



RIDE Arts Initiative Providence, Rhode Island



Summary

Imagine a school where the arts are integral to learning and student success. Where students' academic curiosity is sparked by the creativity of an artist, not just in class but also outside of traditional school hours. A school where students energetically show up every day, expressing their art, their learning and their best, true selves.

Trinity Academy for The Performing Arts is a place where students learn to think like artists, acquire lifelong enthusiasm for learning and develop their personal identities. Tapping into our students' incredible potential, we use the arts to strengthen academic learning, empower youth and families, transform neighborhoods and lay the groundwork for post-secondary success for all.

The arts are a powerful tool for social, emotional and academic success. The RIDE Arts Initiative helps provide opportunities so that all students can participate in the creative process no matter their background or income level!

School Board Members

Dana Borrelli-Murray – President *(joined 2017)*

Larry Kellam – Treasurer *(joined 2015)*

Sandi Connors – Vice President *(joined 2018)*

Lily Chan-Bournes – Secretary and parent of a TAPA graduate *(joined 2018)*

Kalen Almeida – Staff Representative *(joined 2021)*

Mike Gore – Staff Representative *(joined 2020)*

Dr. Ronnesia Gaskins *(joined 2019)*

Christopher Hoyt – Artist *(joined 2018)*

Anjel Newman – Artist and Parent Representative *(joined 2017)*

Richardson Ogidan – Trinity Restoration Inc. *(joined 2010)*

Sarah E. Whiting *(joined 2019)*

Ellen Foley *(joined 2022)*

Leside Torres – Parent Representative *(joined 2021)*

TAPA Founders: Joyce Stevos and Richardson Ogidan

PROJECT TEAM:

Liz Richards-Hegnauer,
Head of School

John Amara, *Facilities
Director*

Rachel Nadeau,
*Director of Performing
Arts Education*

Eliza Bryant, *Guidance
Counselor*

Ammar Zia, *Director of
Teaching and Learning*

ShaLayla Simmons,
*Theatre Artist in
Residence*

Avi David, *Music Artist
in Residence*

Nick Marcoux, *Film
Artist in Residence*

Christa Thomas, *Dance
Instructor*



ARTS at TAPA

Arts for Amplified Student Voice

The 2020s have been an era of burgeoning social justice movements. TAPA students are deeply engaged and naturally drawn to causes that impact their city, community, culture and class. TAPA empowers students to use their artmaking as an outlet to express their desire for cultural growth and change and to encourage cross-cultural understanding.

Throughout the 2021-2022 school year, TAPA students engaged in the writing, creation and production of numerous shows and concerts that allowed them to tell their stories and put their voices at the forefront. This work culminated in March 2022 with their Black History Month show “Holler if You Hear Me.” This production – written, directed, cast, costumed, choreographed and teched by students – placed student voices front-and-center by blending spoken word with poetry, music and dance to teach about Black history, the Civil Rights movement and Women’s Rights. In creating this original work, students studied numerous Black writers, thinkers, educators and artists and explored the history of Black America from being enslaved, to Emmett Til, to the recent Black Lives Matter protests. This interdisciplinary approach, grounded in civic learning, resulted in a truly meaningful show that gave students the opportunity to place their voices and tell their stories in the context of greater historical events. Evidence of this was present in the most-recent RIDE SurveyWorks data, which reported that Race-related topics are discussed openly at TAPA at rates exceeding the state average. Eighty-four percent of students responded favorably that teachers encourage them to learn about people from different races, ethnicities and cultures.





Arts as a Vehicle for Improved Attendance

Throughout the COVID Pandemic, when the percentage of chronically absent students increased statewide, TAPA maintained consistently high student attendance. (At TAPA, our chronic absenteeism was only 4%.) This was partly due to the strong sense of The TAPA Ensemble: the idea that all members of the TAPA community are as important to the whole as each instrument in an orchestra or dancer in a company. Students recently reported to an outside observer that “at least 30” adults knew them well in school. The observer reported that, “At TAPA, students are comfortable and safe” and that they could see and feel this in every space at TAPA. This sense of comfort and community contributes to TAPA’s consistently high attendance numbers. Additionally, the Arts serve as the “hook” that gets kids through the door (or log on to the computer during Virtual Learning) every day. As one TAPA parent recently said: “My son rarely wants to leave [school], he wants to be here almost all the time, and he has received support from different teachers because they’re all committed to the big goal, which is college preparation, and helping [kids] do the things that they need to do to reach their goals. The arts are instrumental in doing that.”

Arts for Diversity Equity and Inclusion

At TAPA, it’s not only the students who are artists. The entire TAPA staff – the IT Director, the Front Desk Receptionist and the Head of School – are also practicing artists in different disciplines. By recruiting educators and employees who are also artists, TAPA has used the arts to optimize human capital and development. People with a passion for the arts already share an affinity with our students. We used this to develop recruitment and hiring practices to achieve the ambitious goal of building a school staff that reflects the students’ backgrounds, experiences and identities. Three years into this initiative, we have recruited and retained an incredibly diverse teaching staff, who are 50% BIPOC, 50% first-generation college students, 40% English/Spanish Bilingual and 30% LGBTQ+. As our students strive for success at and beyond TAPA, they spend every day with people who share their identities and thrive in their professional capacity as educators and artists.

Arts Pathway Endorsements for All Students

At TAPA, students take core academic courses in Math, Science, History and ELA and audition for and are accepted into a Major in a designated art form. The Art Major allows students to learn about the professional world of their chosen art form and gain valuable skills in leadership and collaboration. This opportunity comes with guest lectures, local artists, integration with academics and a final adjudication, where students can showcase their skills and demonstrate how they will be able to transfer those talents into other areas of the world. The work done to complete a TAPA Arts Major results in the Arts Pathway Seal earned by each student on their high school diploma.

Pathway Endorsements, given annually by The RI Council On Elementary and Secondary Education, recognize engagement and deep learning in a given discipline. To earn an Arts Pathway Endorsement on their diploma, each TAPA student engages in significant academic study in their given arts discipline, as well as arts, work-based learning and demonstrating the application of their art skills through a substantive performance-based diploma assessment. **One-hundred percent of TAPA students receive the Arts Pathway seal on their diploma**, making TAPA the only school in the state where all students complete this rigorous course of study and application.

Arts for College and Career Readiness and Accessibility

TAPA has discovered that the same persistence, passion and drive that leads our students to excel at the arts also leads them to success getting to and through college. In addition to being a way for students to express themselves creatively, the arts help develop valuable skills necessary for professional success, including leadership, teamwork, communication and critical thinking. At TAPA, we provide a college-readiness program specifically designed to support our students, the vast majority of whom are BIPOC, first-generation college applicants who require full financial aid in order to attend college. There is no “one size fits all” approach for students planning for their future, but there are effective equity-promoting practices that ensure that all TAPA graduates have the skills and preparation they need to succeed in college and beyond. This is borne out in our Alumni data; 75% of graduates enroll in college directly after high school, with 80% persisting beyond their first year. Nationally, 89% of low-income first-generation college students leave without a degree. TAPA alumni are beating the numbers!

