

Vibrant fine arts programs are a critical element of Clinton's public schools

By Guest Columnist Rosemary Aultman

Research has proven that having a highly integrated fine arts program impacts student outcomes not only academically, but also socially and emotionally. The Clinton Schools have committed themselves to providing students an opportunity to participate in a variety of activities that foster creativity and self expression.



"Draw me a picture of your family" is often the first art experience many students have when entering school. Used as a means to help the child express themselves and understand their place in the family, many of the pictures may be similar - the family lined up across the bottom of the page, sometimes accompanied by a pet, a lopsided house in the background, and always a brightly shining sun in an upper corner. The child takes great pride in the depiction of their family, and teachers can gain insight into the child just from this one activity.

Art is integrated throughout the elementary and junior high curriculum through numerous activities, such as illustrating stories or for special projects

like science fairs or special focus weeks. Teachers understand the importance of fostering creativity in their students and for allowing personal expression, and they look for ways to incorporate these outlets into their classroom. Oftentimes, the most reserved child will open up through drawing or through music.

Nothing gets students more excited than a class play. Generally, these plays center around a unit the class has been studying or perhaps a special focus in music class; however, the student gains invaluable experience in performing in front of an audience, in public speaking and in developing poise and self confidence. Elementary teachers are masters at arts integration in their curriculum and in understanding how it opens their students' minds to a bigger world.

As a student progresses through the grades, they have more options from which to choose in a sequential arts education curriculum. Sequential arts education is defined by each opportunity standing on its own, separate and apart from other subjects. Drama or theatre, all forms of music, dance, media arts and visual arts are taught as stand alone classes. As time allows, the students have an opportunity to participate in

one or more of the offerings. However, instructors in other subjects may incorporate one of the arts in their curriculum, also.

Clinton art students have proven to be very successful in art shows and displays across the state. A number of students have had the opportunity to display their work at various venues which provide recognition to outstanding creative works. Clinton is home to a number of young people who have used the experiences and inspiration gained in

the Clinton Schools to pursue a career in one of the arts. They will be featured in a future article.

Theatre productions are a valuable part of the creative environment, particularly at Clinton High School. Thespians is an International Theatre Honor Society, and Clinton High Thespian Troupe 7314 is a chartered member. As a part of the department, Arrow Players and Arrow Flight, both competition groups, were established under the leadership of Sarah Hankins, theatre instructor.

Thespian Troupe 7314 has been re-activated and has inducted over one hundred students. The Troupe regularly participates in the Mississippi Thespian Convention, where students are adjudi-

cated in individual events.

Students have competed in Mississippi theatre events and have advanced to southeastern competition events, only one of two schools in the state to do so. Students have also been named to the All Star Cast at these events. Additionally, Arrow Players have won awards for Distinguished Play, Overall Costumes and Outstanding Direction. Arrow Flight competed for the first time at the Mississippi Theatre Association with *The Timid Dragon* and garnered the Best Ensemble Award.

Productions vary from year to year, but the theatre classes have produced sixteen shows since 2015. Generally during the year, there are two competition shows, a dinner/dessert theatre, a Readers Theatre, puppetry shows, and Slam Poetry pieces. A Christmas offering of *A Christmas Carol* produced by students in grades seven through twelve is one of the department's highlights.

Arts education is associated with developing discipline, motivation and social development, but it is also associated with higher academic achievement. Students who participate in the arts generally have higher reading and math scores and have better language skills. Having a vibrant arts education program is one of the many factors that have made the Clinton Schools a beacon of excellence in our state.

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