

Jennifer Holliday  
Williamsburg County School District  
Director of Fine Arts  
March 23, 2015

I am Jennifer Holliday, Director of Fine Arts, for Williamsburg County School District. I thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak. As you know, Williamsburg County is a rural area. Our school district is a Title I district. I will be speaking on behalf of the rural, poverty areas in South Carolina.

I became Fine Arts Coordinator in Williamsburg County nine years ago. At that time, we did not have certified teachers in music and visual art at all schools. It is very difficult to find teachers to come to our rural area of the state. We don't even have a Wal-Mart. Today, we have certified teachers at all schools and we have developed and follow a comprehensive sequential standards-based arts curriculum. These are wonderful accomplishments. Also, we offer dance and drama through extended artist-in-residencies. Of course, we would love to have dance and drama as full-time positions. Our students if they don't experience it at school most likely they will not get to experience it at all. We have just as talented students as any other students in the state and they should get the same opportunities.

The Arts Coordinator position began from a grant from the SC Arts Commission. We have also become recipient of the Distinguished Arts Program Grant from the Department of Education and an ABC district from the SC Arts Commission. We have developed a Magnet School of the Arts and they are an ABC site and receive additional funds from the SC Arts Commission to help fund arts initiatives. Without these additional funding opportunities, many experiences would not have occurred for our students. We are able to offer dance and drama through Artist-in-Residences. We are able to get supplies for specialized projects, purchase instruments for students who cannot afford an instrument, provide art field trips, professional development opportunities for teachers, kilns in all art rooms, piano labs at two elementary schools and the lists goes on and on. Principals are able to be part of the Principal- to-Principal network and I am able to be part of the Arts Coordinators network. The Department of Education and SC Arts Commission provides leadership, professional development (free of charge), and a helping hand at any time. This support has made a tremendous difference here in Williamsburg County's arts programs. It allows us to have a connection to the whole state and many partnerships have been established.

Of course, we still would like to do much more for our students. Budget restraints hinders us. We have a supportive district and community. We come from an economically challenged part of the state. As I have stated, we have talented students. I have personally seen the arts turn students around. I had one student who was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. He was failing every subject. The school worked with The Baillie Players (artist-in-residency) to produce a play. This student tried out for the lead role and got it. He learned all his lines in one weekend. A teacher came up to me and asked if I knew what I was doing because that student didn't have the potential to learn lines. I told her yes he does. He was a hit. After the play, he turned around and became an honor roll student. Teachers and students saw him differently. He saw himself differently. He had confidence and self-esteem. He continues to do well. He has graduated and is attending college. I often think what would have happened to him if that play had not been offered. We have many stories like this one. We need to continue what we are doing and offer more opportunities to explore, create, learn, and grow in and through the arts.

The skills that the arts develop include creativity, problem solving, critical thinking, communication skills, self-direction, initiative, and collaboration. These skills will be needed by every student in order to

survive successfully as an adult in an increasingly complex and technologically driven world. These skills are included in the recently released Profile of the SC Graduate under the headings, World Class Skills and Life and Career Characteristics. The arts are also included under World Class Knowledge.

Our own research in South Carolina conducted by Arts in Basic Curriculum shows students involved in the arts do better academically, higher attendance, parents are more involved, and schools have fewer discipline issues. Many national studies have shown At-Risk teenagers with a history of arts experiences show achievement levels closer to and sometimes exceed the general population. Also, high school students involved in arts-related activities are more motivated to go to school and less likely to drop out.

We should remember that the real purpose of schooling is to prepare our students for their life after high school, whatever their choice may be. We want our students to graduate career, college, and citizenship ready. Our schools should be where activities and program happily coexist, the school administration promotes healthy collaboration between arts, academic teachers, and extracurricular instructors, where they help each other in the delivery of a quality curriculum. With this mind, the arts cannot be ignored. All students in South Carolina should have access to the arts which includes creative writing, dance, drama, music, and visual art. Thank you for your time and consideration for the rural students of South Carolina. Always remember ARTS stands for "Arts Really Touch Students".