural school with 57% ED students, demonstrated the highest level of growth according to the

state in academic performance for three years in a row (2008-2012) with *91.4%* overall reading

and math test score proficiency (A+ Schools Program of the NC Arts Council, 2014).

Another arts integration program, Turnaround Arts, provided another example of success

in multiple high-needs elementary and middle schools across the country. All eight schools

showed growth in either math or reading, and the average of all eight schools after only two

years of implementation showed reading proficiency scores increase of *23%*, and math

proficiency scores of *13%* (Stoelinga et al., 2015). In a comparative study between sixth grade

students with a theater arts integration program and students without arts integration in New

Jersey, a 5% increase in treatment group students was observed in Language Arts scores and a

10% increase in math proficiency (Inoa et al., 2014). Most studies in this review of literature

showcased the affective support arts integration programs provide. The discussed studies

revealed benefits from arts integration in three areas: (1) the multisensory aspect of engagement,

(2) SEL competencies, and (3) positive climate as shown by decreased suspension

rates and higher attendance. Studies were especially prevalent for demonstrating benefits

for *disadvantaged* student groups (Ingraham & Nuttall, 2016; Ludwig et al., 2017; Robinson,

2012). However, theoretical explanations connecting engagement from arts integration with

higher academic performance (Bickley-Green, 1995; Durham, 2010), combined with actual

positive academic score results demonstrate a higher potential for arts integration (Edens &

Potter, 2007, Stevenson & Deasy, 2005; Stoelinga et al., 2015; Tyson, 2019). In summary, arts

integration has been shown to bring about greater student engagement socially, emotionally, and

cognitively, leading to improved student academic scores.

Statement of the Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that A+ schools with the highest proficiency were successfully implementing arts integration and A+ schools that performed lower than district schools were not successfully implementing arts integration. It is also hypothesized that weak frameworks of implementation were used in A+ schools demonstrating lower proficiency scores.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

A convergent parallel design was used in this study, meaning the quantitative and

qualitative elements were conducted in the same phase of the research process, the two

components were analyzed independently, and the results were interpreted together. This design

methodology was chosen to create a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of

arts integration in A+ schools. School achievement score data provided quantitative evidence

pertaining to the level of success of arts integrated schools. Three varied first-hand accounts

from arts integration school leaders provided personal and timely experience pertaining to A+

Schools. School achievement scores, number of arts, chronic absenteeism and ED school

percentages were collected from 37 A+ schools and 37 corresponding districts. The data was

collected from both the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI)'s most recent report card

website, which displays school information for years 2013-2019 (NCDPI, 2019), and from the

archived NCDPI database, which displays school information for years 2001-2013 (NCDPI,

2001).

The qualitative aspect of the study aimed to discover information about how schools

have been implementing the A+ program. Interviews with three A+ school leaders were planned,

commenced, and analyzed. I first secured an interview with an administrator of the A+ program.

Next, two school leaders of two different sorts from two different schools were contacted

and chosen because of differences of perspective and perceived success of their implementation

due to each school's high-performance status. The questions posed in the interviews were

designed to uncover the priorities of each school, what each arts-integrated school leader saw as

the most important effects from arts integration, and what types of arts-integrated lessons or units

they deemed most important to highlight. The questions also uncovered some challenges these

school leaders faced in implementing art integration in their setting, and what techniques they utilized to overcome those challenges. Semi-structured phone interviews were conducted using Google Voice. The interviews were transcribed, analyzed for themes and patterns, then coded using NVivo-Windows (2020) computer software into descriptive codes displayed in the qualitative data matrix in Appendix D.

Participants

Quantitative

37 NC A+ schools and 37 NC corresponding districts serving K-5 and K-8 students were evaluated in the participant sample for quantitative review. Schools in the study were representative of many regions in NC. In this sample, ED student populations averaged 58% within corresponding districts, and 57% at A+ schools.

Qualitative

Three individuals in leadership positions at arts-integrated NC schools were interviewed. Interviewees' ages ranged from 30-50. All interviewee participants were white; two female, one male. Participants' socioeconomic status was perceived to be high due to pay range for leadership positions. Participants' position, years of professional experience and degree level at the time of the study were the following:

A+ administrator: 14 years, Bachelors.

A+ school leader 1: A+ Elementary arts program director: 18 years, Bachelors

A+ school leader 2: A+ Elementary school principal: 10 years, Masters.

Setting

Urban, rural, and suburban schools were represented in the 74 quantitative analysis.

Table 1

Qualitative School Setting Data

School(s) of Interviewee	Population	ED	Region
A+ administrator	150-600	57% *	Urban/Rural/Suburban
A+ school leader 1	529	10%	Urban/Suburban
A+ school leader 2	160	53%	Rural

Note. *Represents average for Economically Disadvantaged (ED) students in A+ schools.

Data Collection and Management

Quantitative

This study took place from August 2020 to March 2021. To create the list of A+ Program schools for the 37 A+ school data set, the A+ School Directory website was the starting point (A+ Schools of NC & the NC Arts Council, 2021). Clarification was made with the A+ administrator confirming that 10 schools had become inactive, and they were taken out of the data set. The 24 schools that had commenced A+ programming were also removed from the list in order that the sample set only included schools with at least 3 years of implementation. 37 A+ program schools were included after these adjustments were made. To compare A+ schools with non-A+ schools, corresponding district names for each A+ school in the sample were collected. (Appendix C) Proficiency scores were collected by averaging the Math, English language Arts (ELA) and Science proficiency scores for the End of Grade (EOG) tests for each school or district. Each proficiency score represented the percentage of students (grades 3-8) at that school or district that achieved a proficient level (level 3-5 on a five-point scale) on the EOG tests. The majority of the scores were collected from the year each A+ school commenced the

A+ program and five years after. 15 A+ schools joined the program before publicly available scores were published online. Score 1 for these 15 schools was taken from 2001, the earliest records available on the NCDPI school report card database, and five years later for Score 2 (NCDPI, 2001). Out of the 37 A+ school sample, 6 schools were included that joined the A+ program in 2014 or 2015. Score 1 for these schools was taken from the year they joined the A+ program and Score 2 for these schools was taken from 2017. Scores 3 was taken from 2019 for all A+ and corresponding district schools.

Four additional variables were collected and put into SPSS for each school or district (1) length of time in arts integration programming, (2) number of arts offered at the school, (3) the rate of chronic absenteeism at the school, and (4) ED rate. Number of arts refers to the music, visual art, theater, and/or dance classes the school provided during that year. This count was included as a variable to see if there was any difference between arts integrated and corresponding districts as well as the relationship between number of arts and proficiency. For A+ schools and corresponding districts, the number of arts, chronic absenteeism rates and ED were collected for 2019. Chronic absenteeism represents the percentage of students that were absent for 10% or more of all school days during that year. Chronic absenteeism rates are related to disengagement in school. A spreadsheet of the data was created in SPSS Statistics (version 26.0). Descriptive statistics tests were run for mean and standard deviation of the achievement scores, number of arts offered at the school, percentage of absenteeism, and ED for both groups. A Pearson Correlation test was run comparing A+ schools achievement scores in 2019 with years in A+ programming to measure the bivariate relationship between time in A+ and achievement scores. A one-way Anova test was run to show the relation between number of arts in A+ schools and proficiency scores.

Qualitative

Planning, conducting, and analyzing interviews took place between August 2020-March 2021. All study participants were first contacted by email with information about the study and a request to participate in an interview. Interviews were conducted with the participants through Google Voice and then the transcripts were checked for accuracy using the recordings and finalized. (See Appendix D for questions, Appendices F-H for transcripts) The interview question set included:

- "What are some examples of arts integration going on at your school(s) that you are most proud of?"

- "What are your school's priorities?"

- "How has your school implemented arts integration?"

The interviews were allowed to expand or contract within the natural flow of the conversation. Themes investigated in the question set were: (1) school priorities, (2) purpose of arts integration, (3) spotlighted teachers and community events, (4) multiculturalism, and (5) recommendations for successful arts integration. The process of coding with NVivo software included (1) repeated reading of the transcripts, (2) searching for most frequent and significant codes, (3) grouping codes and analyzing code hierarchy, and (4) making interpretations based on findings. The codes were arranged within the following three categories in a data matrix: arts integrated frameworks, school climate, and evidence of success. (Appendix E)

Ethical Concerns. Before data collection, this research plan was reviewed and approved through East Carolina University's Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). Quantitative data was collected from a publicly available database, the data collected did not require any special permission (NCDPI, 2019). Qualitative data was in the form of interviews with school leaders

and administrators. Each participant was informed verbally and in writing about all aspects of the study including the intention of the study to learn about the success as well as the struggles of arts-integrated schools in NC. Each participant was provided with a consent agreement before proceeding with the research study (Appendix B). Participants were offered full protection of privacy and understood the implications of participation as outlined in the informed consent agreement. School leaders and administrators were not put in any harm by engaging in interviews relating to their schools and arts integration practices. In terms of conflicts of interest, no research participant was known to me prior to the study, and no financial obligations were associated with any aspect of the research.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The research problem in this study was to provide an update regarding proficiency scores and further data about A+ schools in NC and discover aspects of the frameworks used in A+ schools. My research study involved quantitative data analysis of school achievement scores at A+ Schools and qualitative structured interviews with arts integrated school leaders in NC. Qualitative data was collected from school leaders to better understand methods used and challenges dealt with by these schools while implementing arts integration.

Quantitative

Figure 1 was created to show the average proficiency scores for A+ schools compared to corresponding districts in the most recent reporting year.

Figure 1

2019 Average Proficiency Score Comparison
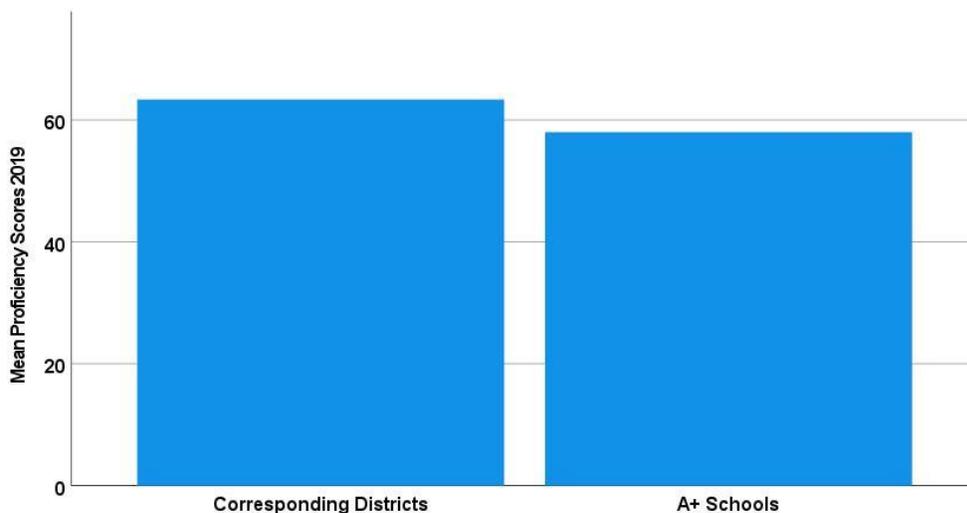
Table 2 shows average proficiency scores and standard of deviation (SD) for A+ program schools and corresponding district schools from three points in time as described in the data collection and management section. In this data set, A+ schools showed a decrease of 6% after

the first year and 7% to 2019. Corresponding districts showed a decrease of 6% after the first

five years, and a further 5% decrease from Score 2 to 2019. The gap between A+ and the 37

corresponding districts widened from 4 % to 5% by 2019. Standard Deviation (SD) of scores was

higher amongst the A+ schools, most noticeably in 2019.

Table 2

A+/Corresponding Districts Proficiency Score Averages

Schools/District	Chronic Absenteeism	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3
A+ schools	.16	71% SD 17.0	65% SD 12.1	58% SD 7.7
Districts	.17	75% SD 21.6	68% SD 18.0	63% SD 14.2

The correlation coefficient value from the Pearson test correlating time in A+ with

proficiency scores in 2019 was .20 and the significance (p) value was .25. This showed a weak

positive linear relationship between years of time in A+ and growth of proficiency scores. SPSS

did not mark this finding as significant, meaning increased time in A+ school had no significant

relationship to increased scores.

Figure 2

Scatterplot of 2019 A+ Proficiency Scores by Time
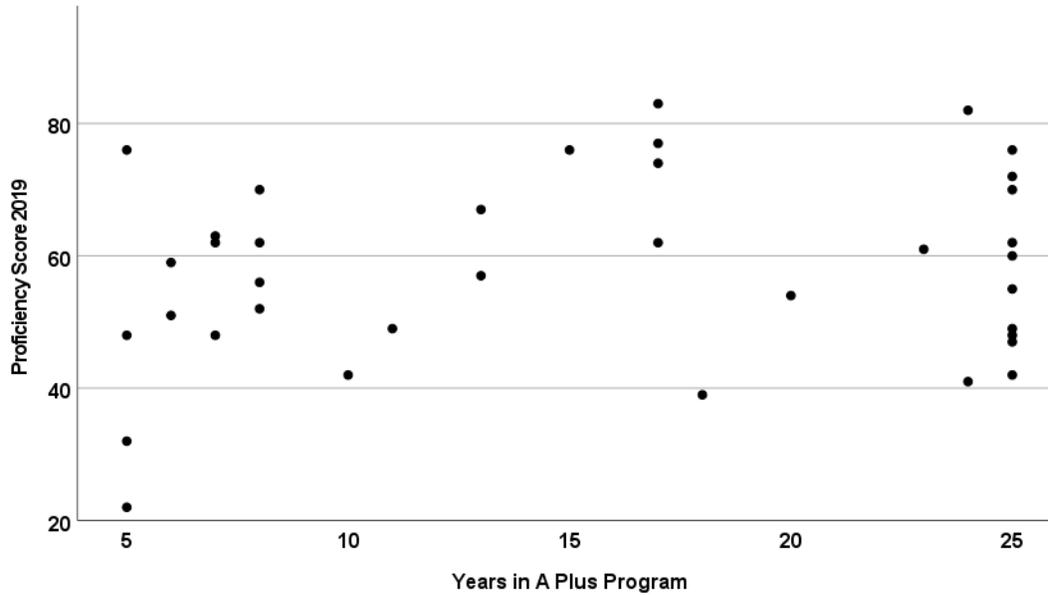
2019 Proficiency Score Comparison

    I.   70% of A+ schools sampled had averages lower than 65%.

    II.   62% of corresponding district schools had averages lower than 65%.

    III.   30% of A+ schools sampled had averages of 65% or higher.

    IV.   38% of corresponding districts sampled had scores of 65% or higher.

    V.   Scores ranged from 22%-83% for A+ schools.

    VI.   Scores ranged from 46%-80% within the corresponding districts sample.

As indicated in Table 3, the highest proficiency scores for A+ schools ranged from 76-83%. ED

percentages for A+ schools ranged from 10-56%. Districts averaged 56-74% students ED.

Table 3

Top Five A+ Schools and Their District's Scores

A+ School	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3 (2019)

District Name			
Cranberry Middle	92	69	**83**
Avery	85	64	71
Saluda	94	92	**82**
Polk	91	89	80
Avery Middle	87	59	**77**
Avery	90	64	71
White Oak	91	87	**76**
Carteret	87	76	76
The Arts Based School	73	71	**76**
Winston-Salem/Forsyth	86	76	61

The lowest five proficiency scores in 2019 for A+ schools ranged from 22-42%. ED percentage at these lowest scoring A+ schools ranged from 61-83% of student population. Corresponding district ED percentage ranged from 23-65%. Scores steadily decreased from the earliest date (Score 1) to Score 2 and Score 3 for corresponding districts and A+ schools.

Table 4

Lowest Five A+ Schools

A+ school Corresponding District	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3 (2019)
Townsend Middle	32	23	**22**
Robeson	38	46	46
ZECA (K-8)	28	37	**32**

Onslow	59	63	63
Diggs-Latham	84	56	**39**
Winston-Salem/Forsyth	87	76	61
Oaks Rds. Academy	86	67	**41**
Craven	88	79	61
Mineral Springs Arts	66	53	**42**
Winston-Salem/Forsyth	87	76	61

A comparison between the five lowest scoring A+ schools and low-performing schools within the same district showed:

I. Townsend Middle had the lowest proficiency out of the 50 schools in the district.

II. ZECA had the lowest proficiency out of the 37 schools in the district.

III. Both Diggs-Latham (K-5) and Mineral Springs Arts and Leadership Middle had a similar proficiency to 28 failing schools out of 70 schools in the district.

IV. Oak Roads Academy (K-5) was one of six failing schools out of the 25 schools in the district.

Table 5

Percentage and Frequency of Arts at A+ and Corresponding School Districts

School/District	1 Arts	2 Arts	3 Arts	4 Arts
37 A+ schools	8.1% (3)	48.7% (18)	21.6% (8)	21.6% (8)
37 Districts	2.7% (1)	94.6% (35)	2.7% (1)	0% (0)

Results from Fisher's two-way Exact test found p value $<.001$, confirming that A+ schools were associated with a higher number of arts. Results from the one-way Anova test comparing number of arts with 2019 scores found $p = .82$ indicating there was no association between number of arts and scores, as made evident in figure 3.

Figure 3

2019 Average Score at A+ Schools with 1, 2, 3, and 4 Arts
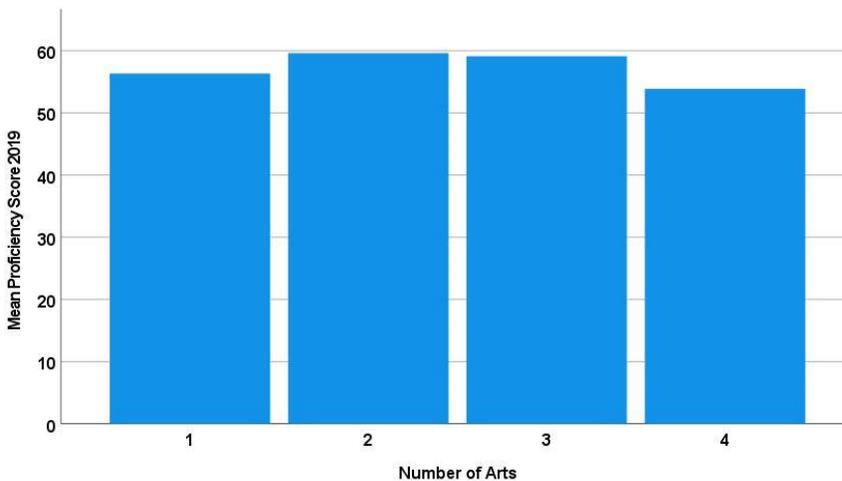
Qualitative

The interview code findings were placed within three themes: arts integrated frameworks (Table 6), school climate (Table 7), and evidence of arts integration success (Table 8). Each theme was categorized with several descriptive codes. The number of statements which fit the code were listed in the tables. Table 6 identifies the following six codes within arts integration frameworks: budgeting, collaboration, curriculum, leadership, multicultural education, and professional development (PD). Table 7 identifies the following two codes within the theme of a school's climate: how the school functions as a team, and Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Table 8 displays the four codes found within the theme of success: lesson examples, community

engagement, student engagement, and higher scores. Below each table are summaries of the similarities and differences between interview discussions.

Table 6

Arts Integrated Frameworks Codes

Interviewee	Budgeting	Collaboration	Curriculum	Leadership	Multicultural	PD
A+ Admin.	1	1	2	1	1	2
A+ leader 1	1	3	1	0	2	3
A+ leader 2	3	4	4	4	3	6

Budgeting

The A+ school leaders' comments on financing arts integration had many similarities. Both school leaders explained that there were a lot of costs involved that were not covered by the A+ organization or their school. For example, School leader 1 stated, "Charter schools don't get any bond money or lottery money, so you can understand, we have a lot to raise" (personal communication, October 20, 2020). School leader 2 said, "Of course, you know, like put on a musical? You have to have money" (personal communication, October 2, 2020). The administrator explained to me that the A+ program costs $60,000 on a sliding scale based on ED status for three yearly three-day long PD trainings, and how the organization put a lot of time and energy into hiring the facilitators of the PD program. The administrator did not discuss how schools dealt with budgeting for arts integration. A+ school leaders, on the other hand, discussed financing as a significant challenge.

Collaboration

The two school leaders discussed collaboration as a necessity for successful

implementation. The administrator discussed collaboration only in terms of the multiple roles

teachers usually play in arts integration. School leader 2 (personal communication, October 2,

2020) stated, "You have collaborative planning in order for it to work, and that's hard to

do." School leader 2 also described why collaboration was a challenge at their school, saying,

"It's kind of like, you know, my fellow colleagues, they're not anti-arts, but it's like it's not what

they're comfortable with or familiar with" (personal communication, October 2, 2020). School

leader 1 (personal communication, October 20, 2020) responded to the question, "What is the

main strategy you can't do without to make arts integration work in a school?" by saying, "It

requires cooperation and collaboration." Leader 1 further shared tactics used at their school for

implementing collaboration including sharing pacing guides and scheduled classroom teacher

participation in the specials classes (personal communication, October 20, 2020) The

administrator (personal communication, September 29, 2020) described what collaboration has

looked like in successful schools, saying, "When you walk in a classroom, you might not know,

is that the drama teacher? Is that the visual arts teacher? Classroom teacher?... So, they really

blurred the lines between the disciplines." The administrator's discussion described the

expectation within arts integration that teachers would collaborate. Central to both school

leaders' discussion were specific methods of infrastructure to support the practice of

collaboration.

Curriculum

Incorporating an arts-imbedded curriculum was brought up in conversation with both

school leaders. The administrator did not suggest that an arts-imbedded curriculum was

important but discussed two aspects of curriculum; that the stand-alone arts education classes

should be sequentially structured and based on the standards of art, and that the curriculum should include exposure to the arts inside and outside the school building.

School leader 1 discussed their "school wide arts integrated curriculum" in terms of collaborative efforts between teachers, "Grade level and all specialists have regular meetings," and gave details for their methods to implement what was described as "two-way integration-teachers in the classroom are also reinforcing the arts" (personal communication, October 20, 2020). School leader 2 implied that curriculum support would have been helpful from the A+ organization when stating, "I don't have any curriculum support" and in discussing how leadership requirements were necessary to enforce integrated curriculum and collaboration between teachers (personal communication, October 2, 2020). Each interviewees discussion around curriculum revealed that the A+ program has not provided help in this process. It appears that there has been a wide variety of methods used to integrate arts into the curriculum.

Leadership

School leader 1 did not bring up aspects of leadership whereas school leader 2 and the administrator discussed several aspects of leadership in implementing arts integration. This difference of perspective may have been a result of school leader 1's staff holding a strong united vision of arts integration. School leader 2 stated that requirements were necessary for staff to attend PD summer training, "whereas other principals say it's optional" (personal communication, October 2, 2020). The administrator discussed the other end of the spectrum, how "Some schools are in an inactive status, so we've had schools that have been inactive for six or seven years because there was a principal that just wasn't engaged" (personal communication, September 29, 2020). Leadership was considered central to successful arts integration in these interview discussions.

Multicultural Education

The interviewees shared a common belief in multicultural education or equity as a part of arts integration. "We use the arts because they give us a doorway to cultural exploration and an opportunity to connect with various aspects of diversity and inclusion," stated school leader 1 (personal communication, October 20, 2020). "I really try to encourage and tap into that [bringing in cultural arts opportunities] just to give them exposure to more culture and more arts integrated events because we don't do many things here," shared school leader 2 (personal communication, October 2, 2020). The administrator echoed this sentiment, sharing, "So, over the last two years, A + itself has been doing a lot of work around for equity and inclusion both with our fellows and just internally" (personal communication, September 29, 2020). A focus on using arts integration to raise multicultural awareness was shared by all individuals interviewed.

Professional Development

Discussions of PD were the most prevalent topic brought up by the interviewees within the category of arts integration frameworks. The success of arts integration was seen by school leaders and the administrator to revolve largely around teachers attending PD training. "Teachers all have A+ training and professional development at the beginning of the school year. New hires must go to training," School leader 1 stated (personal communication, October 20, 2020). The administrator explained that the organization normally offered summer PD conferences but had cancelled due to Covid in 2020 (personal communication, September 29, 2020). School leader 2 described how PD was important for all staff to attend and further described aspects of the training, for example, "they model the lesson and then break it down" (personal communication, October 2, 2020). The importance of PD was noticeably stressed by all, and, to a lesser degree, collaboration also was noticeably significant to all interviewees.

Table 7

Number of School Climate Codes

Interviewee	School as a Team	SEL
A+ administrator	2	2
A+ school leader 1	3	3
A+ school leader 2	1	3

School as a Team

Each interviewee expressed some level of belief in the importance of the school staff working together as a team in terms of integrating the arts. The administrator shared that "One thing we require for schools in their application is 85% of their certified staff has to be in agreement that A Plus is a good fit for the school" and described the importance of "buy-in" (personal communication, September 29, 2020). School leader 2's perspective focused on the principal as "the driving force" behind arts integration implementation describing required attendance at PD and documentation of implementation (personal communication, October 2, 2020). School leader 2's discussion of regularly scheduled collaborative events and collaborative planning implied that the school had a strong focus on working as a team beyond collaborative teacher planning. School leader 1 stated directly that arts integration takes collaboration and shared that the teachers worked in small teams and whole school meetings. The greatest difference between interviewees was seen in school leader 2's limited discussion on the school as a team compared to the involved discussion from other participants.

Social Emotional Learning

Key to all participants' school climate discussion was SEL. All school leaders and the

administrator shared that they believed arts integration supported student behavior. School leader 2 stated that arts integration was a way "to promote positive behavior and then social emotional learning after coming off of Covid" (personal communication, October 2, 2020) School leader 1 stated that arts integration "ignites student energy and creativity, and supports a powerful sense of identity, resiliency, belonging, and self-confidence in students" (personal communication, October 20, 2020). The administrator provided several explanations exemplifying the view that successful arts integration schools made students more engaged, made teachers see the multiple talents of students, and increased social awareness and "responsible decision making" (personal communication, September 29, 2020). The administrator and School leader 1 articulated most clearly the importance of SEL skills, and had many more details to share about how the school worked as a team compared to School leader 2.

Table 8

Evidence of Arts Integration Success Codes

Interviewee	Arts Integration	Community Engagement	Student Engagement	Higher Scores
A+ administrator	1	1	3	1
A+ school leader 1	4	2	6	0
A+ school leader 2	6	2	0	0

Arts Integration Success

Evidence of arts integrated success was discussed differently between interviewees. Arts integration lesson and unit examples were given readily and extensively by both School leader 1 and 2, and with less depth by the administrator. School leader 2 shared that an ELA teacher

incorporated "a famous artist into her lesson, [students] learned about the artist, but also integrated that into their writing and their reading" (personal communication, October 2, 2020). School leader 1 highlighted a dance teacher's incorporation of ELA concepts into her lessons. The administrator stated that the most important thing is that "the kids are getting the arts throughout the day, not only in art classes, but when they're having math, when they're having social studies [etc.]" (personal communication, September 29, 2020). The administrator did not provide concrete lesson examples like each school leader but showed understanding for the overall types of lessons and units that revealed arts integration success.

Community Engagement

Community engagement was discussed as important by all interviewed. School leader 1 focused on bringing community artists to the students, sharing that they "try to tap into some of our local artists here" and further gave details about several local arts organizations that they had hosted at their school (personal communication, October 2, 2020). School leader 1 discussed community events that shared student learning with parents and the community, "We bring the community in for nine grade level productions- We have a Friday thing every month. I'd say about 20 times [community events] a year" (personal communication, October 20, 2020). Community events were described by the administrator in terms of arts exposure, "a lot of our schools connect with the Arts Council or their local Arts Council who have artists and residents" (personal communication, September 29, 2020). The administrator and School leader 2's lack of mention of parent events associated with arts integration seems to reflect a perspective that performances and exhibitions are not central to successful implementation of arts integration, whereas School leader 1 reflected the perspective that performances and exhibitions were very central to the school's arts integration.

Student Engagement

School leader 1 and the administrator discussed student engagement as directly associated with arts integration. "We believe we should use those tools [the arts] to engage them in their studies," stated School leader 1 (personal communication, October 20, 2020). Arts integration "effectively engages students," stated the administrator (personal communication, September 29. 2020). School leader 2's lack of discussion on the topic of student engagement may be the result of there being less student engagement at their school.

Higher Scores

The importance of improving scores was not mentioned as a goal or as evidence of success by either school leader. The administrator discussed higher scores only briefly in relation to the high gains garnered by disadvantaged students, "…traditionally marginalized students have the strongest and fastest gain [according to a recent study they had conducted]" (personal communication, September 29. 2020). School score improvements were not mentioned as a possible result of arts integration programming. Despite no mention of scores, there was limited discussion of gearing lessons towards standards and objectives.

Throughout the interviews, discussion was organized into three themes: frameworks (Table 6), school climate (Table 7), and evidence of success (Table 8). Two themes within arts integration frameworks were most discussed out of the seven coded: PD and collaborative planning. Within discussions of the school's climate, SEL was revealed to be more important to the interviewees than how well the faculty worked together as a team. Success within arts integration was discussed by all interviewees in terms of concrete lesson examples and community engagement. Two out of three interviewees discussed student engagement, and only

one out of three discussed improved scores. These interviews represented a snapshot of varying views of arts integration within the NC A+ program.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in the scope and breadth of the study. This study did not include alternative arts integration programs such as STEAM that would have provided further qualitative comparative analysis. A longer time frame and a wider net of score trajectory or specific case studies would have brought further clarity to the picture of arts integration. There also were limitations in Score 1 data collection, 38% of A+ achievement scores were collected between one and six years after commencement of joining A+ while 62% were collected from the school's first year of commencement as explained in chapter 3. Additionally, qualitative evidence was only gathered from school leaders, rather than teachers, parents, or students. This study does not have the insider's view but is limited to a leadership and managerial perspective of the phenomenon of arts integration.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The wide variability and lower downward trajectory of A+ proficiency compared to district averages indicates that the frameworks at A+ schools are generally not being implemented properly. A+ schools overall averaged lower scores compared to their districts in each instance studied (Score 1, 2, and 3). Results from the Pearson test showed that length of time in A+ schools had no correlation to increased scores. The A+ schools were not improving or developing their implementation in a way geared towards academic success. A+ school leaders stated multiple problems that required their constant attention such as strong leadership, acquiring money or grants, and garnering buy-in from staff. The wide variability in A+ scores compared to district scores may indicate a wide variety of methods being used at A+ schools. The number of A+ schools in 2019 that had proficiency lower than 65% was an alarming 70%. Overall, this points to a failure for A+ schools, however, the corresponding district average was nearly as poor; 62% had averages lower than 65%. It is certainly important to consider outside factors which might have affected the trajectory for all schools such as increased rigor in the EOG tests, decreased funding, or lower teacher expectations. Also, schools with higher Economically Disadvantaged (ED) percentages have a stronger correlation to attaining D's or F's (West Ed, 2019). However, it must be stressed that some A+ schools improved their scores to B or C level and rose scores above their corresponding district. (Table 3) It is true that some of those schools had noticeably lower ED student percentages, (10-39%) however, it must be noted that two of those top five A+ schools had ED populations between 53-56%, so it cannot be said that only rich A+ schools had success. The quantity of poor results does not discredit the small number of good results. The fact that some A+ schools implemented arts integration successfully and the highest A+ score (83%) was higher than any district score gives strong indication that the

A+ school program is not a failure, because in those instances of success, there were frameworks used that supported successful implementation of arts integration.

A Good Start for a Good Arts Integration Framework

A+ schools had on average, higher numbers of arts educators at their schools. This is a good sign for the A+ program even though higher number of arts had no relation to higher proficiency scores. (Figure 3) Some aspects of proper implementation may not have been put into place, such as enough materials and space, enough PD in helping facilitate arts integration, and enough planning time to collaborate with the classroom teachers on the integration of arts into academic subjects. One school leader in the qualitative study described the challenge of including all the arts with only one arts educator who taught both music and art, "I try to bring black box [local arts programming] in to do that, the dance and movement piece, or I'll try to do the theater, you know, do a theater club or do something after school for theater to kind of supplement, so they're getting all [arts] areas" (A+ school leader 2, personal communication, October 2, 2020). It should be noted that these extra supports put in place were not facilitated in any way by the A+ program. The support schools received from being in the A+ program was whole school PD, but schools may need differentiated PD for arts teachers, classroom teachers, and the leadership team to best support arts integration. The importance of using the arts in arts integration methods is stated in this way by Wolff et al. (2018), "Research shows that bringing the arts into the instruction of other classroom subjects benefits students' academic, cognitive and personal outcomes" (p. 1). Knowing the support from research and the published A+ Essential Set of Commitments statement that "In A+ Schools the arts are inclusive of drama, dance, music, visual arts, creative writing and media arts" (National A+ Schools Consortium, 2001), it is surprising that more support was not offered to A+ schools to facilitate additional arts

educators in instances where less than four arts classes were offered. According to the school

sample studied, on average, only 21.62% of A+ schools had four arts (visual art, music, dance,

and theater). It is a great start that A+ schools put in place more arts educators on average than

district schools, (0% of districts sampled had four arts), however, almost half of A+ schools

(48.7%) only offered the norm of two arts (music and visual art). In schools that did not have the

support of all the arts specialists, it is possible that the A+ schools were limited in their

approach. Additionally, if the arts educators were not certified and/or not highly skilled in

collaborating with classroom teachers, then the staff in place may not have been of much support

to the school-wide reform. The lower proficiency scores at A+ schools despite higher number of

arts revealed that implementation of arts integration was not successful. In fact, some A+

schools with four arts were on the lowest end of performance displayed in data from 2019.

(Mineral Springs Arts: 42% and Leadership Magnet Middle: 42%) Detailed case studies

comparing the different ways the arts are used to implement arts integration may provide more

clarity into the expected results from these frameworks.

The following elements were also supported by both school leaders and the administrator

in this study, indicating a good basic framework for arts integration at successful schools should

include (1) budgeting, (2) collaboration, (3) curriculum, (4) leadership, and (5) PD. These

elements were supported through planning and preparation such as garnering funds, planning

collaborative meetings, imbedding arts into the curriculum, and enforcing attendance at yearly

PD.

Positive Affective Results Shown by Lowered Chronic Absenteeism

The bivariate relationship between chronic absenteeism and 2019 scores (r =.171)

implied higher student engagement and potential for academic score improvement as

demonstrated in multiple studies (Stoelinger, 2015; Ludwig et al., 2017). If A+ schools continue

to lower the chronic absenteeism at their schools, results indicate that score percentages may rise

proportionally. This finding is supported by Thomas and Arnold's (2011) study which found

higher attendance at A+ schools and slightly higher Reading proficiency scores than non-A+

schools. (A+: 83.91, non-A+: 83.6) Durham's (2010) research connected engagement from arts

integration with higher academic performance as has reports from Stevenson and Deasy (2005).

In discussions with school leaders in this study, the focus was heavier on student engagement

rather than score achievement results. SEL was coded 8 times by the combined interviewees,

higher scores only once. The high scores at A+ school leader 1's school, however, did point to a

focus on academic achievement, and A+ school leader 2's school was not far behind. (Range of

72-76%) Therefore, although these school leaders did not talk about scores, they showed through

school score results that it was a focus. *How* these two schools facilitated students to achieve

higher scores, however, is not clear. School leader 1 (personal communication, October 20,

2020) shared multiple statements about how arts integration "makes students love learning" and

"engages them in their studies." School leader 2 shared multiple connections their school had

made between arts integration and SEL, describing how they used arts integration to further the

aims of SEL. The A+ administrator described fun dance and dress-up activities at school leader

2's school, adding, "I would say they're really strong in the climate essential, really just making

it a place where people just want to be" (personal communication, September 29, 2020). A

positive climate is central to arts integration that is done well (Barnard, 2010) and research has

pointed to positive academic effects from boosting student self-esteem and self-efficacy skills

(Durham, 2010; Robinson, 2012). Future studies on student engagement at high *and* low-

performing schools may help clarify what specific teaching methods aid in this aspect of an arts integration framework.

Comparing Arts Integration Frameworks

The preparation and methods that make up a successful arts integration framework involve many pieces including PD, curriculum, pedagogy, and infrastructure (Davidson, 2009; Duma, 2014; Ingraham & Nuttall, 2016; Stoelinga et al., 2015). School leader 1's school was a top-5 ranking school, indicating that successful frameworks had been put in place at their school.

The preparation and methods discussed by school leader 1 included embedding arts into the core curriculum and planning regular community events, collaborative planning and yearly PD, and a capital campaign. School leader 2 discussed similar topics in terms of imbedded arts lessons, yearly PD, and applying for grants because of the need for money. According to the information provided, their two schools went beyond a subservient approach and demonstrated a co-equal approach to arts integration (Bresler, 1995, as cited in Robinson, 2012) where arts teachers and classroom teachers work together on planning and integrating curriculum in a way that uses higher-level thinking skills in both the arts and the academic content. School leader 1 stated that their method "develops real-world problem-solving skills in students" (personal communication, October 20, 2020). The most noticeable difference between school leader 1 and 2's descriptions of their school programs was that school leader 2's school focused heavily on planning regular visiting arts events, with no mention of events to celebrate the arts-integrated work of the children discussed heavily by school leader 1. The higher score results achieved at school leader 1's school may be related to this difference in implementation. However, the greatly reduced ED student population (10% compared to 53%) at school leader 1's school may

also have been a contributing factor. A more involved case study would be necessary to compare a school's focus on either student performances or outsider's arts performances.

Frameworks used by successful arts integration school programs provide insight into missing elements in the A+ school frameworks. Ingraham and Nuttall's (2016) study using arts integration to increase scores of ED students included the following framework (1) a culture of respect and encouragement, (2) collaboration between teachers, and (3) data sharing. Both a positive culture and collaboration are on the list of "essentials" posted on the NC A+ school website, but there is no focus on data sharing. It is possible that a focus on data such as student scores on EOGs would help A+ schools gear lessons and units towards improving scores.

All qualitative interviews in this study echoed the importance of a positive climate and SEL in relation to arts integration. School leader 1 described the value of arts integration in this way "...it supports a powerful sense of identity, resiliency, belonging, and self-confidence in students (personal communication, October 20th, 2020) When students' self-esteem and self-efficacy were increased in Robinson's (2012) arts integration study, students put more effort into their work and their academic performance increased.

The Turnaround program, discussed earlier for its success with increasing student scores and improving the school climate has cited using the following eight pillars as core assets in their arts integration schools: (1) principal support, (2) arts specialists, (3) classroom teachers that integrate arts and collaborate with arts educators, (4) teaching artists and community arts organizations that work in the school, (5) connecting with the community, (6) strategic arts planning, (7) ongoing PD, and (8) a school environment that celebrates creativity and artistic achievement through displays and performances (Stoelinga et al., 2015). Turnaround Arts' larger school objectives were to "positively influence student engagement, school culture, instructional

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practice, and school outcomes in the country's lowest-performing schools" (Stoelinga et al., 2015, p. 16). The A+ program has eight sets of commitments as well, with some similarity between the frameworks. The "A+ Essentials" can be summarized as follows: (1) inclusion of all the arts, (2) collaborative and two-way integration of curriculum, (3) multiple intelligences and 21st century skills, (4) hands-on and arts-based learning, (5) enriched assessment, (6) teacher collaboration, (7) supportive infrastructure, and (8) positive school climate with a shared vision (National A+ Schools Consortium, 2001). The categories in the A+ program's checklist that are different from Turnaround's list are (a) multiple intelligences and 21st century skills, (b) hands on and arts-based learning, (c), enriched assessments, and (d) climate. The pieces included in Turnaround's checklist provides a commitment to two areas not included in A+ school's commitments (1) displays and performances, and (2) connecting with the community. Successful A+ School leader 1 discussed the numerous performances and exhibitions organized to share with the community throughout the year. School leader 2 discussed reaching out to the neighboring arts associations and university to bring in community artists. These additions to the A+ essentials may have been key to increasing their scores. In joining the A+ network, A+ schools have been allowed to decide how they want to implement the program (A+ Schools Program of the NC Arts Council, 2014) and therefore many of these framework pieces have gone missing, possibly leading to the low score performance in the majority of A+ schools.

Linking Arts Integration to High Achievement

The A+ program does not stress the importance of academic achievement or methods, and it has made public only the rare academically successful stories (Bugg elementary, Saluda elementary, R.N. Harris elementary) without explaining the poor achievement levels in most of their schools (A+ Schools Program of the NC Arts Council, 2014). The A+ Schools Program

states in their concluding statement to their 2014 report, "Success and quality at A+ schools is measured far beyond the measures of test scores" (A+ Schools Program of the NC Arts Council, 2014, p. 36). Redefining success in this way takes the focus away from high achievement. This is a problem because education leads to greater opportunity for students such as increased latitude with college and career options. Opportunities such as these are made more difficult for students in arts integrated programs if the program is not being conducted beyond subservient, affective, or social integration (Bresler, 1995, as cited in Robinson, 2012) Like school leader 1 stated, "Measurement needs to be how do you get them engaged in learning goals which you have determined to deliver. Not that they are just happy" (Personal communication, October 20, 2020). The fact that "the requirements for A+ schools are not uniform, and the approach does not prescribe a specific curriculum, methodology or process of implementation" may not be helping success be made (A+ Schools Program of the NC Arts Council, 2014, pp. 3-4).

Arts integration aligns with recent educational initiatives to develop 21st century learning skills and increase student achievement through developing SEL skills which have been shown to be effective at closing the achievement gap (West Ed, 2019). Like findings of researchers in the field, (Biscoe & Wilson, 2015; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005), this study's findings on lowered chronic absenteeism at A+ schools indicates that arts integration promotes student engagement in the affective domain. The success of the top five A+ schools demonstrates that A+ schools do have success and some frameworks have been providing pathways to success. Further research may clarify specific frameworks for effective arts integration. Specific aspects of framework research could include successful methods to raise money, garner grants, facilitate buy-in or schedule collaborative planning for the success of arts integration.

This study may be a wake-up call to teachers, stakeholders and researchers involved in arts integration because of the study's critical look at the results demonstrated by many schools within the A+ program. Organizations may take the ideas and make them their own as they teach, research, or create educational policies for the benefit of students in NC and elsewhere.

The effect of the A+ program is not felt by most students in NC. However, the significance of A+ schools will spread if schools are supported to implement an arts integrated framework that increases their overall achievement like their top achieving schools did.

Arts integration is not always able to make much headway because of challenges related to finances, teacher buy-in, lack of leadership or inter-collegial support, or too little PD (Lajevic, 2013; Wolff et al., 2018), however, if there is follow-through with preparation and methods, and the co-equal approach is taken, where students are required to use higher order thinking skills (Bresler, 1995, as cited in Robinson, 2012) then the skills students need to increase their academic achievement will be strengthened while they are engaged and excited about learning.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In this study, the higher proficiency scores at A+ schools were associated with successful implementation of arts integration, and the lower proficiency scores at A+ schools were connected to poor implementation of arts integration frameworks. This study is relevant to the field in that it takes strong data analysis from mixed methods to offer concrete suggestions for improvement in arts integration practice. Low scores and supplementary data such as number of arts and years in the A+ program from 37 A+ schools and 37 corresponding district schools were described to point out the missing pieces and unsuccessful track record of the A+ program for the sample and period studied. These results were placed in context of the low standards held in the state and the challenges which the schools have been facing. The success of a smaller number of A+ schools were described using a convergent parallel design to bring together the concrete evidence of A+ school success with the three personal accounts of A+ school leaders who had experience viewing and implementing successful frameworks. Implications of this data suggest that higher standards may be necessary within arts integration frameworks to expect improvements in scores over time.

Low results at A+ schools included wide variability, high numbers of failing schools, a lower descending trajectory of scores than surrounding districts, a lower overall average of EOG scores compared to corresponding districts, lower number of arts offered than proposed in the A+ program's publications, and a lack of score improvement over the 10-year timespan studied. A+ schools, like their corresponding districts, have had to suffer the consequences of being in a state that has disregarded the arts, had rising numbers of uncertified teachers, and high average ED rates. These factors were overcome by a limited number of A+ schools.

Despite the challenges, 30% of A+ schools sampled had averages above 65%. The top five A+ school average scores ranged from 76-83%. The highest scoring A+ school averaged 83% despite a 53% ED rate, a score 12 points above its corresponding district, indicating a successful framework was utilized in implementation. The number of arts offered at A+ schools was higher than in corresponding districts. Interviews with successful school leaders revealed examples of framework pieces that went above the expectations of the A+ program such as in collaborative planning times and presentations of arts integrated learning created for families. Additionally, average chronic absenteeism at A+ schools was consistently below corresponding districts, a finding paralleled by interviewee descriptions of the climate at their schools.

Low-performing A+ schools revealed empty spaces within their frameworks of implementation based on the A+ Program's proposed commitments and a comparison to the literature about successful arts integration programs. Quantitative and qualitative data from this study point to five framework areas that, if improved, may raise standards of success in low-performing A+ schools: (1) more highly prepared arts educators, (2) expanded PD, (3) scheduled collaborative planning including data sharing, (3) arts-imbedded curriculum, (4) performances and exhibitions, and (5) financial support. Research has supported these measures as central to successful arts integration programs (Davidson, 2009; Duma, 2014; Ingraham & Nuttall, 2016; Stoelinga et al., 2015). The relevance of arts integration's effect on students' engagement socially, emotionally, and cognitively remains central to this thesis' understanding of arts integration; but it does not have to be the stopping point. A co-equal approach to arts integration is necessary for success as well as the establishment of all the pieces that support arts integration to run smoothly.

If the above areas are addressed, students may gain both in the affective realm, *and* in the academic realm, leading to the closing of the achievement gap. Further investigation and research will be needed to pinpoint the exact frameworks that will raise the bar for arts integration whole school reform.

Successful arts integration that raises student proficiency scores can be seen as an Everest for educators. Indeed, raising student academic scores through any means, let alone arts integration is seen by many educators as a difficult task. For a long time, people thought climbing Mount Everest was unattainable. Once one person climbed it, however, that one person proved it was climbable. It is true that the A+ schools have shown a predominate lack of ability to attain this "Everest." However, because most fail to climb this Everest, it does not mean that it is not climbable. An affective or socially based method of arts integration is not enough for our students. The documented successes of arts integration around the country and in the top five A+ schools in NC demonstrate the achievability of academic success through arts integration. If it is in our power to help schools achieve this "Everest," then there is no excuse not to.

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APPENDIX A: PRE-RESEARCH IRB APPROVAL

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board

4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682

600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From:	Social/Behavioral IRB
To:	Kate Wheeler
CC:	Alice Arnold
Date:	9/28/2020

UMCIRB 20-002036 Re: Arts-Integration

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 9/28/2020. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2b.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Data Survey (1).pdf(0.01)	Data Collection Sheet

Document	Description
Data Survey.pdf(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires

Document	Description
Explanation of Research Consent Request K Wheeler.docx(0.04)	Consent Forms
Letter of research .docx(0.02)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Questions for the interviews .pdf(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Study Protocol.Wheeler(0.03)	Study Protocol or Grant Application

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1
(Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2
(Behavioral/SS) IORG0000

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

 Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: A Study on the Success and Struggles of Arts-Integrated Schools in North

       Carolina
Principal Investigator: Kate Wheeler
Institution and Department: East Carolina University, Art Education
Address: 2422 Old Cafeteria Building
                               Greenville, NC 27858

Telephone #:   (910) 899-8416 (cell)

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Arnold
Telephone #:   (252) 328-6475 (office)

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?
The purpose of this research is to discover the status of arts-integrated schools in North Carolina.   You are   being invited to take part in this research because you have first-hand knowledge of the situation. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, I aim to learn from your expertise and experience in bringing arts-integrated strategies into North Carolina schools.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about __25__ people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research? Only if you are under 18 years of age.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?
You can choose to only complete the survey. You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?
The research interviews will be conducted at your school building or over the phone. The survey can be   completed in about 10 minutes. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this research is about 20 minutes.

What will I be asked to do?
You will be asked to do the following:

Answer questions regarding the integration of arts at your
    school such as,
- What are your school's goals and action plan?
- What are your school's priorities?
- How was arts integration decided upon as your school's guiding philosophy?
- How is your school unique in comparison to other schools?
- How are staff supported in synthesizing art with the curriculum?
- What teacher or department can you spotlight as an example of successful implementation of your arts integration pedagogy and philosophy?
- What difficulties did your school or students face during the years of incorporating arts integration?
- Which subject incorporates arts the most and the least?

Complete a survey with six questions about your school's art-integration practices. Examples of questions include:
- How many arts lessons are conducted yearly on average in each subject area?
- What is the average length of arts lessons?

The audio of the interview will be recorded. The transcript of the interview will be incorporated into my East Carolina University (ECU) coursework including a PowerPoint presentation and a thesis. This transcription will be shared with East Carolina University (ECU) Master of Art Education (MAEd) students and staff on the East Carolina University (ECU) Canvas Network (online classes) as uploaded coursework and on the East Carolina University (ECU) online database of theses and dissertations ("The Scholar Ship"). I will delete the recording after three years time of safe keeping in ECU's shared drive. The transcript will be included in the appendix of my thesis. The recording will not be shared with anyone but myself.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?
I don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Social distancing and masks will be utilized to minimize risks of Covid-19 in the case of in-person interviews. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. There may not be any personal benefit to you from doing this interview and survey, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future who are interested in arts integration in schools.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?
I will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?
People who access the East Carolina University (ECU) theses and dissertations digital database will be able to look up my thesis which will have a summary of the interview and a transcript of the interview attached in the appendix to my thesis.

Additionally, the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information (the information that you share in the interview) to do this research:

- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it? Audio-recorded information will be kept for three years from the time of taping, then deleted. The transcript will be included in the appendix of the thesis uploaded to the East Carolina University's digital database of theses and dissertations.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?
You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?
I, Kate Wheeler, will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact me, the Principal Investigator at (910) 899-8416 (I am available for calls Monday-Friday 4:15 pm-8:00 pm, Saturdays 9:00 am-1:00 pm and Sundays 2:00 pm-8:00 pm)

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number (252) 744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at (252) 744-2914

Is there anything else I should know?
Your help in offering your time will be valued greatly and will support further research into arts integration at public schools in North Carolina.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?
The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.

- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

_____ _____

Participant's Name (PRINT)   Signature   Date

Select preference below:

        In-Person or Phone:

❏ Phone interview

❏ In-person meeting following social distancing rules and wearing masks to protect from
Covid-19

        Name left in or taken out of transcript of interview:

❏ Identifying name removed from written transcript of audio
❏ Identifying name maintained in written transcript of audio

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process.
I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed
above, and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

_____ _____
_____

Person Obtaining Consent (**PRINT)   Signature   Date**

Consent Version # or Date:___9/10/2020_____

APPENDIX C: LIST OF SCHOOLS/DISTRICTS

Note: A+ schools are the even numbered schools highlighted with year of joining program also highlighted. Directly above each A+ school is the district which that A+ school is from.

1Alamance-Burlington

2North Graham (PK-5)2015

3Ashe

4Westwood Elem.2003

5Avery

6Avery Middle 2003

7Avery

8Banner Elk Elem.1995

9Avery

10Cranberry Middle 2003

11Bladen

12Clarkton Disc. 1995

13Buncombe

14ArtSpace Charter 2012

15Buncombe 2011

16Black Mt P.(K-3) 2011

17Asheville

18Claxton (k-5) 2007

19Caldwell

20Davenport (PD-5) 1995

21Carteret

22White Oak (PK-5) 1995

23Craven

24Oak Rds Ac.(K-5) 1996

25Cumberland

26Mary McArthur(PK-5)1995

27Durham

28E.K. Powe (K-5) 2014

29Durham

30Global Scholars Ac. 2012

31Durham

32R.N Harris (K-5) 1997

33Forsyth

34The Arts Based S. 2007

35Forsyth

36Diggs-Latham(PK-5)2002

37Forsyth

38Mineral Springs(K-5)1995

39Forsyth

40Mineral Springs(6-8) 1995

41Gates

42Gatesville (PK-5) 1995

43Gates

44T.S. Cooper (K-5) 1995

45Granville

46Creedmoor Arts 2014

47Lenoir

48Rochelle Middle 2010

49Mecklenburg

50First Ward Ac.(K-5) 2013

51Mecklenburg

52University Park(K-5) 2013

53Onslow

54Meadow View (K-5) 2012

55Onslow

56New Bridge (6-8) 2015

57Onslow

58ZECA 2015

59Pasquotank

60Sheep-Harney(k-5) 2012

61Polk

62Saluda Elem (K-5)1996

63Asheboro

64Donna Lee L.(K-5) 1995

65Robeson

66Townsend (6-8) 2015

67Union

68Benton Heig.(PK-5)2007

69Wake

70Douglas A&S(K-5)2000

71Wake

72Wendell A&S(K-5)2009

73Watauga

74Mabel School 2003

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for the interviews include but were not limited to:

"What is your school's priorities?"

"How was arts-integration decided upon at your school?"

"How is your school unique from other arts-integrated schools?"

"What are your school's goals and action plan for the next five years?"

"Can you spotlight a specific teacher or program that you believe demonstrates the integration of arts into curriculum very well?"

APPENDIX E: QUALITATIVE DATA MATRIX

Theme Categories	Emergent Themes	Descriptive Codes
ARTS INTE-GRATED FRAME-WORK	**Budgeting**	- Cost averages $60,000 for three years of summer training - Cost is flexible but there will be a cap on schools added under the current framework - Using a capital campaign to pay for the programming desired, a salary line for someone to manage community programming - Writing grants for arts council grants, university arts programming - Faculty donate time - Arts require money
	Leadership	- Principal support makes a huge difference - Some principals require proof of art integration - PDP goal has to have an arts integrated standard - Without principal support, arts integration does not happen successfully.
	Professional Development	- Summer teacher training only for new hires after 1st yr. - Liaisons "available" but not reliable - Principal chooses the frequency of A+ visits during the year.
	Curriculum planning to integrate the arts	- Supplement arts absent from curriculum: theater, dance - Utilize local arts council - Dance program an integral part of arts integration - A sequentially structured art curriculum following standards is important - Start with assessment - Embed the arts into core curriculum - Arts integrated curriculum helps students understand content
	Multicultural education	45% of PD staff are of color - Integrating culture with arts: dance, theater, etc. - Representing groups present at the school - Arts to teach inclusion through the diversity of culture - Going beyond surface cross-cultural references
	_____	- Importance of building collaborative skills - Scheduling time to plan together

	Collaboration	- Collaborate with local arts councils - Arts integration only works when all collaborate - Class teachers can be uncomfortable with arts - Classroom teachers reinforce arts, arts teachers reinforce subjects "two-way integration" - Collaborating with community artists
SCHOOL CLIMATE	**School as a Team**	85% of certified staff has to be in agreement that A + is a good fit for the school to join program. - With buy-in, school takes ownership of implementation - Grade-level performances, school-wide - Celebrating all students, no matter their level. - Considering families part of the community.
	Differentiation	- Arts integration may be a differentiation that especially helps traditionally marginalized students who have shown the strongest and fastest gain. - Students of broadly varied backgrounds have access to a broader world of understanding
	Social Emotional Learning	- From social awareness to responsible decision making. - Helps teachers see multiple intelligences of students. - Alleviates behavioral problems related to learning during epidemic. - Arts can "save" students. - Supports a powerful sense of identity, resiliency, belonging, and self-confidence.
EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS	**Student Engagement**	- Concept that low-performance is tied into low student engagement. - Concept that high student engagement is tied to arts opportunities - Positive cycle of happy students and happy teachers starts - Arts are tools to engage students in their studies, energizes them - Arts integration reaches learners of all types. - Being friendly and fun but focusing on intrinsic values
	Arts integration	- Integration of art with math, ELA & Science - Integration of music with math - Social studies with science and art - Requirements for teachers to integrate arts - As seen in curriculum and pacing guides - View that integration is the proper way to teach about the world.

		● Two-way integration. ● As guided by "Fellows" staff (A+ program)
	Community support	● Families come to view performances/exhibits.
	Grades improvement	● Marginalized students have the strongest and fastest gain.

September 29, 2020

00:00 Speaker 1

So, we could start with just the amazing amount of A plus schools in the state. I'm new at learning about when that all happened. Could you update me? Is that an amount that's increasing more at this time or is it slowing down a little? What would you say?

00:27 Speaker 2

Yeah, it definitely increased since we moved to the North Carolina Arts Council in 2010, so.

Just a tiny bit of A Plus history, so we started in 1995 with 25 pilot schools.

And then started adding schools from there. We've added more than 30 schools since we got to the Arts Council though.

00:50 Speaker 1

That's a lot.

00:52 Speaker 2

Yeah, so we've been taking about four to five schools per year. We're getting close to our capacity at the moment. We think around 70, 75 schools is probably a comfortable number for us. So back to this point, just about every school that wanted to become a plus has been able to.

01:13 Speaker 2

But now we're reaching the point where we may have to start turning people away.

01:19 Speaker 1

I see and is that due to the fact that it's a bit like a scholarship or a grant request? Because it's difficult to have enough money to pay extra arts faculty?

01:32 Speaker 2

No, we don't. We don't get involved in art faculty at all. The cost for A plus is all in paying for professional development for the school.

Speaker 1

Of course.

Speaker 2

Yeah, we have a bit of a sliding scale, so some of our schools that are from the wealthier districts pay in full, some pay partially and some less.

01:51 Speaker 2

We don't make grants though, but we do provide funding for schools that are in need.

01:57 Speaker 1

That makes a lot of sense.

01:59 Speaker 2

That's part of the capacity reason, but the other capacity reason is, you know we only have a staff of four and almost 70 schools are a lot to manage. And once you join A plus you're always in the network until you decide you don't want to be any more so understand we don't only provide professional development for schools that are in their initial work with A plus, but we provide professional development for the life of the school -as long as they are part of the network.

02:30 Speaker 1

I see and is that something they're supposed to be participating in to stay in the program? That was something I was curious about as well, how to stay an A plus school, basically, is it possible for a school to be disqualified?

02:46 Speaker 2

We don't really disqualify a school. We continue to try to engage them, um, but sometimes things change at the district level. There's a new Superintendent or new principal that isn't interested anymore. And so, we have of course schools drop out of the network, but as long as they are staying connected with us, as long as they are you know, in conversation with us every year and they are continuing to, you know, work on and grow their A plus practice we don't take them out of network because we know that things change. We have some examples of schools that have been what we would call inactive. Some schools are in an inactive status, so we've had schools that have been inactive for six or seven years because there was a principle that just wasn't engaged, and then they got a new principal and came fully back into the network. So we try not to be the ones telling a school they shouldn't be A Plus. We want the schools to make that decision on their own.

03:51 Speaker 1

So, once they're in the network, they're in it for good. Was that what you said?

03:56 Speaker 2

Pretty much, yes. That might change a little bit as we realize our capacity because if we believe we can only really handle say 75 schools in our networks, then we want every school to be engaged. Otherwise, a school that's not engaged, we would take them out so that another school could join, but we haven't gotten to that point.

04:20 Speaker 1

I see, that leads me to another question. Are there any situations where art integration is not a good fit for certain types of schools that you could describe?

04:34 Speaker 2

I think arts integration is only not a good fit when the faculty or principle or district leadership do not believe in it or are really super focused on something else like I don't know what, but there could be something else that would not allow them to also focus on integrating the art. Yes, one

thing we require for schools in their application is 85% of their certified staff has to be in agreement that A Plus is a good fit for the school.

05:15 Speaker 1

I see, that is nice.

05:17 Speaker 2

It is never just the principal saying my school is going to be A plus or a Superintendent thing. - We're going to have five A plus schools. It is always an education process with the whole staff and then a whole staff decision as to whether A Plus is a good fit. And we think that is something that contributes to the longevity for us. Because when you start with buy-in it is easier to get something rolling and make it their own.

05:42 Speaker 1

Definitely, and just to be clear, I love the idea of Arts integration personally and if I could, I would want that implemented in as many places as possible, but you have so much more experience with it. I just wanted to ask what you know specifically, if you come across certain types of struggling schools maybe where it would not work? -but I am an art teacher and I see that when you implement art into the subject areas, it helps engage, it makes them so excited, and I've read a lot of research about it. I am pretty excited about it myself. But specifically on that tip as well, do you specifically think that if there was enough money, all schools in North Carolina should be or it would be good for them to have the opportunity to be arts integrated schools?

06:32 Speaker 2

Of course.

06:34 Speaker 1

Nice, I just wanted to know for clarity.

06:37 Speaker 2

Yes, I mean our mission is a comprehensive arts education for all students, North Carolina and everywhere.

06:45 Speaker 1

As I thought.

06:46 Speaker 2

But there have to be other things in place for that to really happen effectively.

06:52 Speaker 1

Yeah, it is a piece of a lot of things that need to be run well, I'm sure. What would you define as some of the effective qualities of A Plus schools? What makes them great?

07:08 Speaker 2

Well, for one thing, the arts are important, but we have eight foundational pieces of A Plus that the network itself came up with. So early in A plus history when they were 25 schools, we quickly realized that every school looked different in the way that they implemented A Plus. And so we went through a process, about two years of asking them if they're all going to look different, what are the things that you commit to together as the A Plus Network? -and they came up with this set of A Plus essentials which we still use today. They have had a little bit of revision but that's the idea of old school reform. You cannot just say OK, integrate the arts. You also have to have the infrastructure for that. You have to build collaborative skills. For that you have to understand the arts and art standards, but you also have to understand your curriculum and your state standards. You have to think about how you're going to assess students if you're integrating the art. You have to look at all the different ways students learn, so looking at their multiple learning pathways.

08:07 Speaker 2

Right.

08:09 Speaker 2

And arts are very experimental, so we also have experiential learning. So, I just rattled off the eight A Plus essentials in that comment. Art, curriculum, enriched assessment, experiential learning, multiple learning pathways, infrastructure, collaboration, and climate. And it's those eight pieces that work together that make super effective schools.

08:35 Speaker 1

Are there a few basic reasons that you would list as why schools turn to arts integration?

08:44 Speaker 2

Well, especially right now, I mean social and emotional learning is a huge educational buzzword right now, and the arts just hit all aspects of that-from social awareness to responsible decision making and we also provide opportunity for looking at diversity, equity, access and inclusion and the arts you know gives kids a voice where they don't often have a voice and it also gives teachers ways to see students in different ways other than just, you know. Oh, that is the kid that does not write well, or that's the kid that might not read well, you know, it allows them to see that all of the students have talents, think in different ways. Like in the moment we are in right now certainly I have been hearing from a lot of our schools that the kids are moderately engaged virtually when they are doing math. But as soon as you bring in an arts activity, they all want to be online, engaged doing that. So, you know for us, it's about student access. Student talent, and engagement. and that is why I think that's why I think a school that is part of the A Plus Network can turn around a low performing status because it effectively engages students, and that student engagement is one of the reasons you have a low performing school.

10:18 Speaker 1

I completely agree!

10:19 Speaker 2

But once it is started it can be sort of a negative cycle. You know that the teachers are not engaging the kids, so the kids are not engaged. Then the teacher gets grumpy about that and you know they do not work as hard to try to engage kids and then kids are even less engaged. You

know you can get into that negative cycle. But if you turn it the other way, and you include the arts and it engages your kids, then they want to be there, and then that supports teachers feeling good about their teaching and it becomes a positive cycle instead.

10:46 Speaker 1

Right, and I have read some reports that say that the grades of students are definitely not decreasing at A Plus schools. They are a little bit higher in some reports, and the attendance rates are just a little bit higher. Maybe there is some I haven't come across yet. Is there any particular statistics you can throw at me about that?

11:09 Speaker 2

Well, we have done research, every year we do some. I will call it light research. We have not really published any research reports or anything recently, but we do enough research to make sure that we know what is effective and what we need to change still. We use an evaluator at UNC Chapel Hill, which is where our initial evaluation came from as well. In some of the most recent research we have seen, they have found that prolonged participation in A Plus has a strong impact on teaching, and they've also seen that students and A Plus schools with traditionally marginalized students have the strongest and fastest gain.

11:58 Speaker 1

Ah, yes. OK.

12:06 Speaker 2

Kids that are traditionally not the kids that are having success in schools, I think that is super important.

12:13 Speaker 1

I do indeed.

12:25 Speaker 2

So, the original slogan was A Plus schools that work for everyone because when the original evaluation team asked teachers, who does this work for, does this work for your high flyers? Your strong kids? Your average kids? Your low performers? Or you know, your super struggling kids or your, learning differently kids, who does it work best for? They said yes, you know it works for all of those. So that is where that motto of A Plus works for everyone came from. And I think even though we do not really carry that motto so strongly today, I think that it still holds true.

13:05 Speaker 1

That is a powerful thing. Some areas are not as open to diversity and inclusion. . . have you run into any difficulties with finding diverse artists, for example, that are affiliated through the A Plus network that do the Arts in residence program?

13:39 Speaker 2

Well, that is really a separate thing from us.

13:43 Speaker 1

Excuse me, yes of course.

13:45 Speaker 2

A lot of schools do have artist residencies because you know when we are promoting the arts in schools, we look at the arts in three different ways. We look at Arts Integration, of course, which is our main piece in what we provide professional development for. But we also look at Arts Education, which is what you do, what arts teachers do sequentially structured and standard art learning and then also art exposure, which is exposing kids to the arts both inside and outside. Helping them sort of realize that arts are all around us and the artist residencies usually fall in arts exposure, although they definitely reach into integration, and education as well. So, we encourage it but we don't provide those -we don't offer funding for that, but a lot of our schools connect with the Arts Council or their local Arts Council who have artists and residents, and a lot of our A Plus Fellows, you know about the A Plus Fellows?

14:39 Speaker 1

Yes, I do. I am interested in applying. How exciting.

14:43 Speaker 2

OK yes, so our Fellows. We have about 50 right now and they are, you know, excellent practitioners in the field of Education and the arts and quite a few of them are teaching artists as well. But we also have classroom teachers and arts teachers and administrators. It is a real mix of both.

15:02 Speaker 2

So, I can talk about diversity in that group. We have had some struggles to have that group be diverse. So over the last two years, A Plus itself has been doing a lot of work around for equity and inclusion both with our fellows and just internally.

15:20 Speaker 2

And last year we changed our process for taking on Fellows and tried to reduce some barriers in order to bring in a broader, more diverse cohort of Fellows. We did a really good job with that. So, 32 potential fellows, 45% of them were of color, which is great. And then our whole process came to a screeching halt as the pandemic hit and we still have those 32 folks who were getting ready to go through an intensive training with us as we call the field. So, we usually only take between 8 and 10 in a new Fellows cohort, and we usually have about 50 applications.

So, in order to cull that, the potential Fellows covers the two full days of A plus training, and they are deciding whether A plus is a good fit for them. And we are deciding if they're a good fit for us. And after each training we cull the group based on our needs. -and then invite, you know, a smaller group to the next training and then cull that group again, and then our potential Fellows all go through a yearlong apprenticeship. So, they get paid at a 1/2 Fellows rate and they just shadow Fellows there as part of teams. They listen to the planning there, you know, watching how the Fellows facilitate and present, but they are not presenting anything themselves, so we

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call it sitting on their expertise. We require them to sit on their expertise for a year as they really learn A plus and figure out where their connection is to do A plus work.

17:01 Speaker 1

That makes a lot of sense. I like that.

17:03 Speaker 2

It is a pretty yeah, pretty cool process. We get really committed and extremely high-quality Fellows through that process. And we also know that even the Fellows that do not get selected in the end have learned something because the two days of training are really interactive and engaging for them, so we know they all take away something, even if they don't get selected as a Fellow.

17:23 Speaker 1

I bet they would, and that is why I'm interested. Sounds exciting to just be around the multiple arts people that are just interested in it and some people in arts, but they are affiliated with something else and from all the avenues of Arts. The next thing I wanted to. . .

17:42 Speaker 2

This is outside of your interview, but just on a side note, are you aware of North Carolina Arts Council teaching artist Tuesdays series that they're doing?

17:51 Speaker 1

Not at all. I will look into that. Thanks for mentioning it.

18:00 Speaker 2

Go to the Teaching Tuesday website and you will see there's one tomorrow. Actually, I think it's this afternoon from 3:00 to 4:30. It is an ongoing series for teaching artists and arts teachers, so you might be interested in that.

18:09 Speaker 1

Thank you. Do you have a specific school or a couple of schools that you could spotlight and explain a little about what you think they are doing that's working really well and very effective as an arts integrated school, either long running or newly joined?

18:31 Speaker 2

Yes, I can give you a lot of different. . .Are these nameless schools that you are just interested in? Sort of hearing what works? -or are these schools that you might be thinking you want to visit? I'm not 100% sure the question where do you want it? Or just for discussion?

18:46 Speaker 1

OK, yes, just for discussion, but if you do not mind sharing the name, it wouldn't be any problem and I would love to interview the people at those schools further, if they're available.

18:59 Speaker 2

Yes, so one of our original schools who has been with us since 1995 and of our 69 schools I think 13 of them are original. Sorry, it's Banner Elk Elementary which is up in Banner Elk up in the mountains.

19:16 Speaker 2

And they have been a great school all along. They have had, . . .some principal changes as they went, . . .and, you know, got a little quiet a couple of times, but they started with just a banner principal at the beginning and now they have another great principal. And they are doing such great work there. It is a little, small school so they have the benefit of sort of a family environment, which is great, but I just notice like even right now as they're, you know, teaching from doing a hybrid model where some kids are in the building and some are home.

And they're still doing things like, -you know, a daily dance activity. So those principal's recording something, and you know, attending that across the airwaves. I mean last week they

had like a rock around the Clock day where they had everybody dressed in disco clothes and they had, disco balls hanging in the entry lobby, just lots of different things to keep the kids and teachers engaged so I would say they are really strong in the climate essential, really just making it a place where people just want to be.

20:32 Speaker 1

Are there any other schools that come to mind when I say what is a school that you think really has got a scheduling program set for how to fit in an equal balance of some drama, some music, some arts you know, put into the classes, and making sure there's oversight from their leadership on checking that teachers are feeling comfortable doing this and also doing it continuously?

21:02 Speaker 2

Yeah, and that's interesting across the network because of course since we don't pay for art staff.

21:08 Speaker 1

Yes, sorry about that.

21:11 Speaker 2

Our schools have a range of arts staff, so some of our schools in super rural North Carolina might only have maybe a visual arts teacher once, once two days a week, and some of our magnet schools in the bigger districts have full time art staff in every art form. Yeah, so you

know that the schedule is not as important as whether the kids are getting the art throughout the day, not only in art classes, but when they are having math when they're having social studies. A good example of that would be our Art space charter school in Winston Salem.

Yes, they do a really good job of framing their North Carolina standards through the Arts.

21:57 Speaker 1

Wow, good.

21:58 Speaker 2

As they're planning together, they're talking about what standards they're trying to achieve in all content areas. So, there's non arts and art content. So, you might see a teacher you know, kick off a math lesson using a famous piece of visual art to get them thinking about, you know, line or something like that, so it is just so embedded in everything they do. You know, if they are reading a book, the next thing that you know the kids are doing tableaus of their favorite teams. Or, you know it is just the teachers are so well versed in it and they do such a good job of mentoring new teachers into the process, that they do not even realize how strong their arts integration is because it's just a natural thing. When you walk in a classroom, you might not know, is that the drama teacher? Is that the visual arts teacher? Is that the regular classroom teacher who has got a, you know, a math standard she's working on? So, they really blurred the lines between the disciplines. And I think when you see that you know that arts integration is just part of daily life at the school.

23:06 Speaker 1

Yes, and like you said before, the buy in must be there strongly. The leadership all believe in how this is working, and they probably would. You say they incorporate into meetings or professional developments in some regard, would you probably guess?

23:20 Speaker 2

Absolutely yes.

23:22 Speaker 2

We normally have summer conferences and we had to cancel all of ours this summer, so we write change force and develop something that we called A plus U which is 14 self-study modules and six of them are introductory and as we released it that school art state charter immediately was responding back to us asking can we sign up all of our new people? Which of these do you recommend? Can we pull, you know pieces from here and there?

23:52 Speaker 2

You know. . . So that constantly is like on our mind- how do we keep everybody up to the same level? Whether you are new or whether you've been there for 30 years.

24:03 Speaker 2

I do not even know if they've been around 30 years, but that was an exaggeration.

24:06 Speaker 1

Right. - for the longest amount of time possible.

24:10 Speaker 2

Yes.

24:11 Speaker 1

Well, it gets me excited talking about all this. I have come to the end of my questions. Is there anything that you would like to share about that you find that you love most about your job? That was something I was going to ask but wasn't sure if we kind of covered that in a way or anything else that you would like to share about arts integration in general, and how it works through your organization?

24:39 Speaker 2 [censored for administrator's privacy]

27:25 Speaker 1

So, the term you use there was interdisciplinary. What would you say is the main difference there between arts integration and interdisciplinary?

27:38 Speaker 2

Yeah, interdisciplinary instruction just means cross discipline. It does not necessarily mean arts integrated.

Oh, I should have interdisciplinary instruction without ever teaching the arts. If you connect, say, science and math.

27:55 Speaker 1

I think that makes sense.

27:56 Speaker 2

Right, but arts integrated means that you are using our (art) standard elements and vocabulary. We use each other's content. So, for us, arts integration had to have standards and vocabulary embedded. So, a good example is like if a teacher has read a story and then asks kids to draw a picture of their favorite part. That is not arts integration, we would call that a visual spatial activity. But if she then, instead of just saying draw a picture of your favorite part, she also says, and in that picture, you know show me what would be in the foreground. The midground and the background of your favorite piece of the story, then all of a sudden, you're stepping into arts integration because you're starting to look at an art standard and you're using some arts vocabulary. So that is a really simple example of how we tell our schools the difference between arts integration and what's not arts integration. And really, for us our be all end all is not art integration. Because we want them to start wherever they are comfortable, and if they're comfortable with having them draw a picture after they read a story, then so be it. And then we will help them figure out how to come from that.

29:12 Speaker 1

That is, that is a beautiful thing, and you talk about it so clearly and so passionately. Indeed. I am very inspired.

29:19 Speaker 2

Just a couple of years, just a couple of years of experience.

29:23 Speaker 1

Since it began, wow, well, I appreciate your time so much. This has been a very rich interview for me. I am going to discuss this with my own thoughts and see what I can type up about it all. And I will be happy to share it with you if you'd like.

29:43 Speaker 2

Yes, I would love to see it. And then if you have, you know additional questions or whatever. Let me know and then if you are really serious about the A Plus Fellows process, it's going to be now a couple more. Probably will not be till the spring of 2022 that we take another cohort since our cohort from 2020 is delayed. We usually take a new cohort every other year.

30:26 Speaker 1

Well thank you so much. I do not want to take any more of your time but please reach out to me if you want to share anything else that just comes up to your mind. You have my email.

30:40 Speaker 2

I just had one thought for you though. Are you connected with the arts Ed section of the North Carolina Department of Public instruction?

30:47 Speaker 1

Not connected with them yet, no.

30:50 Speaker 2

You should be because they are offering quite a lot of workshops and seminars, and the two folks that are there from Brandon Raider and Sarah Grinley. They handle the four arts in that section and they're really great.

31:05 Speaker 1

So go to Google.

31:06 Speaker 2

And look up arts education Google site and see BPI.

31:11 Speaker 2

And it will take you to their Google site. You will see some of the work they're doing, so I think it's also got their contact information. They are both very friendly if you want to make a connection there.

31:19 Speaker 2

And then they also have an arts education newsletter that they send out every week or every other week that you might want to subscribe to.

31:28 Speaker 1

OK, I got that written down. Thank you so much I am a member of NAEA but didn't even think of the local area here.
That will be good.

31:39 Speaker 2

Absolutely.

31:40 Speaker 1

Well have a great rest of your day.

31:42 Speaker 1

Thank you so much.

31:43 Speaker 2

Thanks, good to talk to you and I appreciate you asking all those questions.

31:46 Speaker 1

You're welcome, thank you.

31:49 Speaker 2

Thanks.

September 20, 2020

00:00:00 Speaker 1

To start out, what are your school's priorities?

00:00:05 Speaker 2

Let's see, capital campaign is very important- Let me explain the recent events, the board decided to replicate the school. They are trying to share this opportunity with other students they will start with K-2, then add to it. Charter schools do not get any bond money or lottery money, so you can understand, we have a lot to raise.

00:00:18 Speaker 1

Could you share a brief summary of your school's goals for the next five years?

00:00:22 Speaker 2

You have to understand, I have an artist's view. . . [director of arts] But here's my take on what we try to accomplish: we meet every child where they are and move them forward from there. We do what we can to accomplish that -improve communication with families and increase collaboration between grade level teachers. As I already mentioned, arts integration was decided upon as a founding principle. So, one way we make them put into practice is we have pacing guides to inform one another. -To constantly improve that communication across the faculty and increase the individual teacher's skills in integrating the arts.

00:00:40 Speaker 1

That is wonderful. How was arts-integration decided upon at your school?

00:00:45 Speaker 2

This school's unusual because it was started to be focused on the arts. We think it makes sense to integrate the arts because this is how they learn. Parents share things like, "He never stops drawing, she loves to act and do plays," They come to us so active in art confidence! -We do not want to shut that language down. We do not agree with the stress on -sit still and listen! We believe we should use those tools [the arts] to engage them in their studies. We use the arts because they give us a doorway to cultural exploration and an opportunity to connect with various aspects of diversity and inclusion- you have to be careful however- of stereotypes – we don't want to make those mistakes, we are careful. We do our research.

00:01:24 Speaker 1

I love it. Can you spotlight a specific teacher or program that you believe demonstrates the integration of arts into curriculum very well?

00:01:32 Speaker 2

Our dance teacher, teacher of the year, [name], she was a teacher Fellow since it was first created. -A master of integrating anything from any grade level -she currently teaches K-5 [dance]. She is an expert dance teacher and also does perimeter dances, vocabulary dances, and goes deeper into multicultural studies than surface cultural cross-references. She'll richly integrate math or generate words that are verbs that demonstrate how leaves move for example,

grouping them in verbs and adverbs, demonstrating how those parts of a description work together like the aspects of dance. We really do deeply integrate.

00:02:05 Speaker 1

What types of lessons, projects, or community arts events, for example, do you believe use arts integration in a very beneficial way for students?

00:02:20 Speaker 2

Well, what I want to share with you in answer to that question is about our grade-level wide performance -all 60 students. Those shows are designed by the grade level teachers working with the specialists by looking at the standard course of study- They ask themselves, what does it suggest to us?
For example, since the third-grade studies planets and skeletal and muscular systems, we used Leonardo da Vinci who is a powerful artist who integrated science. Students do immersive study and inventions- performance combining renaissance knowledge with science. There is so much I could speak to in regard to that. . .I believe it works very well, this overlapping.

00:03:19 Speaker 1

That is fascinating! Really, a fabulous sounding overlay. I would have enjoyed attending your school very much. Are there any particular students, or groups of students for whom arts integration has made an especially positive impact?

00:03:28 Speaker 2
Well, it is pretty rare for it not to work with any student. One thing that makes it particularly valuable is that it reaches learners of all types. Art exhibits show all student work, to help

celebrate them where they are at. We don't believe in hiding away student art by the struggling students, and I believe we help them value that opportunity to express themselves as well. By. . .about eighth grade you can see -They are independent! It is an effect of the way we do things. . .It's very strong community-building, what we do, -there is a lot of support, all around. It's amazing. . .There are students that can learn better expressing by singing or dance. Like real life, our way of educating is -everything combined together- so this is good experience for them. Also, students have many ways to succeed. And the teachers value many ways to be smart.

00:04:05 Speaker 1

How is this philosophy shared with students?

00:04:09 Speaker 2

One thing we do is. . . we don't use discipline in a traditional way. We mostly rely on high expectations, and no regular number grades -and more importantly this is shown in the way teachers deliver lessons. . .Teachers are expected to greet students at the door with a smile- that is a practice. Announcing what we are doing is an ongoing process - it's part of our culture, children catch on quickly that everything that they have success at is valued because teachers all have A+ training and professional development at the beginning of the school year. New hires must go to training. There is also a school wide arts integrated curriculum. . .staff meetings spread these ideas. . .Grade level and all specialists have regular meetings- they plan for getting the most difficult aspects of the-the core of it, to explore these concepts. We try to do two-way integration- teachers in the classroom are also reinforcing the arts. One time a trimester system each classroom teacher must go with their class to the specials class. There are three regular specials for K-four.

00:05:12 Speaker 1

This is wonderful. How many community arts events do you usually do as a school each year?

00:05:18 Speaker 2

We bring the community in for nine grade level productions- We have a Friday thing every month. I would say about 20 times a year.

00:05:31 Speaker 1

Wow. That is more than many. . . Do you have any advice for how to accomplish a program like what you have at [school name]?

00:05:40 Speaker 2

It is a lot of work. You have to dedicate a salary line for someone to manage that- the community programming. . .have a community fundraiser to uphold that. We have to be committed to do this, it took us years to build up to this. 20 yrs. now. When people ask for quick answers, I worry that some will be discouraged – I would recommend that they just try things- But the kind of people at the school need to value arts integration- At our school, the buy in is strong. Not only that, there's a sense of adventure.

00:06:14 Speaker 1

Any other advice for those that don't value arts integration?

00:06:17 Speaker 2

Work backwards -start with assessments- think about what state goals you're addressing- Ask how am I going to show how the students have learned these things? - you can show their

learning through art, dance, drama or music. There's a pitfall in the -" Kids love it! "idea. Measurement needs to be how do you get them engaged in learning goals which you have determined to deliver. Not that they are just happy. . . which brings me to another principle of discipline –we don't do rewards – the focus is on intrinsic values. . .we support them and make learning fun.

00:07:01 Speaker 1

Please tell me, what do you value most about arts integration?

00:07:10 Speaker 2

Okay, it unites the unnaturally separated studies into one rich world, which is how the world truly occurs. Even more than that it ignites student energy and creativity, and supports a powerful sense of identity, resiliency, belonging, and self confidence in students.

00:07:26 Speaker 1

Yes! Please, go on.

00:07:30 Speaker 2

Arts integration also provides students of broadly varied backgrounds with access to a broader world of understanding. . . It enriches the school community with joy and surprise. It connects us with artists across our city. It develops real-world problem-solving skills in students. It develops self-esteem. It strengthens relationships between teacher and student. It allows students to be recognized for individual ideas and skills. It makes students love learning!

00:08:28 Speaker 1

Thank you! I feel strongly that you are speaking from valuable experience. I do wish to visit someday. Perhaps one more question. What is the main strategy you can't do without to make arts integration work in a school?

00:09:05 Speaker 2

It requires cooperation and collaboration.

00:09:10 Speaker 1

Understood. Thank you so much for your time! I will share the outcomes of this research paper with your school once completed.

00:09:22 Speaker 2

Sounds good! It was my pleasure to speak with you!

00:09:34 Speaker 1
Thank you.

October 2, 2020

[Introductory remarks and setting up the volume levels]

00:00:40 Speaker 1

How long have you been familiar with arts integrated schools?

00:01:37 Speaker 2

So, I actually was a kid in a neighboring County. So, [school name] is an original A plus school from back in 1995, the school that I am at now.

00:01:47 Speaker 2

That's right, and then in 2000. The middle schools in this County came on board with A plus schools after the elementary school was a pilot. So, I was actually a student in middle school to the 9th grade year when we started A plus schools approach in programming. So as a student I was involved in that and then when I became a teacher, the school I was at was not an A plus school but I used a lot of that passion for the arts anyway. So, I used a lot of integrated approaches but kind of on my own terms, not a full system approach but I became in 08 an assistant principal at Avery middle school, which is an A Plus School in 2010 and so the system kind of went dormant before that with government, with like, you know, state funding and changing positions and so they kind of had a revitalization of a Plus in 2010. And so, I was a part of that, kind of we were regrouping and rebranding.

Then A plus with Michele Burrows came on board, so I was a part of that in 2010, 2014 and then I became a principal at [school name], which is an A Plus School as well. And then I was transferred from [school name] to [school name] and they had an opening because they are A plus and my background is in the arts and I'm supportive of the arts. So, I'm back in an A Plus

School in the elementary level. So, when I came on board here we were kind of in that dormant approach due to the Principal well prior to me you know, just different philosophies and different passions, so we've been kind of hitting the ground running and trying to bring back a lot of those A plus principles that they were trying out in 95 because we had still have some of the same staff here and then retraining the staff and regrouping and re branding with our parents in our community to kind of revitalize the arts here in the school.

00:03:31 Speaker 1

Nice so would you say that your school, as far as an elementary A plus school goes, that your school implements in a deeper or more pervasive way throughout your school, community, and curriculum?

00:03:46 Speaker 2

O Yeah, absolutely. Actually, if you compare one to the other, like there's five elementary schools in our County we are the only A plus school. But compared to my peers, you know, colleagues, yes, it's, definitely... it's we begin there and then plan from there, whereas other schools, probably plan and then think of that last.

00:04:04 Speaker 1

Nice, I did speak with [one of the administrators for A+ schools] and it was interesting that although it's wonderful when it has been implemented, It seems there's not too many oversights to make sure that schools are implementing the A plus ideas throughout the years that come after they start to join the program, so I'm interested to hear from schools like yours, where you are implementing in a strong way and how are you doing that? How are you getting it done and getting people on board?

00:04:44 Speaker 2

Yeah, it starts with the principal, it's the leadership. I mean if your principal isn't strong, I mean your teachers can carry the torch as long as they can, but when it comes to whole-school approach and classroom approach and you know, community and with parents that the principal leadership is not sold on A plus, then you are not going to do it. It's going to be either, you're going to have your teachers, there's pockets, but if you want a whole school approach, the principle has to be the driving force. And that is with any program. If it's arts, if it's math curriculum, if it's reading, if it's you know, heck, it's physical education, you know the principal isn't backing that and that's not the passion, then your whole school approach, you know... and principal too it's where I begin, but as a principal also, there's a lot of other things added to your plate, and that's just one other thing. It's about comfort zone too, while comforts onto that power learned as a child, so I see it through that lens, but if I didn't learn that way, then I would think it would be hard. But my teachers are on board as well, but it is also kind of a nonnegotiable and what I do too like, you know, their PDP goal has to have an arts integrated standard to it and that's not a requirement of anybody but me. Because if it's not there and it's not something- a goal you're reaching towards then we all get busy with the demands of the job and then you kind of lose focus. So, I think the driving force is leadership.

00:06:04 Speaker 1

That makes sense. Do you mind just giving me a quick summary of some of the wider school priorities you guys have- not just arts integration and just kind of like, oh, what are the three or four top things that come to your mind that you're focusing on for the next five years?

00:06:23 Speaker 2

The multiple tiered system of support is a huge approach from the state level you know and so that would probably be a huge focus of both at our school, we just adopted a new math curriculum. So, you know you're balancing math, rigor and math content knowledge that's a huge component here. We are trying to look at behavioral, and as you know, behavioral supports not particular PBIS but like how to promote positive behavior and then social emotional learning after coming off of Covid has been the other focus for us and how do we recoup and regain kids that lost so much? And how do we support families? Social, emotional... But you know the arts can kind of bond all that together. Yes, in some approaches, so that's kind of how we view it as rather than each entity. How do we make this one cohesive kind of unit? And it's hard. And you know, we are not doing it perfectly. I will tell you that right now I visit, I'm a liaison with a public school, so I get to visit schools a lot and you know there are schools that are kicking tail and doing things on a higher level, but you know, for us as a small school, you know, we only have an art teacher you know 40% and a music teacher 40%.

00:07:31 Speaker 1

Oh, I see.

00:07:33 Speaker 2

Right, so you know we have to figure out how we make that work for us, so...and we don't have drama. So, I do drama after school, but that's the passion of me as principal, not an expectation from the state or the County even, but you just have to kind of know when to push in and when it's appropriate to back off because the job of principal is hard you know with the demands of everything. But how do you balance that and make it meaningful? You know I don't want them to fluff a lesson and integrate art into it if it's not a natural thing, you know I don't want them to fluff a lesson and say, oh, we're going to sing this when it doesn't (fit). I'm all about you know if

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it's naturally fit then we need to do it so Yeah, there's days that math isn't integrated, but I'd say 85% of the time it's integrated so just having that balance because you can jump in full force and lose focus easily.

00:08:31 Speaker 1

Right. Is there any specific teacher or program, even the one that you mentioned of your own, that you believe is demonstrating that integration of Arts in the curriculum in the way that you would see as best fit?

00:08:44 Speaker 2

Yeah, I would say I have many teachers throughout the building.

00:08:47 Speaker 1

Tell me about one. If you want to tell me about one and explain a little about what is it they're doing.

00:08:56 Speaker 2

I'll start with a third-grade teacher I have. She is also my A plus coordinator, but she has a background in graphic design and the art. So that is a passion of hers. First, she teaches reading and social studies. They were doing some Keith Herring artwork like using his and then to do...they are doing like essays to promote the three W's: washing hands wearing your mask. You know all that. So, they did. Keith Herring inspired portraits of, you know, social distancing and wearing your mask, and you know all that, so she integrated that art, that famous artist into her lesson, learned about the artist, but also integrated that into her, their writing, and their reading. So just one approach of this last just this last week. Another teacher you know they are doing butterflies and some of its life cycle of a butterfly. In second grade, she integrated with their art teacher and they just created these beautiful paper-mache butterflies and caterpillars with clay to

go on display for this last week, you know. So, it's like we integrate when it's a good natural approach. The piece of math we are getting, you know math is always the hard piece of how to integrate that. We do a lot of music through mathematics, so my... I have the same, my art teacher is my music teacher. I just have one person who does both, so she's integrating with, you know, math because they're doing volume in 3D shapes, so you know creating a song to help them learn the algorithm link... so that's just some of the things going on. Just this last week and this week, so it is kind of all over the place. Yeah, I get that. There are some teachers who do it every day but, but there's some teachers who integrate the arts into, you know, brain breaks - they're huge right now with our mask breaks. So, because we're still face to face here, they can only go outside for a mask break and our brain breaks. You know I see a lot of people incorporating movement or they created a tableau outside with social distancing, you know, just the other day in first grade. So, it's like so you see that kind of in a different approach as to what we've seen in the past.

00:11:11 Speaker 1

Neat, are there any community art events or arts, you know music or drama that you believe used the arts integration in a way that has been beneficial for the students or the community?

00:11:22 Speaker 2

We are one of the few counties who don't have a local Arts Council here, which is sad, sad but what I do is I try to tap into some of our local artists here we have [name of] arts Council who's been helpful. My PTO is supportive of me. We bring [name of] dance theater every year to do dance. Yeah, a week residency with them and then there's our liaison through A plus.

I apply for the North County Arts Council cartwheels grant every year for that. And then I also have [name of] universities near us, and they have an applause series that they put out every year.

And so that is a priority for us. And I know the director well. So, we get in on those performances, you know there was a brass band that came last year. You know, we have done things like Flamenco dancers... They had Chinese acrobatics. The things that our kids in our mountain rural counties will never have access to when they come through the [name of program]. I really try to encourage and tap into that just to give them exposure to more culture and more arts integrated events because we don't do many things here.

00:12:26 Speaker 1

I am impressed, do you think that you could give me a number of how many events are done each year about, or a range?

00:12:36 Speaker 2

Each year "[name]" does like 6 different, six or seven. We did probably three or four of them. Of course, Applause is going to be virtual this year, which is OK. It makes it broader for the entire state, but then black box comes to do a performance and then we do an entire school play that I run. Like last year, we did Jungle Book. This year's supposed to be Frozen and every kid in the schools involved in the musical, so that's something we do here. I would probably say, you know we try. I try to do at least 7 to 10 different activities provided for the school year for them to have some kind of cultural experience if you will or performance-based experience. Usually but sometimes like last year was five. You know Covid happened, and we didn't get to do a lot because our winters are bad here. So, you know we gear up and we do a lot of things from August to November and then November, December, January, February are kind of dormant months for us because of winter and cancellations and snow days. And so, then Covid happened last year in March, so we really didn't get much because our Springs are jam packed with things that we do too. So hopefully this year will be different.

00:13:44 Speaker 1

Powerful, I am inspired! As far as art, music, dance and drama and maybe other arts areas, would

you say that they are equally being integrated or?

00:13:57 Speaker 2

No if anything, I would say art and music are our focus. We do not have a drama program or a

dance program, so that's why like.... Like, we pick a goal each year, like the last few years, it has

been dance and movement because we don't have them. We don't have those teachers or those

specials here, so that's why I try to bring black box in to do that, the dance and movement piece,

or I'll try to do the theater, you know, do a theater club or do something after school for theater to

kind of supplement so they're getting all areas. But I would say you know art is always where

people start, music, probably music and then art. And then we have a drama program at the high

school, but that is about it. So, obviously, dance and drama are the weakest areas or it's what

people are needing. I mean they will get up and dance for them. They will probably, you know,

study art or something, but we have an art/music teacher here at our school,

00:14:51 Speaker 1

Right. Are there any particular students or groups of students that you believe art's integration

has made an especially positive impact?

00:14:59 Speaker 2

Oh, absolutely yeah. Arts level the playing field. That is my goal and that's the kind of mound I

stand on in all areas, in all meetings and say, "Arts integration levels the playing field for all

kids." So, like for example our EC population of students? You know that is the one area that it

levels it. It makes the access for everybody fit and then ELL population of students. Last year we

did a school theme, every year we do this, such as a thing around a book or a book study, last

year the thing was Hispanic heritage. And so, we read books from Hispanic authors and illustrators and then we did, you know, I spent a cultural day, so like so we brought in Flamenco dancing. We brought in you know the ancient dancers, like the Aztecs, the native tribes did like different dances so trying to get representation of everybody.

00:15:50 Speaker 1

Yeah, I looked at the demographics of the school and asked that.

00:15:54 Speaker 2

Yeah, that is fabulous for a small school we're mostly white. We have, probably, you know, 90% Caucasian. African American maybe 2%. You know, probably 8% Hispanic, so we are not diverse, so trying to bring that diversity to have those groups represented, as well as giving our other kids, you know exposure.

00:16:16 Speaker 1

And it helps. I am a huge proponent of that myself and I believe that helps to spread the ideas to the whole school. That and the students and their families, that no matter who comes to the school, we value them and their differences.

00:16:31 Speaker 2

Our theme this year is our school mission and vision are I will treat myself, others and the environment with respect so I think this year is going to be like empathy for others and social justice and then climate justice. So, trying to tackle just getting the ideas out there. You know, how do you respect the environment? How do you respect each other and different ideas? So that's kind of our thing this year. We cannot do as big as we've always done just because of the guidelines and restrictions. But we'll try to make that over a two-year period so we can kind of do some of the culminating activities that we like to do.

00:17:03 Speaker 1

Nice, do you find there are any hurdles in the way of implementing arts integration well in your school or in a larger way of talking about it in the region?

00:17:15 Speaker 2

Time, time. Of course, collaborative planning. You have collaborative planning in order for it to work, and that's hard to do... money. Of course, you know, like put on a musical? You have to have money. To do art, you know money is also. And then I would just say it is not... It's kind of like you know my fellow colleagues, they're not anti-arts, but it's like it's not what they're comfortable with or familiar with. They don't see how to make it through, so it's like, oh, that someone that's the job like the art teacher does that. And if you look at it from a whole school integrated approach, it is everyone's job, not just the art teachers. The way I demand my art music teachers; say listen, teachers are teaching multiplication tables in 3rd grade. You have to help teach that, you know, like so it's integrated. Yeah, everyone thought. Well, it is not just singular jobs. Everyone is kind of working towards the greater good. So, I would say leadership is a huge hurdle… county mandates. You know not having a Superintendent, that's... I mean, my Superintendent is supportive of what I do, you know, and gives me total free reign and permission. But you know, I have had superintendents in the past who say, you know, that your focus needs to be something else. I have to find ways to integrate it differently, so, leadership, time and money.

00:18:30 Speaker 1

Nicely put, how is the professional development from the A Plus Schools Program? How is that helpful?

00:18:38 Speaker 2

It is as big and little as you want. One of their foundation goals is to provide ongoing professional development. We do, you know, leadership training. They will provide, you know, on site like teacher training where you know they model the lesson and then break it down, they'll come in and work for 1/2 price staff development and a lower performing, like a rural school with not a lot of support financially, you know, a budget. They provide that at no cost to me. If I cannot provide that. So really, it's just as big or as little as I want. I mean I could have them in multiple times a year. I could have them in once a year and then they do summer training too. So the principal really kind of drives that as well, like I required my staff so they know they're showing up to three day training in the summer, whereas other principles say it's optional. And then you know it is what you get. But Michelle and her team are amazing. I mean, I can't speak enough about what they do with the little resources they have and what they're able to do.

Kind of mind blowing to me that they're still adding schools and supporting the network.

00:19:42 Speaker 1

Yes, I agree. I just wish it could be larger. I do, I do and I can't help but personally wonder what it would be like if they were able to support the schools more.

00:20:16 Speaker 2

And they do have liaisons, so I am in charge of four schools, not in charge of, but I'm a liaison for four schools that I provide a visit in the spring and a visit in the fall. You know any kind of work or help that they need, and I have a liaison for my school that I kind of reach out to if I need, in a kind of a direct support. So, I think there's like 15, maybe liaisons. There are 15 of us and we work with schools to make that network, you know, kind of come together, but you know it's… you know sometimes you'll have a liaison who's the music teacher. You have delays on who works at the school of you know, School of the arts in Winston. Or you have a liaison who

is a potter or something you know, like myself, I'm a principal, so I kind of view it from the principal's lens when I'm working with the principals, and I think that's helpful, but it varies in their expertise and their knowledge and their skill set. But liaisons have been really helpful just because you know Michelle can only do so much in her office, but liaisons can kind of be that... that voice that could bring it back to her to say, hey, this school is struggling in x, y or z here. And ask, how can we support or their needing support or vice versa?

00:21:24 Speaker 1

Very nice and I agree having someone that is a principal that supports it, and he sees how it's being run in their school and has been around it for years and years. I would want you to come visit my school. That is nice. But going back to your school, how do you maintain the integrity of arts integration? Is there any group that oversees lessons or meets to review implementation?

00:22:03 Speaker 2

So, we're smaller, so I kind of have to manage that... I do not have any curriculum support, so it's kind of, I have to manage that piece, but I build in quarterly planning days, I'll get a sub for the teachers and they work with the art music teacher, the PE teacher or the speech and language pathologist to kind of plan, and plan ahead. So hey, I am working on the Native Americans in 4th grade in October. Alright, let's start that planning process now for how we can integrate and push in. So, I do planning days because the time is huge and valuable and lacking. So, I do those integrated planning days. They used to submit weekly lesson plans to me, but I have not done that this year, just because I feel like we are at a place where we're managing that pretty well, but they know that I'm looking for an integrated approach. And if I don't see that, then they're going to hear back for me. I started last year, you know, two years ago, kind of like evidence based artifacts where, say for example they have like a sheet where if they teach math and science, for

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example, 4th and 5th, math science, it'll say math, math, math, science, science, science, and then you have to add in OK, math and art, math and dance, math and reading even how you're integrating the subjects and then you provide an artifact to show how you integrate it. So, we do those like 6 a year. So, it's like it's a checklist. That provides predictability. If it is not on your mind, then you forget and you get busy. So that's kind of how I manage that.

00:23:36 Speaker 1

Nice. Well, you have given me so much to think about and this has been such a great experience for me. I hope you didn't mind taking so long.

00:23:46 Speaker 2

No, and I am passionate about art, so I'll talk all day long about it. But I appreciate you calling in and hope I can give you any information you need.

00:23:54 Speaker 1

Thank you so much. I just have one more quick question then. Just yeah, OK. In broader terms, do you think arts integration is a good fit for every school or are there other reforms you have run into or you've heard about or know about that you think are successful in different contexts?

00:24:13 Speaker 2

To me arts integration is the game changer and the equalizer for all.

But it's kind of what helps save me in school, so I have a personal touch with it. You know it's probably...if I'd been on the football team and sports saved me from you know whatever, then I probably would say oh my gosh, they need this is. And I support my PE teacher in sports and love sports, you know, but it's kind of a personal thing for me so that's why I take it so personally. But that's kind of where I found my place in school so I think that is probably why I believe that and why you could probably have a hard time arguing with somebody who didn't

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have a great experience with it. You know, that is probably why I'm so passionate about it. But to me it is the equalizer.

00:25:06 Speaker 1

I would agree, maybe it just means we need to get everyone to have those experiences, and then they will just be on board.

00:25:13 Speaker 2

Exactly, exactly.

Speaker 1

Alright. Well, I don't know if I'll have any more questions, but I may be in touch with some!

00:25:26 Speaker 2

No problem!

00:25:31 Speaker 1

Thank you and thank you so much for your time.