



Arts-Based School Reform: Adaptations of the A+ Schools Program in Three Unique Contexts

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A+ Schools Program
of the North Carolina Arts Council



**NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF
CULTURAL
RESOURCES**

This report was conducted as part of an ongoing collaboration between the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in support of the A+ Schools Program of the North Carolina Arts Council.

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[Table of Contents]

Introduction	3
Bugg Elementary School: Creative Arts and Science Magnet	8
R. N. Harris Integrated Arts/Core Knowledge Magnet School	16
Saluda Elementary School	24
Discussion	31
Conclusion	36
Sources	36
Glossary	37

Executive Summary

Originating in North Carolina in 1995, the A+ Schools Program is a nationally-recognized, arts-based school reform movement. Over the past 18 years, the program has grown and adapted to a number of administrative changes as well as substantial changes in the educational landscape. Throughout these changes, the A+ Schools Program has maintained a central commitment to the A+ Essentials (arts, curriculum, multiple learning pathways, enriched assessment, experiential learning, collaboration, climate and infrastructure) and to accommodating local adaptations of the A+ philosophy by individual schools. An extensive program evaluation found the A+ Schools Program to be a successful arts-based school reform effort, in part because it is focused on the process of reforming schools through the arts rather than on creating a defined product or outcome. Instead, the A+ Schools Program focuses on “connecting people, providing a wide range of ideas, developing organizational capacity, trusting teachers to design appropriate curricula and instructional processes, attending to students, and ultimately valuing the arts.” (Noblit, pg. 164)

A+ schools in North Carolina represent the diversity of the state, with schools in all eight regions of the state; in urban, suburban and rural areas; in large, medium and small schools districts (Local Education Agencies) as well as independent charter schools. Almost all of the active schools in the A+ Schools Network are eligible for Title 1 funds. Because schools within the A+ Network exist in a range of diverse settings, each A+ school looks different and has developed unique programs and practices that reflect the A+ Essentials, serve the needs of the school population, and also meet both state and local requirements. The case study profiles are intended to highlight the unique adaptations of the A+ Essentials to local context, programs and practices.

In each of the schools highlighted, the arts and the A+ philosophy are central, yet the programs and practices are unique. The first school, Charles R. Bugg Creative Arts and Science Magnet Elementary, is an arts and science magnet school in a large city. At Bugg, the arts are framed within the context of multiple intelligences and a Student University that focuses on “arts, athletics and academics.” The second school, R.N. Harris Integrated Arts/Core Knowledge Magnet Elementary, is an arts magnet located in a mid-sized city. A dual magnet focus emphasizes the Core Knowledge curriculum, designed to develop cultural literacy, and integrated arts to make the rigorous content accessible. The third school, Saluda Elementary, is located within a small, remote community in the western mountains of North Carolina. The arts are framed within a context of individual creativity and child development.

Despite their differences, the schools have many commonalities. Each school is deeply committed to the A+ philosophy and to the arts, and all have been part of the A+ Schools Network for many years, with the majority of teachers receiving substantial professional development in the A+ philosophy. All of the schools are award-winning schools that have a record of success. They are familiar with the unique needs of their student population and adapt their practices to meet those needs. In addition, they consistently emphasize the importance of the arts and arts integration to help students access content and concepts in multiple ways, to engage and motivate students, and to help students develop unique strengths and talents.

A+ School Reform as a Process

The North Carolina A+ Schools Program, currently in the 18th year as a school reform movement, has maintained an active network of 40 schools, and is continuing to grow annually. It has gained a national presence through its expansion into the states of Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana, and the recent establishment of a National A+ Schools Consortium. An extensive program evaluation found the A+ Schools Program to be a successful arts-based school reform effort, in part because it is focused on the process of reforming schools through the arts, rather than on creating a defined product or outcome. The requirements for A+ schools are not uniform, and the

approach does not prescribe a specific curriculum, methodology or process of implementation. Instead, the A+ Schools Program focuses on “connecting people, providing a wide range of ideas, developing organizational capacity, trusting teachers to design appropriate curricula and instructional processes, attending to students, and ultimately valuing the arts.” (Noblit, pg. 164) The focus of the A+ reform efforts on process over product, shared leadership within the schools and the support of the A+ Network are design features that make the A+ schools resilient and sustainable. Because the approach is focused on process, the programs and practices at each A+ school are unique, yet all are built around and reflect the eight A+ Essentials:

- Arts
- Curriculum
- Multiple Intelligences/Multiple Learning Pathways
- Enriched Assessment
- Experiential Learning
- Collaboration
- Climate
- Infrastructure

For A+, the process has been more important than the product. It was the process that led schools to creatively adapt A+ to their context and to develop the organizational capacity to manage change. (Noblit, 2009, pg. 166)

A+ was value added in that it broadened the experiences of teachers and students and added linkages to parents, community, and a state-wide network that previously had not existed. It also added a vocabulary about learning that conceived of students’ academic strengths in more inclusive and diverse ways. Most significantly, A+ schools managed to broaden their curricula when other schools in North Carolina were narrowing them in response to high-stakes testing. Finally, A+ added value to lives of teachers and students by giving a richer, more imaginative, and more complete educational experience. (Noblit, 2009, pg. 181)

Expanded Definition of Success

Perhaps one of the most important findings of the A+ Schools Program evaluation was the expanded definition of success. Although the majority of the A+ schools were able to meet or exceed growth goals set by the state, the evaluators found that “academic achievement tests are too narrowly constructed to capture the fullness of what the arts and/or arts integration can offer a student.” (Noblit, 2009, pg. 180) The evaluators found that the A+ Schools Program approach added value to schools in many ways.

Changes in the Educational Landscape

Much has changed in the North Carolina educational landscape since the initial A+ pilot schools were selected in 1995. The A+ schools have continued to adapt and change to reflect current trends, while retaining the philosophy and Essentials of the A+ Schools Program. Initially a program of the Kenan Institute in 1995, the A+ Schools Program moved to UNC Greensboro in 2003, and finally to the North Carolina Arts Council in 2010, a move that included an administrative reorganization and a new director. At the state level, education has changed dramatically since the introduction of the initial pilot schools, beginning with a high-stakes accountability model in 1996 and most recently with the adoption of new standards in every subject, including the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics, and participation in a high-profile, competitive Race to the Top grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Increasingly, schools are asked to integrate media and technology into all aspects of the curriculum, something much less emphasized in the early years of the A+ Schools Program. With the most recent school reforms comes a revised NC Educator Evaluation System that reflects an expectation for integrating content, facilitating learning for different types of learners and placing a greater expectation for teachers to demonstrate student growth in all academic areas. A recent trend is toward schools of choice, which often include magnet programs, charter schools or special school and program focuses.

TIMELINE OF MAJOR EVENTS AND INFLUENCES ON THE NC A+ SCHOOLS PROGRAM

1995 – A+ Schools Program of the Kenan Institute begins five-year pilot study by implementing A+ practice and philosophy in 25 schools across North Carolina

1996 – NC introduces an accountability model with standardized testing and *Valuing A+: Assessing the First Year*; by Corbett, Wilson, Adkins and Noblit, is released

1998 – *A+ In Action: An Evaluation Report on the First Two Years of A+*; Corbett, Wilson, McKinney, Flores and Noblit, is released

1999 – *Moving Toward Comprehensive School Reform: A+ After Year 3*; Corbett, Wilson and Noblit, is released

2000 – *The Arts and Education Reform: Lessons from a Four-Year Evaluation of the A+ Schools Program*; Wilson, Corbett, and Noblit, is released

2001 – A+ Essentials Created by NC A+ Network

2002 – Oklahoma A+ Schools Network Initiated

2003 – A+ Schools Program moves to UNC Greensboro, Arkansas A+ Network initiated and NC Department of Public Instruction publishes an initial elementary version of the Balanced Curriculum, referencing the A+ Schools Program as a model for balanced education

2004 – Appalachian Arts Education Partnership Grant Awarded and National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Grant Awarded

2007 – The Dana Foundation Grant Awarded

2009 – *Creating and Sustaining Arts-Based School Reform: The A+ Schools Program* published by Noblit, et al., is published

2010 – A+ Schools Program moves to the North Carolina Arts Council and official partnership is formed between the A+ Schools Program and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

2010 – Senate Bill 66, *An Act to Provide a Comprehensive Arts Education Plan* created and NC receives a \$400 million Race to the Top Grant for educational reform

2011 – A+ Schools Program referenced in the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities report, *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America's Future Through Creative Schools*

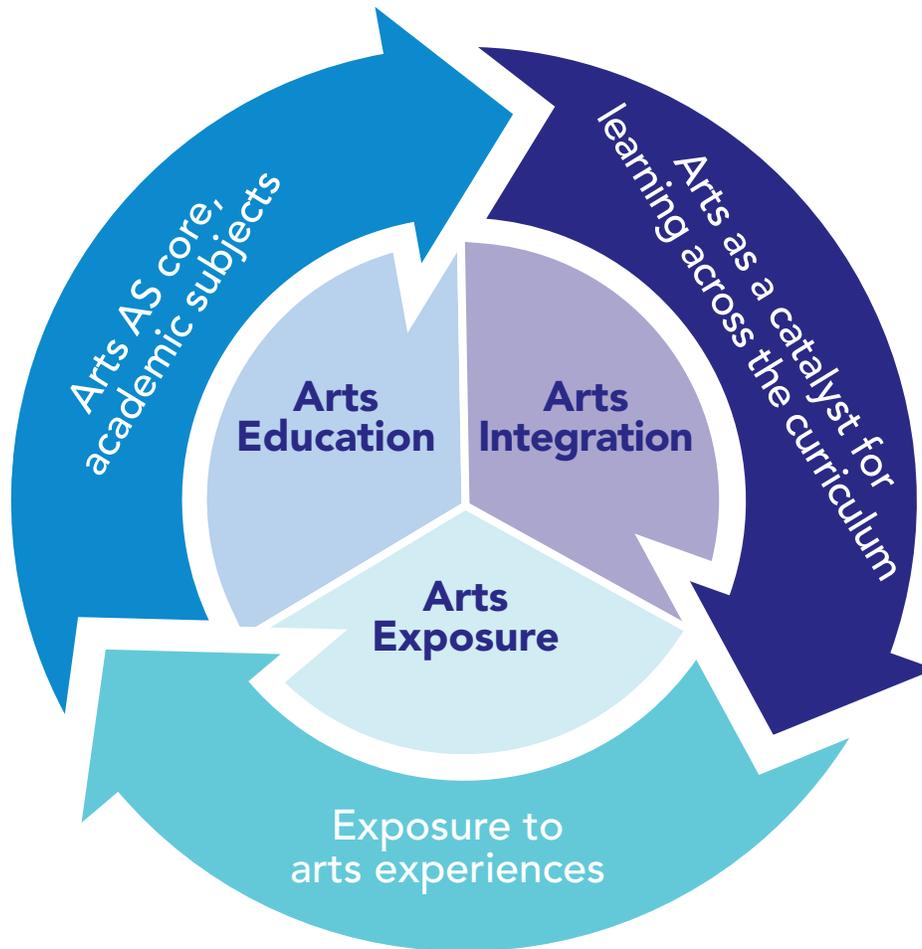
2012 – NC implements a revised *Standard Course of Study* with new standards in all subject areas

2013 – Louisiana A+ Schools Network Initiated and National A+ Schools Consortium re-formed to include leadership of four A+ states.

At both the state and national levels, there is increased focus on the benefits of the arts in education, and this discussion has increased the visibility of the A+ Schools Program. A+ has been mentioned in a number of state and national publications, including elementary and middle grades editions of *The Balanced Curriculum*, published by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2003, 2005) and *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America's Future Through Creative Schools*, published by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (2011). In 2009, lead evaluator George Noblit and his research team published *Creating and Sustaining Arts-Based School Reform: The A+ Schools Program*, which highlighted key findings of the program evaluation. In 2012, the Arts Education Partnership released artsedsearch.org, an online clearinghouse for research on education and the arts, which includes references to the original A+ Schools Program evaluation. Most recently, North Carolina Senate Bill 66 (2010) included language about expanding the A+ Schools Program as part of a statewide Comprehensive Arts Education Plan. In addition, both policy and legislation have brought recent attention to the need for professional development in arts integration (NC House Bill 758) and the preparation of pre-service elementary teachers to integrate the arts (NC Teacher Education Specialty Standards for Elementary Grades Teacher Candidates; NC Senate Bill 66; NC House Bill 758; NC Senate Bill 724).

Comprehensive Arts Education

The initial A+ Schools pilot study began roughly 10 years after the introduction of the Basic Education Program, which included the arts as part of a fundamentally complete program of education, but before North Carolina introduced an accountability model with standardized testing. During the initial stages of the A+ Program, the focus was primarily on bringing arts into the schools. With the introduction of high-stakes testing in North Carolina, schools began to emphasize the arts as a means of learning in other subjects. (Noblit, 2009, pg. 23) In 2010, North Carolina Senate Bill 66, An Act to Provide a Comprehensive Arts Education Plan, defined “comprehensive arts education” as one that included arts education, arts integration and arts exposure, providing an expanded framework for thinking about the role of the arts in schools. The A+ Schools Program has embraced the comprehensive arts education framework and emphasizes all three components within the A+ Network. Arts education refers to the arts as core, academic disciplines with sequential, standards-based instruction in dance, music, theater arts and visual arts. Arts exposure refers to authentic, real-world arts experiences and may occur through collaborative efforts with teaching artists, performing artists and various arts agencies. As articulated in Senate Bill 66, arts integration uses the arts as a “catalyst for learning across the curriculum.”



Case Study Schools

All three of the profiled schools have school-wide Title I programs, indicating that they serve large numbers of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. This is reflective of the A+ Network as a whole, in which 98% of the schools are eligible for Title I funds. All three schools are award-winning elementary schools and nationally recognized for their programs and practices, and all show high student achievement and/or high growth on the North Carolina end-of-grade tests. Each of the profiled schools has been affiliated with the A+ Schools Program since the earliest years and has remained active through each institutional change, as well as the range of state and local educational reform efforts. Each school has undergone changes since the introduction of the A+ Schools Program, including many staffing and program changes. Coincidentally, the principal at each of the profile schools was originally a teacher at the school and has remained a strong advocate for the A+ philosophy and provided continuity for the program. Each of the chosen schools has remained active in the A+ Network through ongoing professional development and participation in the network activities, and is considered by the A+ Schools Program Director to have a substantive A+ identity.

Despite the commonalities, each of the schools profiled have adapted the A+ philosophy to suit the unique student population and context in which they exist, including two magnet school programs that co-exist with the A+ philosophy. Because of these and other contextual differences, the arts and A+ programs and practices are different at each school, even though the arts and the A+ philosophy is central to the school identity.

Substantive A+ Identity:
“wherein most school staff considered the arts in making important decisions about school operation and made repeated attempts to integrate the arts into major subject instruction and to integrate the major subjects into arts instruction.”
(Noblit, 2009, pg. 88)

- **Bugg Creative Arts and Science Magnet Elementary School (Raleigh, NC)**

The first school, Bugg Elementary, is an arts and science magnet school in a large city. The school population of roughly 600 is 65% low-income, and 79% black/African American. At Bugg, the arts are framed within the context of Multiple Intelligences and a Student University that focuses on “arts, athletics and academics.”

- **R.N. Harris Integrated Arts/Core Knowledge Magnet School (Durham, NC)**

The second school, R.N. Harris Elementary, is an arts magnet located in a mid-sized city. The student population includes roughly 370 students with 82% low-income, 62% black/African American and 31% Hispanic. A dual magnet focus emphasizes the Core Knowledge curriculum designed to develop cultural literacy and integrated arts to make the rigorous content accessible.

- **Saluda Elementary School (Saluda, NC)**

The third school, Saluda Elementary, is located within a small, remote community in the western mountains of North Carolina. The student population of roughly 150 students is 56% low-income and 90% white. The arts are framed within a context of individual creativity and child development.

Methodology

The case study profiles that follow are intended to highlight the unique ways that each school has adapted the A+ philosophy to local needs and context, and to answer the following questions:

1. How is this school unique or distinctive in comparison to other schools?
2. How does the A+ philosophy manifest itself in the school programs and practices?
3. How has the A+ philosophy contributed to the success of students and the school in general?

Because the A+ Essentials are deeply interwoven within the programs and practices of each school, they also interwoven throughout the case study narratives, rather than addressed separately, emphasizing the organic nature of their role in the school. Comprehensive arts education is manifested through the A+ Essentials – arts, curriculum, multiple intelligences/multiple learning pathways, enriched assessment, experiential learning, collaboration, climate and infrastructure – in a variety of ways. For instance, the arts may be an important means to building a positive school climate and also developing curriculum that nurtures multiple learning pathways. In many cases, the arts foster collaboration between arts educators, classroom teachers, arts organizations, teaching artists, parents and the community at large.

Data for the case studies includes a combination of interviews, surveys, observations and information from state reports. A site visit to each school included observation of the school environment and focus group interviews with teachers, administrators, students and parents. Online surveys were sent to educators and parents at each school. Additional information about the schools was collected via an annual survey that is completed by the A+ Coordinator each year and state reports, including North Carolina state report cards, demographic information, Title I information and county profiles. Data was compiled and organized around the three research questions to create a case study profile for each of the selected schools.

Bugg Elementary School: Creative Arts and Science Magnet

Question 1: How is this school unique or distinctive in comparison to other schools?

- BUGG HIGHLIGHTS**
- Joined the A+ Schools Program: 1995
 - Location: Raleigh, NC
 - NCES Locale Characteristics City: Large
 - NC Dept of Commerce County Rank: Tier 3, Least Economically Distressed
 - Number of Students: 611
 - Number of Teachers: 60
 - Low Income Population: 65% – Free and Reduced Lunch
 - Major Demographic Groups: 76% – Black/African American
8% – Hispanic/Latino
8% – White
 - Magnet Focus: Creative Arts and Science
 - 2011-2012 NC Report Card: School of Progress; High Growth
 - Major Awards: Magnet Schools of America, Magnet School of Distinction (2008, 2012)
Magnet Schools of America, Magnet School of Excellence (2009, 2010)
Magnet Schools of America, Ronald P. Simpson Award (2004)

I feel like our school is committed to A+. I love seeing students who often have behavior issues in a regular classroom setting thrive when using their “body smarts.” I think that the essence of A+ is celebrating the differences in people. Those differences are not focused on socioeconomic status or intelligence; rather they focus on the differences in learning styles. No one is deemed stupid or unable to learn – instead they are celebrated for having different styles and challenged by other people’s styles.

– EDUCATOR, BUGG ELEMENTARY

LOCAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

Located in central North Carolina, the metropolitan area known as the Research Triangle (including Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill) has a population of roughly 1.8 million and is widely associated with higher education, technology and biotech research. Major research institutions include the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina State University in Raleigh, and Duke University in Durham. The Research Triangle Park (RTP) is home to high-tech employers such as DuPont Electronic Technologies, Cisco, Fidelity Investments, GlaxoSmithKline and IBM Corporation. Wake County is a large, urban area with a relatively wealthy and highly-educated population. The county has a population of over 900,000, with 86% of the population reported to live in an urbanized area. Raleigh, the largest city in Wake County, has an estimated population of over 400,000 and is classified by the National Center for Educational Statistics as “City: Large.” The North Carolina Department of Commerce ranks Wake County as a “Tier 3” county, indicating it is one of the 20 least economically distressed in the state, with an estimated median family income of \$81,461. Roughly 9.7% of the population is estimated with income below the poverty level. (North Carolina Department of Commerce, 2013)

Raleigh is cited on a number of top 10 lists as one of the most highly educated cities in the United States. (*Brookings Institute*, 2008; *US News*, 2011) Eight institutions of higher learning, ranging from North Carolina State University, a major research university, to a community college system, can be found within Wake County alone. Raleigh, the county seat and the capital of North Carolina, is home to a wide range of state, community, corporate and non-profit organizations, including the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources and its related agencies, which include the North Carolina Arts Council, North Carolina Museum of Art, North Carolina Symphony, the State Library of North Carolina, North Carolina Museum of History and other state and local resources, such as Carolina Ballet, the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences and a host of other museums, performing arts venues, arts organizations and cultural resources. The United Arts Council of Wake County provides a number of grants each year to support various arts education and community programs, including an “Arts Integration Institute” affiliated with the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts that provides professional development for teachers, and an “Artists in the Schools Program” that places professional artists in Wake County schools.

SCHOOL AND DISTRICT CONTEXT

The Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) is the largest school system in North Carolina and the 16th largest in the United States, with approximately 150,000 students. The district is almost 50% white, with sizable minority populations of black/African American (24.4%), Hispanic/Latino (15.5%) and Asian (6.5%). The school system has a number of innovative school programs, including two early college schools and an extensive magnet school program with 32 schools. Bugg Elementary is located in suburban southeastern Raleigh, NC, a historically lower-performing and/or high-poverty area of the county. Bugg became a classical studies magnet school in 1982 when WCPSS initiated a magnet program to support voluntary desegregation and to break up large concentrations of poverty. In 1995, when the school joined the A+ Schools Network, it also changed its magnet focus to creative arts and science in an effort to draw more students. At the time, Wake County viewed A+ as an inseparable piece of the creative arts magnet program. Bugg has continued to evolve and develop as both a magnet school and an A+ school, and has been honored five times by the Magnet Schools of America (2004, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012). Of the 104 elementary schools in the WCPSS, Bugg has the 14th highest percentage of students (63%) qualifying for free and reduced lunch, compared to the WCPSS average of 35.9%. In contrast to WCPSS which is almost 50% white, Bugg Elementary is roughly 8% white, 8% Hispanic/Latino, and 76% black/African American. Bugg has embraced the population it serves, and a school vision to “end generational poverty” is clearly posted throughout the school.

Bugg was one of the original 25 North Carolina A+ pilot schools and has remained actively involved in the A+ Network. Although there have been many staffing changes since Bugg began the A+ Program in 1995, the staff has been continuously involved in A+ professional development, and a quarter of teachers reported they have attended a full five-day institute, the typical starting place for A+ schools. Virtually all of the teachers have received professional development in the A+ philosophy, and the majority (65%) felt that they have attended enough professional development to implement A+ practices. There are four A+ schools within the WCPSS, including three elementary schools with a creative arts and science magnet program and a middle school with an international baccalaureate magnet program. Bugg was the first of the four Wake County A+ schools to join the A+ Network, but as other schools within the county were added, they have created their own mini-network of support. Principals and A+ Coordinators meet and collaborate on a regular basis, and the schools often hold their annual A+ professional development together.

Question 2: How does the A+ philosophy manifest itself in the school programs and practices?

SCHOOL CULTURE

The principal, Michael Armstrong, has a 12-year history at Bugg, working both as a 4th grade teacher and a drama teacher. Following a brief intermission at another school, Mr. Armstrong returned to Bugg as principal. His passion for the school, the magnet program, the student population and the A+ philosophy is clear. Although he has served as principal for only two years, his history at the school and with A+ in many roles has allowed him to refine and reinvent A+ within the context of the school. During his short time as principal, Mr. Armstrong has introduced a number of new and innovative programs to Bugg, including a monthly series of events called Family University, an afterschool program called Student University, a laptop initiative and some creative scheduling to allow for collaborative arts teaching. With a large faculty of roughly 50 teachers, a student population of approximately 600, a new principal and many new initiatives, communication is a priority. In response, the administrative team has created an online resource as part of the school infrastructure for faculty to streamline information and document policies, expectations and institutional traditions that have not been previously documented.

It's not how smart we are, but how we are smart.
– QUOTE IN THE ENTRANCE AT BUGG ELEMENTARY

Multiple intelligences play a significant role in the philosophy, programs and practices of Bugg and is a dominant theme throughout the school. The Bugg mission – “to empower all learners to creatively explore their smarts” – is clearly posted throughout the school, and a large mural outside the main office emphasizes Howard Gardener’s eight intelligences, referred to as “smarts”: visual-spatial (art smart); musical-rhythmic (music smart); interpersonal (people smart); intrapersonal (self smart), bodily-kinesthetic (body smart), verbal-linguistic (word smart), logical-mathematical (math smart) and naturalistic (nature smart). Curriculum development is carefully planned with multiple intelligences in mind, but the students are also made aware of many kinds of intelligence and have a variety of opportunities to explore the various “smarts.” On every hallway, displays and bulletin boards emphasize the application of these smarts in various ways – student graphs indicating personal profiles of the various intelligences, pictures of students engaged in activities using various intelligences, student work demonstrating the application of different types of smarts, short explanations of the various intelligences, and pictures of famous people that exemplify types of intelligence. One bulletin board displays pictures of teachers from the MI (multiple intelligences) team using their various smarts on the job. An extensive array of arts electives are available to students through the afterschool program, such as African drumming, chorus,

violin, Metamorphid (historical and cultural dances), step team and drama, as well as athletic electives like ball handling, jump roping, cup stacking, tennis, golf and a gardening club. The trophy display in the front hall proudly displays awards earned by the step team and the Bugg Ball Handlers, as well as a group of dancers selected to perform in the county-wide Pieces of Gold arts showcase.

Bugg Elementary's Vision:
To end generational poverty

SCHOOL-WIDE PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

Because many students at Bugg will be first generation college students, the school has embraced a mission not only to prepare students academically for college, but also to help them envision a future that includes college. The Bugg vision – “to end generational poverty” – is posted throughout the school. A bulletin board in the central hallway displays photos of Bugg Elementary alumni and college graduates and prominently features the quote “When I get to college, I will exponentially multiply my choices.” Beginning in kindergarten, signs outside each classroom indicate the year students are expected to graduate from college. College students from surrounding universities are involved as volunteers and interns throughout the year. Recently, the school hosted a College Bound Day intended to encourage students to set goals for college and careers, with the arts continually reinforced as both a career choice and as a hobby. All the students in the school rotated through various stations focused on arts, athletics and academics, and more than 300 college students from North Carolina State University, Shaw University and St. Augustine’s College volunteered at the event to tell students about their own college experiences and to help them fill out mock college applications.

The college emphasis is extended through the use of the terms Student University and Family University to describe other major initiatives in the school. The Student University afterschool program is partially funded by a federal grant with scholarships available for students that cannot afford the supplemental expenses. Student University includes mandatory academic programs as well as electives in arts and athletics that allow students to explore interests and develop talents. Some electives, like step team and ball handling, are familiar and have wide appeal within the community, while others, like golf and violin, are included to help expand the horizons of students to activities beyond their daily experiences. Many teachers from the school, including the arts, science and physical education teachers, teach in the Student University, and a number of outside teachers and community partners like Raleigh Little Theatre are involved as well.

The Family University hosts monthly events aimed at educating families and helping them become involved in the academic success of students. The needs of low-income families are accommodated by providing food, childcare and in some instances, transportation, in hopes of increasing attendance. Student performances and informances are an important part of Family University, including a large, end-of-year performance at the Time Warner Cable Music Pavilion at Walnut Creek. Book discussions and speakers are hosted on a variety of topics including parent involvement, curriculum, mental and physical health, financial assistance, etc. When motivational speaker Mychal Wynn was featured, the school administrators and staff served over 600 people in the cafeteria by catering dinner for families. A translator was provided for the event, and a copy of Mychal Wynn’s book was provided for every family. District funds were used to support the guest speaker, and collaboration with volunteers and community partners played a role in providing food and childcare. A separate Family Connections bulletin board provides information for parents, including Parent Academy educational offerings and resources for child care, free tax preparation, counseling services, services for the homeless, affordable housing, food and clothing pantries, and a host of other social services.

Involving parents in the schooling of their children is essential to the process of nurturing the academic, social, cultural, and humanistic development of young people. Sharing with parents strategies and ideas on how to have such meaningful involvement in the lives of their offspring most frequently occurs through our local schools

– MYCHAL WYNN, EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT AND MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER

The use of technology is quite visible at Bugg, reflecting the focus of the Wake County Public School System, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the region at large. All the classrooms in Wake County are connected to the Internet, a fact that is highlighted on the NC School Report Card issued by the state. Each classroom at Bugg includes a SMART Board for use in daily instruction, and technology integration is an important part of the curriculum. The school has a full-time technology teacher that instructs each class one time per week, as well as collaborating with classroom teachers on a regular basis to integrate technology. In addition, a 21st century coach is contracted to provide ongoing and specialized support with technology and various classroom applications. Relatively new is an iPad initiative that provides an iPad for each 4th grade student to use throughout the day in many subjects. Teachers are able to post assignments so that students can easily reference them, and students are able to complete assignments using a variety of apps, including a few that allow drawing and other creative representations. The vision for the iPad project includes one-to-one iPads for each student in 2nd through 5th grades, and eight iPads in each kindergarten and 1st grade classroom.

We are a work in progress – always exploring new avenues to enrich our students’ educational experiences. A+ offers that support. New and veteran teachers encourage themselves and their students to connect, to celebrate and create. We are all pieces of this and past and future years masterpieces! Love the image of this year...from a blank canvas – to a masterpiece. Love the process!
– EDUCATOR, BUGG ELEMENTARY

THE ARTS AT BUGG

As a creative arts and science magnet, students have weekly access to arts education in all four art forms – dance, music, theater arts and visual arts – as well as an elementary science specialist with a science lab, and a host of special programming not typically offered in non-magnet schools. The afterschool program has a focus that includes the arts and also offers electives in a wide variety of topics. With a large student population of roughly 600 students, the school is organized with five classes at most grade levels and an MI team of eight teachers working in specialized content areas. The infrastructure for the arts programming is adapted to the large size of the school. The grouping of the arts education teachers within a larger team of multiple intelligence teachers is a unique, but important, part of the arts at Bugg. The MI team includes the four arts education teachers – dance, music, theater arts and visual arts – as well as teachers in physical education, technology, media/library services and science. The larger than average number of teachers on the MI team allows for a creative double-block schedule that designates time for traditional arts education, as well as arts-integrated instruction. Four days per week, students attend two of the eight MI classes for 45 minutes each. On the fifth day, each class has a 90-minute block of time referred to as Gray Matter, designed to allow the classroom teachers to collaborate with one or more members of the MI team.

CURRICULUM SNAPSHOT

Arts-integrated units for the Gray Matter block are typically planned in nine-week blocks around enrichment themes chosen by teachers and connected to the grade level standards. The team typically has a structured planning time to outline units for each quarter. One unit, team-taught by a 3rd grade teacher, the music teacher and the visual arts teacher, was based on Prokofiev’s musical symphony *Peter and the Wolf*. It included study of the folk tale and related language concepts, study of the composition, including historical and background information, as well as musical elements such as contour, tempo, dynamics and rhythm. Throughout the study of *Peter and the Wolf*, the students painted listening maps of the various elements onto clear overlays that were later layered to create a painting based on the orchestral work, in the style of visual artist Kandinsky, known for works based on music. A 4th grade integrated unit was planned between the classroom teacher, the visual arts teacher, the dance teacher and the P.E. teacher around the topic of George Bellows and boxing. In addition

to studying the boxing paintings of George Bellows throughout the unit, students studied a variety of boxing moves in P.E., choreographed the movements into dance, and created sculptures depicting the human form in various boxing poses. A collaboration between the theater arts teacher and a 4th grade teacher included adapting a book into a play.

Our school fosters a community that values the arts and allows team planning and the partnering with local artists.

– EDUCATOR, BUGG ELEMENTARY

Arts exposure is a regular part of the programming and includes artist residencies and arts-based field trips funded through grants written by the magnet coordinator. The hallways and media center are filled with works of art created by students working with artists in years past, including a wire sculpture, a paper tree, a Rainbow Fish sculpture made of recycled materials, and a quilt. Bugg has been fortunate to have the same magnet coordinator for several years, and each year she refines the process slightly to deepen the learning experience. The theme for the 2012-2013 school year was *From a Blank Page to a Masterpiece*. Six different teaching artists were commissioned to work with a different grade level for a week, and schedules were arranged so that the MI teachers were able to collaborate with teaching artists chosen to correspond with the various intelligences. Teaching artists included a Kennedy Center teaching artist (puppeteer, Hobe Ford), two A+ Fellows (drummer, Beverly Botsford and writer, Mimi Herman), and three artists from local arts organizations (Even Exchange Dance Theater, Burning Coal Theatre and the Drum Exchange). The residencies culminated in an event called Evening with the Stars, which was combined with the science fair, allowing parents an opportunity to attend and see the students showcase their work with the teaching artists.

This year's show was "From a Blank Canvas to a Masterpiece." Students shared what they had learned during the school's Artist in Residence week this year. They performed an original interpretation of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer's Night Dream," used tangrams to reenact folktales and created global awareness through the beauty and meaning of story of the Malinke (MA-LEN-KAY) people of western Africa as students performed on the Djembe (GEM-BAY) drums. — Wake County Public Schools Press Release, March 28, 2012

An annual end-of-year performance is held at Time Warner Cable Walnut Creek Pavilion, allowing every child an opportunity to perform in a large venue and to share their learning through the arts. Past performances have included African drumming, artists in residence and informances based on curriculum themes like the weather cycle and the cycle of the butterfly. Field trips expose students to a wide variety of cultural resources including the arts, such as trips to the NC Museum of Art, the Nutcracker ballet, Raleigh Little Theatre and the NC Symphony, as well as visits to coastal Wilmington, Grandfather Mountain, the NC Zoo, Marbles Kids Museum and a local pumpkin patch. The field trips have been coordinated so that all grade levels participate on the same day and all teachers, including the MI team, can attend. Fall field trips are typically science-oriented and spring field trips are arts-oriented, related to the magnet theme.

CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Student engagement is very important at Bugg, and to encourage this practice, the administrative team has developed a checklist for walk-through observations that documents the level of student engagement. A graph is posted in the faculty meeting room to document percentages of engagement throughout each quarter. Student engagement, multiple intelligences and arts integration are an important part of the daily classroom practices at Bugg. Just as multiple intelligences are an obvious theme throughout the hallways of the school, they appear in the curricular choices teachers make. For instance, one class read informational text about George Washington Carver and identified his types of intelligence. The dance teacher uses the "Brain Dance" as a daily warm-up and a way to engage many types of intelligence. In general, the teachers understand the

significance of multiple learning pathways and make efforts to plan with this in mind. For instance, one teacher mentioned project-based learning that incorporates arts and multiple intelligences with technology and science. Others use the arts in literacy centers, poetry units, and math units to enrich daily instruction.

I am always thinking about how I can add the arts; a lesson doesn't feel complete without it.

– EDUCATOR, BUGG ELEMENTARY

The vast majority of teachers reported using the arts in curriculum planning on a regular basis. The greatest percentage of teachers expressed confidence in incorporating visual arts into instruction, and this was evident in a wide variety of practices. For instance, in language arts, students wrote mysteries based on a painting, made predictions based on the illustrations in a story, used art to explain favorite books, and used Google Art Project to understand personification and poetry. In math, paintings by Kandinsky were the inspiration for a unit on shape and numbers. Visual art appeared in social studies and science through drawings in journals and a variety of projects including landforms and a study of famous African Americans. The majority of teachers also reported a confidence level in music and incorporated it into classroom practices on a daily basis. As one teacher noted, “we incorporate music frequently in daily lessons because most of my students are music smart.” Flocabulary, an educational hip-hop website, is popular among the faculty at Bugg and includes a number of songs and videos that teach concepts from all subjects. Singing is a regular part of many classrooms, and instruments are used in a number of ways, such as using instruments to translate rhymes and syllables, creating rhythms on instruments to represent parts of a story, and drumming to represent fractional parts.

As the dance educator, I integrate the arts and other academics throughout every lesson.

Dance is based upon literacy connections, math connections, science connections; and historical dance is living social studies. There is no lesson that I share that does not integrate.

– EDUCATOR, BUGG ELEMENTARY

Theater arts is incorporated in many ways, including the use of puppets, storytelling and reader's theater in daily instruction. Other classrooms use creative drama for telling, retelling and acting out stories, as well as for creating distinct character voices for dramatic reading. One class explored the story elements by creating characters with puppets and settings with paint to retell and write events in the story. Yet another class used the skills of reading fluency and character voices to audition for a class play. Although the teachers as a whole reported feeling the least confident with dance, the majority still indicated using it in classroom instruction. In a language arts lesson, dance was integrated by reading a book about ballet as an art form and exploring it through movement. Creative dance and movement was incorporated in a math unit by creating body shapes, using movement to represent math facts and identifying angles in body designs. In a science unit, students represented the water cycle through dance, using various pathways, levels and tempos to demonstrate their understanding of rivers, streams, precipitation and condensation.

Question 3: How has the A+ philosophy contributed to the success of students and the school in general?

TRADITIONAL MEASURES OF SUCCESS

By many measures, Bugg is a successful school. It was recognized by the Magnet Schools of America in 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2012 as an excellent creative arts and science magnet. In addition to the magnet program, Bugg offers an amazing array of programming, and one could safely assume that students at Bugg are offered a broad, varied and rich curriculum that extends beyond the current focus on standardized testing in math, language arts and science. For five years in a row, beginning in 2007, Bugg has met the growth goals established by the state, and four of those five years, Bugg has been a school of "high growth." In 2011-2012, Bugg achieved a status of a school of progress with high growth as determined by the NC Department of Public Instruction's accountability model. The school as a whole met 85% of the annual measureable objectives, and the overall math scores exceeded the state average, with 83.8% of students performing at grade level. Data collection plays a significant role in the school. For each grade level, quarterly pre- and post-benchmarks for literacy and math are given and results are posted in the workroom. These results play a central role in responsiveness to instruction, and student groupings and curriculum are adjusted regularly to help meet student growth goals by the end of the year. Yet, despite the strong focus on academic achievement in tested areas, the principal remains committed to and most proud of the arts programs.

Our test scores go up by pouring on the arts. We doubled the specials last year and our scores went up 14% with the most growth in math and science.
– PRINCIPAL, BUGG ELEMENTARY

Allowing students to rotate through our eight specials allows students and parents the opportunity to find and nurture their gifts and strengths that may lie outside the regular classroom. These gifts can lead to scholarships and jobs in the future.

– EDUCATOR, BUGG ELEMENTARY

EXPANDED MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Reflective of the original A+ findings, responses from Bugg teachers indicate many benefits of the A+ model for students that reach beyond the scope of academic achievement. Developing individual strengths and intelligences is a clear benefit reported by both the parents and the teachers. Having an MI team is considered an important benefit for students, particularly because students have the opportunity to explore and nurture many types of gifts and strengths that might not otherwise be developed in a traditional classroom. The students look forward to the programs and take pride in special programs like the step team. In addition to arts skills and talents, critical job skills like listening and speaking, as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence are developed through programs like the theater arts class. Individual students have the opportunity to thrive in areas of strength, as well as to grow in less comfortable areas. Students know and value their "smarts" and are able to express themselves in various ways. In turn, this valuing of their unique abilities teaches confidence. A Bugg teacher stated, "I have seen students who at the beginning of the year would not speak in front of the class, and now they are singing and dancing in front of the whole grade level."

A+ motivates the reluctant learners to participate in skill-based learning in a way that heightens understanding.

– EDUCATOR, BUGG ELEMENTARY

Multiple learning pathways and teaching to a variety of learning styles is a clear theme among the benefits of A+ for students as reported by teachers. Teachers consistently commented that "the A+ philosophy allows all learners to experience learning in a way which lends itself to the best learning and retention possible." Students and teachers are aware that everyone learns in a different way, and the school fosters this as a positive

difference. Teachers repeatedly referred to the different ways in which students learn – visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic learning – as well as learning through “different smarts” and hands-on activities. Particularly for children with special needs, the arts are considered a way to differentiate instruction for students of differing abilities. For the student body as a whole, teachers believe that learning new concepts through the arts helps children succeed, and that “students are using deeper knowledge to help with EOG testing and questions.” Student engagement, enjoyment and interest in learning were mentioned as significant benefits of using the A+ philosophy throughout the school. A teacher commented that “movement and hands-on art experiences keep our children excited and engaged throughout the day.” Another commented that her class was made of “below-benchmark students” that struggle academically, and A+ plays a significant role in motivating children to learn and to take ownership in their work. Most of all, students love to learn through the arts

SUMMARY

In summary, Bugg is a long-standing A+ school and also has an award winning creative arts and science magnet program. The school is unique in that it serves a dominantly low-income, high-minority population, yet it is located within a wealthy and highly educated region. The school has access to many types of collaboration with higher education, arts organizations and corporations; as well as significant resources within the large county school system. The A+ Essentials are well-integrated into the programs and practices, including many kinds of collaborations between university, community and local arts partners. At Bugg, the arts are framed within the context of multiple intelligences and the school-wide theme of “arts, athletics and academics.” There is a significant focus on allowing students to develop interests in the arts as both hobbies and careers. The Student and Family Universities play a significant role in expanding the programs and practices beyond the school day. In addition, the comprehensive arts education is strong at Bugg, including arts education in all four art forms, an expanded MI team, a “Gray Matter” team-teaching block specifically for arts integration and a wide variety of daily A+ practices. The benefits of A+ are varied, but educators emphasize the importance developing strengths and talents in students, and also to allow them to learn content in a variety of ways.

R.N. Harris Integrated Arts/Core Knowledge Magnet School

Question 1: How is this school unique or distinctive in comparison to other schools?

R.N. HARRIS HIGHLIGHTS

- Joined the A+ Schools Program: 1997
- Location: Durham, NC
- NCES Locale Characteristics City: Midsize
- NC Dept of Commerce County Rank: Tier 3, Least Economically Distressed
- Number of Students: 374
- Number of Teachers: 30
- Low Income Population: 82% – Free and Reduced Lunch
- Major Demographic Groups: 62% – Black/African American
- 31% – Hispanic/Latino
- Magnet Focus: Integrated Arts/Core Knowledge
- 2011-2012 NC Report Card: School of Distinction; High Growth
- Major Awards: National Excellence in Urban Education Award (2012)

LOCAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

Like Wake County, Durham County is located in the Research Triangle (including Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill) and has access to the wide variety of institutions of higher education and high tech corporations. Durham County is a midsize, urban area with a relatively wealthy and highly-educated population. The county has a population of roughly 272,000, with 92% of the residents living in the city of Durham. The North Carolina Department of Commerce ranks Durham County as a “Tier 3” county, indicating it is one of the 20 least economically distressed in the state, with an estimated median family income of \$62,890. Roughly 16% of the population is estimated with income below the poverty level. (North Carolina Department of Commerce, 2013) Despite a large pocket of poverty, 86% of Durham residents are high school graduates, and 44% hold at least a bachelor’s degree. The Durham-Chapel Hill region was also ranked as the fourth most educated metropolitan area in the United States. (US News, 2011) Durham is home to Duke University, a prestigious private research institution; North Carolina Central University, the nation’s first state-supported liberal arts college for African Americans; Durham Technical and Community College; and the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, a selective residential high school/college that is part of the University of North Carolina system. Durham also includes a number of cultural resources such as the Durham Performing Arts Center, the Nasher Museum of Art, the Museum of Life and Science and several of smaller performing arts venues.

SCHOOL AND DISTRICT CONTEXT

The Durham Public School System is the seventh largest school system in North Carolina, with approximately 33,000 students. The district is roughly 50% African American, with sizable populations of Hispanic/Latino (24%) and white (19%). The school system has an extensive magnet school program with 23 schools. R.N. Harris Integrated Arts/Core Knowledge Magnet School is located in central Durham, NC, roughly one mile from NC Central University, the first state-supported historically black college/university, and named after Rencher Nicholas Harris, a prominent African American business and civic leader. Lottery preferences for attendance are given to students within the walk zone of the school, including a large representation from McDougald Terrace, the largest public housing community in Durham. The school has become increasingly popular, and magnet applications have tripled, including those from the ESL (English as a Second Language) Center. The student population at R.N. Harris has higher percentages of low-income and minority students than the district averages with roughly 62% African American compared to the district average of 51%; 31% Hispanic/Latino compared to the district average of 22%; and 82% of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, compared to the district average of 62%. At one time, there were two other A+ schools in the district, including a dominantly white, suburban elementary school, and a 6th through 12th grade arts magnet, both of which have become inactive in the A+ Network. R.N. Harris was the recipient of the 2012 National Excellence in Urban Education Award.

R.N. Harris was initially a Learning to Read through the Arts school, affiliated with the New York Guggenheim Museum. By joining the A+ Schools Network in 1997, the school was able to shift the focus to integrating the arts across all subjects. With a dual magnet focus of Integrated Arts/Core Knowledge, A+ is closely equated with integrated arts. R.N. Harris has a remarkably stable teacher population, with only 5% turn-over, compared to the state average of 12% and the district average of 16%. One-third of the teachers have been at the school for more than 10 years, and two teachers retired from education after 30 years and returned to teach at R.N. Harris. The principal estimates that roughly 30% of the children in the school have parents that also attended the school, and the teachers are beginning to teach the children of former students. All teachers have attended some A+ professional development over the years, and the majority agreed (86%) that they had received enough professional development to understand and implement the A+ philosophy.

Question 2: How does the A+ philosophy manifest itself in the school programs and practices?

SCHOOL CULTURE

The principal, Carolyn Pugh, has been at R.N. Harris for over 30 years, including 25 years as a teacher. The arts are personally important to her and shape her commitment to keeping the school focus on the arts. Her mother was a music teacher and received a master's degree from Columbia University in New York. She spent several summers as a child in New York and grew to love the arts, having fond memories of her first silent movie and several works of art. She had many years of music lessons, and the arts were an important part of her upbringing, which she credits for her passion for the arts. In her words, "I can't imagine teaching any lesson without putting the arts in. Without the arts, it's boring." This commitment to the arts filters into the decisions made for the school and into the related infrastructure. She is creative with budgeting and financing, juggling many sources of funds to prioritize the arts teachers and maintain the Core Knowledge library. This has included advocacy within the district for the magnet program funds, and even in keeping the current name of the school and magnet focus – R.N. Harris Integrated Arts/Core Knowledge Magnet School. The dual emphasis of the magnet is an important design feature and part of the school identity.

The climate at R.N. Harris has a strong sense of community within the staff in general and also the community at large. Many parents attended R.N. Harris as students and applied for entry into the magnet program because they feel connected to the principal, the school and the community. The principal refers to the children as her "babies," and occasionally a child will refer to her as "auntie" or "grandma," knowing she taught their parents. There is a core group of teachers that have been at the school for more than a decade, and two teachers have retired after 30 years and returned to work after a six month break. A common theme among the teachers is the feeling of being trusted and respected as professionals, and being involved in the decision making at the school. They mentioned trusting the principal because she has been there for a long time, is deeply familiar with both integrated arts and Core Knowledge curriculum, and was a teacher, a lead teacher and an assistant principal before becoming principal. They know she has been in the trenches, and they trust what she says. The principal explains that although her staff may disagree, everyone has a voice and the teachers have bought into the vision for curriculum and the arts. She encourages them to problem solve and come to her with solutions rather than problems. To build morale, the school has adopted a school-wide theme song from the movie *High School Musical* called *Push It*. The dance teacher choreographed a routine to the song and taught it to all of the children and the teachers in the school, surprising the principal with a flash mob performance in the school gym. The song is played with the morning announcements to set the tone for the day, and it is not uncommon to see children dancing and moving in the room. Every child in the school knows the lyrics and the choreography to the school song.

SCHOOL-WIDE PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

As reflected in the title of the school – R.N. Harris Integrated Arts/Core Knowledge Magnet School – the Core Knowledge curriculum is an important feature of the magnet program and provides the structure for the entire school. Core Knowledge is an integrated, cultural literacy program founded by E.D. Hirsch, Jr., based on the principle of building a rich knowledge base in language arts and literature, history and geography, mathematics, science, music and the visual arts. It is based on the premise that knowledge builds knowledge, and the more you know, the more you are able to learn. The principal spoke openly about the importance of the Core Knowledge curriculum in leveling the playing field for students that do not come

from privileged or elite home environments that include travel and extensive cultural exposure, by exposing them extensively to culture. This sentiment is reflected in a statement on the Core Knowledge website:

Our society cannot afford a two-tiered system in which the affluent have access to a superior education, while everyone else is subjected to a dull and incoherent classroom experience. Academic excellence, educational equity and fairness demand a strong foundation of knowledge for all learners.

– E. D. HIRSCH, JR., FOUNDER, CORE KNOWLEDGE FOUNDATION

The organization of the curriculum around the Core Knowledge materials is an integral part of the practices at R.N. Harris, and the use of this established framework and resources has been a grounding piece for the faculty. They describe the content as rich and deep with a heavy emphasis on science, history, literature and the arts. A teacher explained that the arts are a part of history and the highest level of expression for human beings, and they are related to all the other subjects. For instance, the Impressionists couldn't have existed without the scientific discovery of light, and modern painting techniques couldn't have existed without the discovery of paints. The arts are history as well, and much of social studies can be told through paintings and artwork. The integrated units are carefully spiraled over the grade levels and organized around themes such as Western Expansion, Civil Rights, Ancient Greece, Ancient Africa, Feudal Japan, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The curriculum is rigorous, relevant and focused on helping students see the larger picture of how the pieces fit together. For instance, a study of the Renaissance includes music, games, dance and drawing as well as history, science, language and math. The big picture or broader theme ties the ideas together and teachers operate under the assumption that learning is fascinating and children have a desire to learn. Because the content is rigorous, the principal explains the importance of using stories to help the students connect with the material, such as introducing the artists of the Renaissance through the names of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles – Leonardo, Michelangelo, Donatello and Raphael. Field trips are an important part of the extended learning experience and are chosen based on the connection to the Core Knowledge curriculum – the Nasher Museum, a Native American festival, Medieval Times, High Point Renaissance Festival and the Phantom of the Opera.

Building a strong foundation of knowledge across many disciplines is the critical piece of the Core Knowledge curriculum. One

teacher explained that it is much deeper

than the stereotypical elementary curriculum of apples, fall or leaves. For instance, a 5th grade student researched Duke Ellington as part of a unit on famous African Americans and shared his work through a PowerPoint presentation to the class, including interesting historical information, photographs and video clips of music. The principal further explained that the state standards are somewhat generic, such as "identify contributions of historical figures." The Core Knowledge curriculum is specific and includes literature, music and other resources to help teachers see exactly what to teach in social studies and how to make connections. Without the Core Knowledge structure, students might study Martin Luther King, Jr. every year and not be exposed to a wider variety of historians, scientists, artists, musicians, etc. A parent described her experiences with curriculum in other schools as being more random and disconnected, with topics based on teacher and/or student interest, but often not building on each other from year to year. With the Core Knowledge curriculum, themes or topics are carefully spiraled to repeat at other grade levels, but with more depth rather than repetition of materials. For instance, kindergarteners study the continents, 2nd graders study China, and 4th graders study Chinese Dynasties. The Core Knowledge curriculum provides a foundation of carefully sequenced and spiraled content that builds toward cultural literacy.

Knowledge does for the brain what exercise does for the body.

– PRINCIPAL, R.N. HARRIS ELEMENTARY

Core Knowledge is such a rich curriculum, A+ allows us to marry the arts with this curriculum to make it kid-friendly so that students can learn and enjoy such a wealth of information daily!

– EDUCATOR, R.N. HARRIS ELEMENTARY

The students in our school not only get to do art when they go to specials, but music, dance and art are incorporated throughout the entire day.

– EDUCATOR, R.N. HARRIS ELEMENTARY

“A+ brings Core Knowledge to life!” Teachers explain that the structure of the integrated curriculum is naturally engaging and allows students to access concepts in different ways. One teacher explained that Core Knowledge is the content and curriculum – it provides background knowledge that is

beyond the Standard Course of Study and, to some extent, Common Core State Standards. Common Core is the WHAT of teaching and arts integration is the HOW of teaching: content vs. process. A+ is a natural complement to Core Knowledge, and the A+ strategies, including arts integration, multiple learning pathways and student engagement, offer practical strategies to help students access the rigorous content. These practices are evident in the daily instruction at R.N. Harris. The principal noted that most students in the building are kinesthetic or music smart, and they need lots of hands-on activities. For instance, in a kindergarten classroom, students sing songs with movements as part of their daily routine. Music of all kinds – jazz, classical, Spanish, rap, pop – is commonly heard throughout the school as part of a lesson, or played in the background to establish the climate. The music engages children; it nurtures different types of intelligence and exposes them to cultures beyond their own neighborhoods. The walls of every hallway are covered with visual art created in the classroom to correspond with various Core Knowledge units – Egyptian hieroglyphics, mummies, collars and pyramids; topographical maps of Africa made from natural materials; watercolors depicting architecture inspired by the Taj Mahal and a study of India; artwork inspired by Ezra Jack Keats; collage of the desert and ocean habitats; and mosaic art depicting images of winter. During a science unit, 2nd graders hummed into paper towel rolls to hear their voices, listened to recordings of various sounds and created instruments using a variety of materials. As a follow-up lesson, the strings teacher brought in a small ensemble to play their violins and let the class see the way the strings vibrate to produce sound. During a geometry unit, 4th graders created dances that incorporated the concepts of point, parallel lines, perpendicular lines, rays and line segments. Another class incorporated geometric terms and the symbolic meaning of the colors from the Ancient African Kingdoms into creating an original flag. Another class used geoboards and graph paper to create symmetrical artwork.

THE ARTS AT R.N. HARRIS

Arts education is embedded in the infrastructure of the school. A strings program is available for students. All kindergarten students learn violin for nine weeks and those with potential continue two times per week in 1st through 5th grades, with a performing ensemble available to 4th and 5th grade students. A collaboration with NC Mutual Life Insurance Company provided half of the violins for the program and Duke University students assist with private lessons. All students attend classes in visual art, music and dance on a weekly basis. The arts educators work closely with the curriculum to make connections and enrich each unit of study. For instance, a 4th grade unit on the Middle Ages included learning dances, Gregorian chants and recorder music from the time period; creating illuminated manuscripts and stained glass windows; and exploring catapults, games and health concerns from that era. Student artwork inspired by many cultures cover the hallways – Indian, Egyptian, African, Ancient Near East, the Renaissance and Feudal Japan. The music and dance teachers collaborate frequently to team teach and direct productions related to the Core Knowledge curriculum. One recent production titled *A Journey to Freedom: A Celebration of African Culture through Music and Dance* incorporated an African American history program with a 3rd grade focus on colonization and slavery, a 4th grade focus on ancient Africa, and a 5th grade focus on Westward Expansion and the Harlem Renaissance. In addition to grade-level performances, there were performances by the R.N. Harris violin players and the FLIGHT dancers, as well as readings by a number of students. The performances provide an opportunity for parent involvement and an outlet for students to showcase their learning.

In my classroom we integrate the arts in every subject – in math, literacy and in science and social studies. I make sure that the kids can not only describe what we are talking about, but can draw it, dance it or use any other way of communication to get across the fact that they know the information.

– EDUCATOR, R.N. HARRIS ELEMENTARY

CURRICULUM SNAPSHOT

The infrastructure of the school allows for informal collaboration, in part due to the consistency of using the Core Knowledge curriculum for many years, and also having a stable faculty with little turnover. The teachers know each other, the students and the curriculum very well and are able to further refine it from year to year. Double planning blocks are available for the tested grades (3rd through 5th), but much of the collaboration that happens during the year is based on “stolen moments” and a climate that encourages teachers to consult each other as experts. Time is an issue, but the comfort level and relationships that teachers have with each other encourages collaboration. They maintain the mindset of needing and wanting to collaborate, knowing that they get good ideas from each other, and welcoming new teachers into the fold. With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, many schools in North Carolina have scrambled to make substantial changes. At R.N. Harris, the faculty emphasized that Core Knowledge is very similar to Common Core, which emphasizes reading complex text – both fiction and nonfiction – to systematically build knowledge. Recently, they used summer professional development days for curriculum mapping with the new standards and to continue their work with arts integration. The principal explained that the faculty uses arts-integration strategies on a regular basis, but they have recently begun to collaborate and focus more heavily on using arts vocabulary and arts concepts with integrated lessons. For instance, during a science lesson on the moon, 1st grade teachers had students use white crayon to shade and provide texture in creating images of the moon. The arts teachers also serve as consultants for the classroom teachers. During a recent project, the visual art teacher recommended using

Students are using multiple forms of intelligence to learn the Core Knowledge Curriculum.

– EDUCATOR, R.N. HARRIS ELEMENTARY

watercolors and wax resist because the students already had experience with the materials. She directed the teachers to the appropriate materials and recommended that they reinforce the term “value” as the art vocabulary.

CLASSROOM PRACTICES

The arts are an important part of the daily classroom practices at R.N. Harris. Ideas and concepts from all subjects are expressed regularly through the arts and multiple intelligences. One teacher explained that the students “are very well-versed in the types of arts and media that exist [and] in ways to present information.” Another reported giving the students a “choice board” to allow students to demonstrate understanding of concepts in a way that is appealing to the student – often through movement, music or art. In a language arts unit, the relationship between character, emotion and color were explored through many art forms. For instance, thoughts and moods of characters were related to color, and portraits were painted to depict the moods and emotions of a character at different points in a story. Students acted out different emotions and discussed colors that would convey the emotion to a reader – green with envy, feeling blue, etc. – and they wrote descriptions of their characters to accompany the portraits.

Visual art is integrated into literacy centers and all subject areas at most grade levels. Classroom practices include illustrating books, creating posters, valentines and a wide range of drawings to accompany writing. In a social studies unit on the culture of modern Japan, students created Japanese haiku poems illustrated with watercolor paints, and in a study of immigration, students created a book of art and writing to express learning about the Statue of Liberty. Math concepts such as quilting patterns, geometric flags and architecture are reinforced through visual art projects. In some instances, technology is used to design and construct shapes and to create visual images to accompany writing. Music plays a significant role in classroom practices and is integrated into classrooms of all ages. Teachers reported singing songs on a variety of topics such as landforms, transportation, symbiosis and the continents to help students remember information. Music and writing are frequently combined by writing lyrics to folk tunes, raps and poetry covering a variety of topics. A wide range of

Even at my age I dance, rap and sing.
I doubt that I would do that in a traditional
school. Arts are celebrated here.
Singing is a regular part of the day.
– EDUCATOR, R.N. HARRIS ELEMENTARY

music is heard throughout the various classrooms, and history and cultural connections are integrated to help students see connections. For instance, during Black History Month, students created a rap based on a poem by Benjamin Banneker and also created a dance to accompany it. Other classes researched aspects of famous African American artists and musicians including their music, training and performances.

Theater arts is incorporated in classrooms particularly in language arts and social studies. In one classroom, students researched civil rights figures and used role play to demonstrate historical American events. In another, students worked in small groups to re-enact tall tales, including recalling key details and demonstrating identity exaggeration. In a math and literacy lesson, students explored ordinal numbers through Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by creating their own caterpillar and retelling the story with food props. A dance lesson on ordinal numbers used colored scarves and creative movement as each child called out their number. The scarves were also incorporated into a creative movement activity based on Vivaldi's Four Seasons during a unit on the season of fall. Dance was evident through geometry lessons on slides, flips, turns, points, lines and symmetry. Yet another class created a dance to review vocabulary and concepts of the ecosystem, and in P.E., students worked cooperatively to learn parts of a dance through reading.

Question 3: How has the A+ philosophy contributed to the success of students and the school in general?

A+ philosophy contributes to the success of my students because it allows them to make connections and be engaged while learning the curriculum. I beamed with joy when I saw a student teach the human body songs and dance movements to other students and adults while explaining the function of each system.
– EDUCATOR, R.N. HARRIS ELEMENTARY

TRADITIONAL MEASURES OF SUCCESS

R.N. Harris has a steady record of outstanding academic achievement with over six years of "high growth," meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) five of the past six years, and recognized as a "School of Distinction" in 2011-2012. Most recently it was one of seven schools to receive a 2012 National Excellence in Urban Education Award, an award given to urban schools that serve low-income communities with multiple challenges, yet have "outstanding evidence of academic achievement for all students." It is no surprise that the principal mentioned a great source of pride in the 80.9% proficiency rate of the children in the school, and also that the teachers don't need to teach to the test because the arts and the curriculum are married. When discussing the academic progress of the school, the principal spoke of the importance of high expectations for students, regular benchmark testing and the dual magnet emphasis on Integrated Arts/Core Knowledge. Quarterly benchmark assessments are a regular part of the practice at R.N. Harris. The principal mentioned one art smart child who had difficulty reading and summarizing. After learning the strategy of drawing a picture, he was able to pass every section of the test by drawing pictures throughout the book. Not only do the benchmarks let the faculty know if the students are on track for the end-of-grade tests, but they build endurance to sit and concentrate for several consecutive hours. Motivational strategies such as a display board documenting quarterly benchmark scores for every class – including the classes with exceptional children – motivates students to work harder toward goals.

EXPANDED MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Arts integration is the complement to Core Knowledge, and the teachers spoke repeatedly about the opportunity the arts provide students to experience a concept in multiple ways. The arts naturally differentiate learning for different kinds of learners, and teachers noted that so many kids are hands-on body smart and music smart. One teacher explained that the rich and rigorous content and related resources are often above

the heads of the kids – topics like Western Expansion, Civil Rights and Ancient Greece. They have to make the content “kid-friendly” and that’s why A+ is so important. Teachers at R.N. Harris understand that children learn in different ways and that the arts offer multiple learning pathways, allowing them to reach the needs of all children in the classroom. Teacher comments referred repeatedly to the importance of moving, singing, being creative and even playing during the process of learning.

Teachers noted many reasons that A+ is so important for student success. The A+ strategies at R.N. Harris play a significant role in multiple learning pathways and promoting student engagement in the learning process. Teachers believe that learning a concept in multiple ways contributes significantly to the students’ understanding of a subject.

“Students are able to learn a multitude of topics through ways that are non-traditional such as visual arts, dance, music and theater arts.”

“Students are given the chance to learn in many different ways and are also able to learn/work in the area that they feel most comfortable.”

“When students learn facts through song, movement or visual simulation, it is easier to refer back and recall the information.”

“While some students can retell a story verbally by answering teacher-made questions, students can also express their learning style by acting out the sequence of a story.”

“We are constantly moving, singing, dancing and creating art to help students understand topics.”

Motivation and engagement are equally important reasons for integrating the arts in instruction, according to teachers. They mentioned the excitement children get from learning, the willingness to go above and beyond the minimum and add “artistic touches” to assignments. This excitement about learning is believed to help students better retain information, to motivate them to want to learn and to cut down on behavior problems. As teachers begin to understand student interests, they are better able to tap into them as motivational tools.

Developing confident, balanced and well-rounded students is also seen as a significant benefit of the A+ philosophy. The following teacher comments emphasize the importance of the A+ philosophy at R.N. Harris:

“Students gain confidence with creative expression and this builds momentum for core academic subjects.”

“All students find success in one of the arts areas which then helps them feel like they can transfer that to academics.”

“Being an A+ school has really helped our students to try harder and believe in themselves.”

“My students have gained more self confidence and believe that the sky is the limit.”

Other benefits include a willingness to think outside of the box and a willingness to go “above and beyond when finishing their work.” In general, both parents and teachers believe that A+ offers significant advantages to creating learners that are well rounded and develop an appreciation for the arts. One teacher commented that “students have an understanding of why and how music is used and reflects the culture of society,” and another mentioned that her “students have developed a love for dance because of what we do in my classroom.”

SUMMARY

In summary, R.N. Harris is unique in that it serves a dominantly low-income, high-minority population. It is located within a mid-sized city that includes a number of educational and community resources, and a large segment of the population is well-educated and relatively wealthy. The winner of a National Excellence in Urban Education Award, R.N. Harris uses a dual magnet focus that complements the A+ Program. The curriculum piece is strongly anchored by the Core Knowledge curriculum, and the integration of arts and other A+ practices are essential to making the rigorous curriculum “kid-friendly” and engaging. A strong arts education team includes dance, visual arts and music, including a strings program. Frequent collaboration between the music and dance educators results in performances planned around the integrated curriculum units. Collaborative planning is evident throughout all of the school, and integration is evident in the daily classroom practices. Teachers credit the A+ Schools Program with providing students the opportunity to access content in many different ways, to develop student talents, and helping create students that are confident, balanced and well-rounded.

Saluda Elementary School

Question 1: How is this school unique or distinctive in comparison to other schools?

SALUDA HIGHLIGHTS

- Joined the A+ Schools Program: 1998
- Location: Saluda, NC
- NCES Locale Characteristics Rural: Distant
- NC Dept of Commerce County Rank: Tier 2, Moderate Economic Distress
- Number of Students: 160
- Number of Full-Time Teachers: 11
- Low Income Population: 57% – Free and Reduced Lunch
- Major Demographic Groups: 89% – White
8% – Hispanic/Latino
- Magnet Focus: Informally known in the community as “The Arts School”
- 2011-2012 NC Report Card: Honor School of Excellence; High Growth
- Major Awards: National Blue Ribbon School (2012)

LOCAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

Polk County is located in the western mountains of North Carolina and has a population of roughly 20,000. The NC Department of Commerce ranks Polk County as a “Tier 2” county, with a mid-level of economic distress compared to others in the state. The estimated median family income is \$55,846 with an estimated population of 12.9% living below the poverty level. Roughly 27% of residents have at least a bachelor’s degree. It is designated by the NC Department of Commerce as 89% “Rural, Non-Farm” and the National Center for Educational Statistics as a “Rural, Fringe” area. Tourism is a significant industry in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and many of the luxury industries and attractions – arts festivals, zip lining, horseback riding, golfing and spas – are intended for tourists rather than for local residents. The idealistic setting of the mountains has attracted a number of professional artists, both nationally- and regionally-recognized, that have moved to the area to work. Historic Saluda is the smallest town in the county, with a population of just over 700 people, and hosts the annual Coon Dog Day, a large festival and 5K run that attracts as many as 10,000 visitors per year.

SCHOOL AND DISTRICT CONTEXT

The county supports four elementary schools, a middle school, a high school and an early college. Saluda Elementary is the smallest school in the county with roughly 141 students and one class per grade in most grades. Roughly 56% of the student population at Saluda is identified as economically disadvantaged, although the educators believe the percentage is likely higher and that parents are “too proud” to submit documentation. Almost all of the students in the school are white (89%) with significant economic diversity and a divide between the wealthy and the poor. History and intergenerational relationships play a significant part in the school and community culture. Saluda school sits on top of a hill on Main Street in a historic rock building that was originally a seminary, later became a 1st and 2nd grade school, then housed kindergarten through 8th grades, and is currently a Pre-K through 5th grade elementary school. In many cases, multiple generations have attended the school, and many of the teachers are beginning to teach the children of former students. One grandparent traced a five-generation connection to Saluda Elementary, including her grandparents, parents, children and grandchildren that have attended the school in the original rock building, as well as an older ancestor that died of typhoid fever when the building was still a seminary. The school librarian works closely with the students and the city to document oral history of the community. Saluda is a high-performing school, recognized by the state of North Carolina as an Honor School of Excellence, and also a 2012 winner of the National Blue Ribbon School Award.

Saluda Elementary joined the A+ Schools Network in 1998 and has remained active the entire time. The decision to join A+ was made primarily on the belief that adding the arts to the school would be beneficial for children. The school has both a stable teacher and student population with very little turnover and half of the teachers reporting to have been at the school for more than 10 years. All teachers have attended A+ professional development over the years, with 71% reporting they have attended “more A+ training than they could remember,” and all agreed that they have received enough professional development to understand and implement the A+ philosophy.

Question 2: How does the A+ philosophy manifest itself in the school programs and practices?

A+ made us teachers of children rather than teachers of subjects.
– EDUCATOR, SALUDA ELEMENTARY

SCHOOL CULTURE

The small size and remote location of the community, as well as the central location of Saluda within the community, play a significant role in the climate, infrastructure and collaborative efforts at the school. Saluda is fortunate to have very little student or teacher turnover, adding to the tight-knit feel of the community. The principal, Ronette Dill, has hired only one new teacher in the past seven years, and a standing joke in the community is that there are only three ways to get a job at Saluda – death, retirement or more students. The principal emphasizes the importance of knowing every child personally – not only names, but also hobbies and interests. Recently, the local paper published an article on birthdays and she realized that she knew all but one of the students listed. Students frequently come back to Saluda years later to visit the principal and the teachers. One teacher explained that the students come back to receive Ms. Dill’s blessing for the choices they are making, such as the student who chose to join the Marines after graduation. All the teachers are expected to know the names of every child in the school, and begin by learning the names of the pre-kindergarten students during the first week of school. One teacher emphasized the easy transition between grades is easy because they already know not only the names of the students in their classes, but can easily make seating charts based on the personalities of the students before the school year begins. This familiarity with all students in the school allows students in 3rd through 5th grades to rotate between teachers for different subjects. A parent commented that she was initially concerned that 3rd grade was too young to change classes, but realized that every teacher knew her child and that it worked.

In some ways, the school functions as one community, and there are many school-wide expectations and initiatives. The principal explained that there are very few behavior problems at Saluda, and the staff feels proud of the ways students behave in various public settings – a significant part of the overall climate. She attributes much of this to consistent expectations and collaboration between the adults in the community, including the principal, the counselor, the arts teachers, the classroom teachers and even the bus drivers. When dealing with isolated behavior issues, the principal relies heavily on knowledge of child development, including eating and sleeping routines that might influence behavior. Classroom teachers use age-appropriate consequences for behavior such as moving clips or filling in squares. In addition, each class works together to earn incentives for positive behavior. The faculty explained the importance of using the incentives to teach the life skills of delayed gratification and working toward long-term goals. Incentives might include walking downtown for ice cream, extra recess, game days, or popcorn and a movie during the winter months. Incentives are developmentally appropriate, with the kindergarten class working towards weekly rewards, and the older grades working longer periods between rewards.

SCHOOL-WIDE PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

School assemblies and field trips are generally oriented toward the entire student population, and in some ways, the school functions as one multi-age classroom. The principal is deliberate and resourceful in finding collaborative resources to use as incentives, to teach delayed gratification and also to offer the students as many real-world experiences as possible. Occasionally she collaborates with other small, rural schools to share the cost of bringing in performers and speakers. Literacy is a significant focus at Saluda, and a parent group organizes Books Are Really Fun (BARF) to fund five free books for each child every year, as well as a book swap to make sure that children have access to books. As part of the school-wide focus on literacy, all children are expected to read at home each evening, with reading logs signed and returned daily. As an incentive for returning signed reading logs, the entire school is working together to earn points through Heiffer International to purchase a calf to raise. This project connected nicely to a farm trip for Pre-K through 5th graders hosted by the local high school, and because the Heiffer International program includes a global education component as well, the principal arranged for a culminating arts performance by Argentine fire dancers listed through the Bureau of Lectures and Artists. Recently, to celebrate the honor of becoming a National Blue Ribbon School, the entire school attended a trip to the Mountain State Fair. The structure of these whole-school initiatives allows many opportunities for the older children to be paired with and serve as role models for the younger children. This sense of the larger community is visible within the regular school day, with older children reminded to set an example for the younger ones.

This focus on the whole school as one collaborative community is extended to the community at large. The community is generally considered to be very “artsy” and is home to a juried art festival and a number of professional artists. The relatively large percentage of artists living in the area serves as a major resource for the school and community at large, including visual artists, potters, wood turners and drummers – several of which are nationally- or regionally- recognized. The school has made the most of this unique resource by building relationships and utilizing the expertise of local artists for residencies, career fairs and cultural experiences in general. The tight community network includes relationships among professional artists, teachers, school board members, local business owners, families and friends; and the school benefits greatly from these relationships. The town has a considerable arts presence and it is interwoven with the presence of the arts in the school. Saluda is known as the arts school and is a source of pride in the community. Student art work is posted throughout the school, but also in the community center, the local post office, throughout the town and even at the annual professional art exhibit hosted each spring. The community is invited to the school for all events and activities, and the principal makes an effort to include most school activities and recognitions in the local paper so that the community is informed. The location of Saluda Elementary on

Main Street also plays a role in creating the sense of extended community. The students walk downtown from the school on occasion to visit the local ice cream shop, and the kindergarten students walk to the public library downtown once a month for “story time.” The shop keepers regularly line up on the sidewalk to greet the children by name as they walk down Main Street. Volunteers from the local

Episcopal church come to read with students after school, and volunteers from the garden club and a parent from the local dance studio organize special programs and activities for the children. The local Methodist church organizes Tuesday meals to feed children and families in need. There is an emphasis within the community to buy from and support local businesses. A local dance studio and a Suzuki violin teacher offer extracurricular activities for students from the community.

When you actually see your own artwork, and you see other artwork, you can see that you’ve done a good job.

When you’re making it you [might] feel down on yourself, but when you see it hanging around and see that people like it, you don’t feel so down anymore. It reminds you that you’ve done a good job at something.

– EDUCATOR, SALUDA ELEMENTARY

THE ARTS AT SALUDA

Arts education is a significant part of the curriculum and the infrastructure at Saluda. Despite the very small size of the staff, the school has part-time, certified educators in music, visual art and physical education/dance. The visual art teacher works part-time at Polk County High School, and the physical education/dance teacher works part-time at Tryon Elementary School. The music teacher is also involved with the local community theater. Students attend music class three times per week, significantly more than the national and state model of once per week. In addition to general music, students in 3rd through 5th grades receive weekly instruction in keyboard and guitar. Students have opportunities to perform in formal settings occasionally, such as community performances for the Saluda women’s club and the Polk County employees’ luncheon. Although the music teacher is actively involved in community theater, she de-emphasizes large scale productions at the elementary level. She explains that the large performance may take months to prepare and can last only an hour or so. Instead, the students share their learning within their own classrooms or with other classrooms on a regular basis, and class time focuses on building skills that the children can take with them throughout their entire lives. Visual art education is available to all students for 30 minutes to one hour per week, and student artwork is visible throughout the entire school as well as the community. The art teacher also emphasizes the importance of developing skills, vocabulary and a general appreciation of art. Physical education is available to Saluda students every day for 30 minutes. The physical education teacher is also certified in dance, and dance is incorporated on a regular basis. In addition, there is a clogging club that meets after school. The school regularly hosts teaching artists from the NC Arts Council Touring Artists Directory, including Jody Cassell, Michael Beadle, Mimi Herman, Hobey Ford, Timmy and Susana Abell and others.

CURRICULUM SNAPSHOT

At Saluda, honoring personal differences and creativity is central to the school philosophy and is reflective of the larger community. A parent mentioned that the children feel safe in the community and many of them still play outside, using their imaginations on a daily basis. Yet another parent noted that creativity can begin to diminish in upper elementary school but felt that the climate at Saluda nurtured and encouraged individual

creativity. Recently, 15 students voluntarily participated in a holiday-themed talent show that allowed individual students and small groups to perform for their parents. In general, the parents spoke of the importance of recognizing and honoring individual differences and respecting the differences of others.

The A+ Essentials are such a deep embedded part of our school that it cannot be separated and is evident in all aspects of our classrooms.

– EDUCATOR, SALUDA ELEMENTARY

This philosophy is reflected in the curriculum design as well. For instance, one primary grades teacher regularly includes an “Expert Show and Tell” in her classroom that builds on individual student interests and allows students the opportunity to share their expertise with peers. Past topics have included disassembling a vacuum cleaner and identifying the parts, deer hunting, ballet, clogging and even knot tying. Many of the teachers reported regularly using centers that allow students variety and opportunities to make independent choices. One teacher reported, “I have learning centers in the morning and they change each week with our theme. I try to have a balance of arts in the centers (art, music, drama, etc.). I am always thinking of how I can implement the arts into my centers.” Another teacher has students rotate through multiple intelligences stations and asks the students to rate the stations as easy or difficult, in an effort to help them think about their personal strengths.

Recently, the media specialist organized a career project for the older students intended to help them identify their own strengths and to begin thinking about careers that might match their individual strengths and abilities. As part of the curriculum unit, students took a Holland Code survey that helped them identify their personality types (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional), and a multiple intelligences survey to help them identify their types of intelligence (verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical-rhythmic, naturalistic, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal). Students used the results to identify potential careers that matched their strengths, including researching the job outlook, education requirements, salaries and general job requirements. For instance, one student with a Holland Code strength as “artistic” and a multiple intelligences strength as “bodily-kinesthetic” identified “Arts Director” as a possible career. Another with a Holland Code strength as “artistic” and multiple intelligences strengths as “logical-mathematical,” “visual-spatial,” and “bodily-kinesthetic” identified “Architect” as a possible career. The unit included guest visitors from many different careers and culminated with a project that summarized student learning. The 10-year-olds wrote a script and performed a play to share their findings. As part of a new technology project, the 11-year-olds used iPads to create a multi-media presentation to share their research.

More so than any other grade level, we [Pre-K] use art materials everyday in every center. The children are free to explore all types of medium and have free access to all art materials all day. Whether a child is building a volcano in the blocks and building center and needs red paper, tape, etc., a child in the housekeeping center wants to use green paper and green pom-poms to make green peas or another wants to paint at the easel, the materials are always available.
– EDUCATOR, SALUDA ELEMENTARY

The A+ philosophy looks a little different in every classroom in the school. Teachers are allowed the freedom to teach the curriculum without the constraints of mandated programs.

– EDUCATOR, SALUDA ELEMENTARY

CLASSROOM PRACTICES

The arts teachers reported integrating the general classroom subjects on a regular basis, and the classroom teachers reported integrating the arts on a regular basis. All of the teachers surveyed reported that the arts are an important part of their classrooms. Teachers have significant leadership roles in the design of curriculum, and the county allows the principal and faculty a significant amount of autonomy in curriculum design. Textbooks are available for classroom use and the library contains a number of resources, but the school does not rely on a particular commercial program or curriculum. In most cases there is only one teacher per grade level, so collaborative planning tends to happen across grade levels rather than within grade level teams. With very little teacher turnover, the teachers know each other well and are able to maintain consistency and build on curriculum from year to year. One teacher noted that “there is a genuine collaboration between all the teachers and staff for the benefit of the students.” Students notice this collaboration and commented that they appreciate having the opportunity to learn things in different ways and in different subjects. They know that they will have the chance to revisit concepts throughout the week and that all the teachers are working together to help them master the content.

Kindergarten recently completed a unit on farm animals. Our entire school visited the [high school's] farm. I decided to have our wee ones think outside of the box. We briefly studied Salvador Dali. Several of his Surrealistic paintings were viewed. We decided to make farm animals look outrageous and surreal. Each student selected a magazine picture of a farm animal's head. They glued it onto white paper and then drew a "human body" under the animal's head. We had a cow dancing in a ballet outfit, a sheep flying a kite, a cat bride, etc. Most of the Kindergarten students found their way into Surrealism through humor when they first look into the possibilities of the unreal.

– EDUCATOR, SALUDA ELEMENTARY

As a whole, the teachers reported confidence in integrating all of the arts, with visual arts being slightly stronger and dance slightly less common. Most agreed that integrating the arts was an important part of their daily curriculum decisions. In some instances, integration included cultural connections within larger units of instruction. A math unit explored tessellations, reflections and translations within the work of graphic artist M.C. Escher. In a language arts unit on illustrator Leo Lionni, students illustrated and summarized the story elements for a number of his works. In a unit on poetry, students explored abstract art. In a multi-disciplinary farm unit, students explored Surrealism and the works of Salvador Dali by combining human and animal elements. Also part of the farm unit were activities that included making barns and silos out of boxes, singing farm songs and illustrating books of farm facts. The arts were used in everyday learning strategies such as dance and creative movement to demonstrate a variety of concepts such as following verbal directions, reading comprehension, language processing and auditory skills. Drama is incorporated into all subjects through acting out stories, writing scripts and reader's theater. Music and singing in particular is used on an almost daily basis in many classrooms, as is drawing pictures to accompany writing from every subject. Many different visual representations of concepts are included, such as using photography to demonstrate non-verbal expression of emotions; creating "array communities" that demonstrate repeated addition or multiplication sentences; and creating three generations of pet rocks to demonstrate dominant and recessive genes.

Question 3: How has the A+ philosophy contributed to the success of students and the school in general?

TRADITIONAL MEASURES OF SUCCESS

By virtually all accounts, Saluda is a successful school. Academic test scores at Saluda are consistently well above the state and district averages with an overall composite pass rate on both the reading and math tests at 91.4% compared to the state average of 67.5% and the district average of 82.1%. Saluda has been recognized the past four years by the state of North Carolina as an Honor School of Excellence, with high growth in academic performance (2008-2009; 2009-2010; 2010-2011; 2011-2012), and also by the U.S. Department of Education as a National Blue Ribbon School (2012). Despite, the history of strong academic performance, Saluda educators consistently mentioned their pride in the arts skills Saluda students have attained. They believe these skills will provide a foundation for arts study at the middle and high school levels, and believe that their early elementary experiences make them more likely to take risks and try things later in life. Saluda students comprise 10-15% of the student population at Polk County High School, yet Superintendent Bill Miller estimates that roughly 45% of the top achieving seniors in the county attended Saluda Elementary. It is no surprise that the principal mentioned her greatest source of pride as

We are a small school in a small community in the mountains. Even though it is an "artsy" area, many of the students do not have the financial resources for arts enrichment outside the school/home environment. The inclusion of arts in the curriculum I think speaks for itself in the fact that we were listed as a "Blue Ribbon" school for 2012. Our test scores are excellent. The middle and high school teachers always tell us that "our" kids are their best ones.

– EDUCATOR, SALUDA ELEMENTARY

This year I have a student who has difficulty sharing his knowledge through writing. However, when he is allowed to draw/create/sing about what he has learned, it is quite evident that he is gaining new knowledge. I have used enriched assessments frequently to assess his learning.

– EDUCATOR, SALUDA ELEMENTARY

the compliments she receives from high school teachers and former students that recognize and appreciate the foundation and exposure to the arts that are provided at Saluda. A+ brought the arts to Saluda, and the arts are now central to the school identity.

EXPANDED MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Saluda educators mentioned many benefits to including the arts in education. Among the top beliefs in the benefits for students is that the A+ philosophy provides multiple learning pathways and teachers are able to use enriched assessment to measure student progress. At Saluda, this idea is closely tied to developmentally appropriate practices. Teachers indicated that children learn best through experiential learning, and that children are much more able to express their ideas and understanding through a variety of developmentally appropriate ways, including music, dance, drama and art activities. These varied activities also match the extremely high energy level of young children. One teacher emphasized, "Through integrated projects, I am able to assess my students' learning much better than through paper and pencil tests." Another teacher indicated that "the A+ philosophy gives me the freedom to experiment and come up with something that will work for everyone." Yet another teacher indicated that "students have great difficulty comprehending abstract (well...even concrete) concepts and directions. Movement and sound help them to visualize and associate memory to retain skills." The physical education teacher noted that movement in particular is important not only to help students understand concepts, but also to help the students release energy levels. Many also mentioned the significance of the arts in making school fun and interesting, and helping students to become excited about learning. The engaging quality of the arts encourages creativity and sparks imagination and interest. One teacher expressed that many of the students "remember how much fun learning was at Saluda, and they have carried their security and eagerness through high school and beyond."

Our Saluda students excel at the high school level. They are fine artists, musicians, actors and also well-read and are able to collaborate with their peers. They are admired by fellow students, and frequently [the high school] faculty will remark about Saluda students and their "stand out qualities."

- EDUCATOR, SALUDA ELEMENTARY

In addition to the hands-on nature of the arts, teachers mentioned the benefits of an integrated curriculum in helping students "connect the dots" in their learning and helping students to "make connections between subject areas due to the collaborative planning between classroom and arts teachers." Several teachers indicated that they do not teach art as an isolated subject, and that a broad knowledge base including the arts enhances

learning in all subjects. Both teachers and parents repeatedly mentioned the importance of the arts in offering a well-rounded and balanced curriculum. They want to help individual students "recognize their talents and strengthen their weaknesses" and believe that all children can succeed. Teachers repeatedly expressed pride in knowing that they helped develop artistic success in students.

SUMMARY

In summary, Saluda is a small school in a tight-knit, rural community in which many generations of educators, students and alumni are connected through the school. The school serves a student population with a high percentage of low-income, white students. The school utilizes many types of collaborations, both from within the community and outside. Creating a child-centric climate is also an important piece, which is reinforced through the behavior system, planning developmentally appropriate activities, careful attention to the length of class periods and the deliberate inclusion of variety in the schedule. The arts are an important part of the school curriculum, with arts education in dance, visual arts, and music – including keyboard and guitar. The arts are integrated into all classrooms on a daily basis. Saluda is an award winning school, and the A+ Program is an important part of the success. The school has been recognized multiple times as an Honor

School of Excellence, and also as a National Blue Ribbon School. The A+ practices are credited with making learning experiential, interesting, and fun. In addition, learning through the arts helps students connect the dots as they understand concepts in a variety of ways. In a school that celebrates individual differences, the arts allow students to emphasize areas of strength.

Discussion

Question 1: How are these schools unique or distinctive in comparison to other schools?

The three elementary schools represented in these case studies have been continuously involved with the A+ Schools Program for 15 years or more, and were recommended by the A+ Schools director as schools with a “substantive A+ identity.” At each school, the principal has a long history with the school, both as a teacher and as an administrator. All three schools are eligible for Title I program funds, serving a large percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch. Each of the schools has achieved “high growth” on the North Carolina end-of-grade tests (EOG) and has also been nationally recognized for exceptional programs and practices. The profiled schools are situated in both rural and urban contexts, serve diverse populations, and represent small, medium and large school sizes. Bugg is located in a large city and has a student population of over 600. Roughly three-quarters of the students are African American. R.N. Harris is located in a mid-size city and has a student population of less than 400. Approximately two-thirds of the student population is African American, while another one-third is Hispanic. Saluda is in a remote, rural area with a student population of 160 and has a student population that is almost 90% white. In addition to programs and requirements from the district level, two of the schools, Bugg and R.N. Harris, have magnet programs that co-exist with the A+ Schools Program.

	BUGG	RN HARRIS	SALUDA
Location	Raleigh, NC	Durham, NC	Saluda, NC
Size	611 Students 60 Teachers	374 Students 30 Teachers	160 Students 11 Teachers
Income	65% Free & Reduced	82% Free & Reduced	57% Free & Reduced
Demographics	76% Black 8% Hispanic 8% White	62% Black 31% Hispanic	89% White 8% Hispanic
Distinctions	NC School of Progress – High Growth (2011-2012) Magnet School of Distinction (2008, 2012) Magnet School of Excellence (2009, 2010) Ronald P. Simpson Award (2004)	NC School of Distinction – High Growth (2011-2012) National Excellence in Urban Education Award (2012)	NC Honor School of Excellence – High Growth (2011-2012) National Blue Ribbon School (2012)

Question 2: How does the A+ philosophy manifest itself in the schools programs and practices?

Each of the schools has creatively adapted the A+ Essentials to local context. Although the essentials are evident in each school, they manifest themselves within the programs and practices in ways that make best use of local resources and to customize the program to the needs of the student population. This section briefly summarizes the differences in the ways these schools approach the A+ Essentials and incorporate them into programs and practices.

ARTS. In each case, the arts are central to the school identity, and the three components of comprehensive arts education – arts education, arts integration and arts exposure – were evident at each school; but themes emerged that framed the arts in slightly different ways at each school.

At Bugg, multiple intelligences are a clear and dominant theme. Throughout the school, the emphasis on honoring many kinds of intelligence in children is emphasized. The MI team includes education in all four art forms, as well as media/library, technology, physical education and science. Classroom teachers emphasize the use of many kinds of intelligences throughout daily activities, and the hallways display quotes, murals, student work, teacher highlights and other spotlights on different kinds of intelligence. Another major emphasis is on the development of talents and abilities. Students have many opportunities to explore the arts as “careers and hobbies” through extensive array of after school electives, regular experiences with professional teaching artists, weekly arts education, and interaction with mentors and partners through the College Bound program. Student work is shared several times per year through class informances, including an end of the year production at a large scale community amphitheater.

At R.N. Harris, the arts are an important piece of the Core Knowledge cultural literacy curriculum. All teachers in the school plan around the Core Knowledge themes. The educators value the importance of building a solid foundation in knowledge of the world. A parent commented that the emphasis on Core Knowledge gave her child confidence that he could go anywhere and talk to anyone. Yet another parent emphasized the coherence of the curriculum compared to her experiences at other schools. The integrated arts portion of the magnet program reflects the philosophy of the A+ Schools Program with the emphasis on hands-on, engaging instruction that allows students to learn in many ways. The arts are central to both the rich curriculum and the engaging instruction at R.N. Harris. Student artwork is posted throughout the school, and students perform for parents several times per year in music and dance productions built around the Core Knowledge theme.

At Saluda, all of the educators are very focused on child development and are aware of the importance of the arts in the development of the child. They emphasize hands-on, multi-sensory learning, variety in activities and short activity periods. Students attend arts classes more than once per week, including visual art two times per week, music three times per week and P.E./dance every day. The emphasis on individualism is important at Saluda. For instance, teachers are expected to know the names of all children in the school. Sample curriculum projects include emphasis not only on multiple intelligences, but also personality differences and individual interests. This theme was reflected in the arts as well. Individual artwork is displayed throughout the school and the community. An optional talent show allows interested students the opportunity to perform for their parents. The teachers reported having almost daily informances by individual students within the classroom. Despite the above average time spent in arts classes, performances are not emphasized. As the music teacher explained, so much time goes into a large performance that is over in a few minutes. By learning guitar and keyboard over time gives students something they will have for their whole lives.

The following chart compares these ideas as they appear in the three schools.

	BUGG	RN HARRIS	SALUDA
Framing the Arts	Multiple Intelligences – Arts included as part of a larger “MI team” that also includes physical education, science, library/media and technology. Classroom teachers emphasize MI.	Cultural Literacy – The arts are an important part of the Core Knowledge cultural literacy curriculum. Knowledge of the arts is a foundational part of education.	Child Development – The arts are an important part of child development. Physical movement, hands-on activities and variety are important.
	Developing Strengths & Abilities – An extensive afterschool program allows students to explore a wide variety of arts electives to discovery potential “careers and hobbies.”	Student Engagement – Integrating the arts engages students in learning and makes the rich and rigorous curriculum accessible for all learners.	Individual Creativity & Expression – Independence is encouraged, and children develop a unique sense of self, which often includes the arts.
Arts Education	Weekly dance, music, visual arts and theater arts; 90-minute “specials” block each day.	Weekly dance, music and visual arts; strings program beginning in kindergarten	Daily PE/dance; visual arts two times per week; music three times per week, including keyboard and guitar in 3rd – 5th grades
Arts Integration	Classroom teachers and arts educators integrate on a regular basis. “Grey Matter” period allows team teaching on extended teacher-created integrated units.	Classroom teachers and arts educators integrate on a regular basis. Arts teachers integrate projects and performances around the Core Knowledge curriculum themes and offer support to teachers for classroom activities.	Classroom teachers and arts educators integrate on a regular basis. Emphasis is placed on creative expression and respecting individual differences.
Arts Exposure	Each grade level participates in a teaching artist residency and an arts-based field trip each year.	Cultural experiences and field trips are organized around the Core Knowledge curriculum themes for all grades.	Cultural experiences are regular parts of the school experience, and are often used as school-wide events and incentives.
Exhibiting & Sharing Work	Informances are held in the evenings so that parents can attend. Larger events at the school and Walnut Creek Amphitheater are also scheduled annually. Visual art is regularly displayed throughout the school.	The arts team plans carefully around the Core Knowledge magnet themes. The music and dance teachers team-teach and host performances for parents several times per year. Visual art is regularly displayed throughout the school.	An optional talent show allows students the opportunity to showcase individual talents, interests and abilities. Informances are included in the classroom on a regular basis for peers, but productions for parents are not emphasized. Visual art is regularly displayed throughout the school and the community at large.

CURRICULUM. Curriculum is the knowledge and content information that is taught. The A+ Schools Program emphasizes the importance of an integrated curriculum that organizes content information in a cohesive way and helps students see connections across all areas of the curriculum. Increasingly, schools are subject to curriculum requirements from the district and magnet programs as well as state educational requirements. At Bugg, curriculum includes a combination of district requirements and special programs offered as part of the magnet program. At R.N. Harris, the Core Knowledge curriculum is a major organizing factor. At Saluda, curriculum is created at the classroom level, and teachers have great autonomy in instructional decisions. All of the schools have made use of local resources to create an arts-rich school environment.

The A+ Schools Program has been from the beginning a holistic approach to instructional innovation, with arts integration the focal point for delivering not only meaningful artistic experiences but also innovative instruction across subject matter areas. In contrast to DBAE [Discipline-Based Art Education], the emphasis on professional development in the A+ Program is less on the development of aesthetic sensibilities and critical dispositions and more on curriculum and instructional design. The A+ Program gives individual schools a greater opportunity to take the philosophies associated with the Program and create a defining metaphor for the entire instructional program. (Noblit, 2009, pg. 39)

MULTIPLE LEARNING PATHWAYS, ENRICHED ASSESSMENT AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING. The essentials of multiple learning pathways, experiential learning and enriched assessment are all closely related and refer to the instructional approaches used in learning. The A+ Schools Program promotes an approach to learning that emphasizes creative teaching and learning and student engagement. Students should be given opportunities to learn and to demonstrate what they know in a variety of ways. These essentials are evident in the day-to-day instructional choices made at each of the three schools. At Bugg, the emphasis is on honoring multiple intelligences in individual students. At R.N. Harris, the emphasis is on actively engaging students in learning. At Saluda, the focus is on variety and multi-sensory experiences fundamental to early childhood.

	BUGG	RN HARRIS	SALUDA
Curriculum	District math and reading programs are used along with additional arts and science programming. Gray Matter period allows integrated arts teaching using teacher-created units.	Structure for curriculum is organized around the Core Knowledge materials. Unit themes allow for integration across all subject areas on a regular basis.	Curriculum is teacher-created at the individual classroom level. Many field trips and assemblies involve the entire school. Textbooks are available as resources, but no one program is required or followed.
Multiple Learning Pathways, Enriched Assessment & Experiential Learning	Multiple intelligences is a dominant theme, with murals, quotes and photographs displayed throughout the school. Students develop intelligences in areas of strength, use them to access content in many areas, and demonstrate their learning through enriched assessments.	Hands-on, experiential learning that engages students in rigorous content is a significant theme. Students are able to access concepts and content from multiple perspectives and to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways.	Planning instruction that offers variety and multi-sensory experiences is fundamental to learning. Children have many opportunities to explore a concept in different ways, and to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways.

CLIMATE, COLLABORATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE. The essentials of climate, collaboration and infrastructure are closely related and refer to the overall school environment. Each of the schools reported a climate that felt “like family.” However, because of the different sizes, contexts and resources, much of the collaboration and infrastructure varied greatly between schools. Bugg is the largest school with six or seven classes per grade level and a large “MI team” of eight teachers. The staff relies on an online “weebly” to disseminate information and incorporate blocks of collaborative planning time between classroom teachers and the MI team. R.N. Harris is a medium-sized school with very little teacher turnover, and planning is done primarily through designated work days and “stolen moments” between the faculty. Saluda, the smallest of the three schools, has approximately one teacher per grade level, and the staff functions as one extended team. Personal relationships established within the community play an important role in collaboration and infrastructure.

	BUGG	RN HARRIS	SALUDA
Climate	Family-like environment. Arts energizers are used as team building exercises among faculty and staff.	Family-like environment. School song is played over the intercom every morning and the entire school sings and dances together.	Family-like environment. Every teacher is expected to know the names of every child in the school, beginning with prekindergarten.
Collaboration & Infrastructure	With six or seven classes per grade level, an online “weebly” organizes school-wide policies for the large staff. Gray Matter units are planned quarterly with a formal planning session and written plan. The school utilizes an extensive range of formal partnerships with local colleges and arts organizations.	With a medium-sized staff, very little teacher turn-over, and a well established curriculum, much of the planning is done in “stolen moments” and whole school planning days. Dance and music teachers team-teach regularly.	The school functions as one extended team. With a very small staff and only one teacher per grade level in most cases, the teachers work together very closely and meet regularly in a less formal infrastructure. A network of personal relationships has been established with community businesses, organizations and artists.

Question 3: How has the A+ philosophy contributed to the success of students and the schools in general?

All of the schools are deeply committed to the success of their students. Educators at each school noted the many benefits of the A+ Schools Program for students. Repeatedly, faculty indicated that the arts are important in developing multiple intelligences, strengths and talents in students; in providing multiple learning pathways for many types of learners; for engaging students in learning; and in many cases, opportunities for enriched assessment. The comments gathered from the three case studies reflect the findings of the original A+ evaluation and the research on the importance of the arts for students. The arts allow children to develop self-confidence, learn in different ways, actively engage in learning, make meaningful connections across the curriculum, and to give children a sense of identity.

CONCLUSION

Just as every child has a unique composite of many kinds of intelligences, every A+ School has a unique composite of the A+ Essentials. Developing these essentials to their full potential is a process that grows over an extended period of time and requires a long-term commitment. The three schools profiled serve different communities with different values and needs. All have incorporated the A+ Essentials into their existing programs and practices to create schools that value the arts, creative teaching and learning, and positive school climates. At each school, the faculty work together to create a high-quality learning environment that places the arts at the center of learning. They all recognize the needs of individual children and also that children belong to a community at large. They are all responsive to the needs of the communities they serve and adapt their programs and practices in response to the unique demographics and the resources available. Each of the schools is focused not only on the immediate outcomes that included, but were not limited to academic outcomes, and also to the long-term impact of the environment on the growth of the child. Success and quality at A+ schools is measured far beyond the measures of test scores.

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Glossary

Substantive A+ Identity: “wherein most school staff considered the arts in making important decisions about school operation and made repeated attempts to integrate the arts into major subject instruction and to integrate the major subjects into arts instruction.” (Noblit, 2009, pg. 88)

Comprehensive Arts Education: Senate Bill 66 defined a Comprehensive Arts Education as one that includes:

- **Arts Education:** The first component, arts education, relates to the arts as core, academic subjects and the importance of school-based instruction to develop proficiency in the arts. Arts education is a collective term referring to a comprehensive and sequential education in four separate and distinct disciplines: dance, music, theater arts and visual arts. Arts education is defined in North Carolina in the Basic Education Program (115-C-81), and the arts are also defined as core, academic subjects in the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). K-12 Arts Education is delivered during the regular school day by licensed arts educators using the NC Standard Course of Study, as specified in the Arts Education Essential Standards. (Some arts educators teach in Pre-K settings.)
- **Arts Integration:** The second component, arts integration, refers to using the arts as a catalyst for learning across the curriculum and in all areas of learning. In addition to offering a rigorous course of study in their distinct disciplines (dance, music, theater arts and visual arts), the arts are a powerful tool for learning throughout the curriculum. When teachers create curriculum that successfully integrates arts content and concepts with that from other subject areas, students are fully engaged in a multisensory learning experience through the application of multiple intelligences. North Carolina’s A+ Schools Program is a nationally recognized, research-based, whole-school reform model that successfully utilizes arts education (instruction in all four arts disciplines) and arts integration to teach a balanced curriculum.
- **Arts Exposure:** The third component relates to the importance of arts exposure in providing real world context to students. By experiencing the arts, either as a creator, participant or audience member, students learn about themselves and the complex world around them. In-school programming by professional artists reinforces the arts curriculum, while showcasing career paths. Artists also provide an inspirational model of the discipline, skill and perseverance required to achieve excellence. Off-site student visits to art museums, theaters or other arts venues demonstrate that the world outside school provides countless opportunities for discovery and active learning, encouraging students to become life-long learners engaged in their communities. The interface between the arts sector and a school is an essential component of a comprehensive arts education and sustains a community culture of well-rounded citizens who value creativity.

