

# KENNEDY PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

The Partners in Education program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is designed to assist arts and cultural organizations throughout the nation to develop and/or expand educational partnerships with their local school systems. The purpose of the partnerships is the establishment or expansion of professional development programs in the arts for all teachers.

The program, established in 1991, is based on the concept that educating teachers is an essential component of any effort designed to increase the artistic literacy of young people. The Kennedy Center's experience with professional development programs for teachers is the basis for this national initiative. Partnership teams consist of an arts organization and an administrator of the cooperating school system. The team participates in an institute that provides models and strategies for professional development programs in the arts for all teachers, follow-up consultation and annual meetings to assist teams in their continued development. The Lied Center is one of 99 U.S. Partnership teams that are located in 46 out of 50 states.

Since 2001, the Lied Center, Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup> Nation School District, and University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Education and Human Sciences have partnered to provide professional development in Pre-K through 12 arts integration for teachers, staff and students in the Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup> Nation School District. Open to any Nebraska teacher, partnership activities include teacher workshops, in-classroom demonstrations by experienced teaching artists, embedded residencies in arts integration, and participation in Lied Center student matinees or special events. Each year planning team members complete an annual partnership agreement addressing both program and partnership goals. Teaching artists involved in the Nebraska Rural Arts Education Initiative have been trained using the Kennedy Center's unique approach.

Umo<sup>n</sup>ho<sup>n</sup> Nation School is located in Macy, a rural community in northeast Nebraska. The student population is 435 with 99.5% enrolled members of the Umonhon Tribe of Nebraska. Ten of 48 teachers are Native American. A 2008-09 Nebraska Department of Education report shows 78% of the district's students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. The school employs two full-time music teachers (Band 4-12th grades and Music K-5th grades) and two full-time visual art teachers (K-5th and 6-12th grades). The elementary visual arts and music teacher positions were added within the last five years. A nationally recognized Indian Education program, the Umonhon Language and Culture Center, serves K-12 students by partnering community elders with classroom teachers to bring Umonhon language and culture directly into K-12 classrooms.

Statistics show that for at least a quarter of a century K-12 students enrolled in Nebraska's Native American schools are susceptible to at-risk behaviors that impact academic achievement, including high drop-out rates, decreased involvement in school and community activities, and low scores on state and national benchmark tests. In addition, Umonhon students are the most economically disadvantaged in Nebraska, with student mobility rates significantly higher than the state average.

At-risk behavior documented among Native American students is not only a problem in Nebraska. National studies identify factors that lead to at-risk and self-defeating behaviors. In the 2005 publication *Third Space: When Learning Matters*, Richard Deasy and Lauren Stevenson review 10 arts education programs across the U.S. that serve at-risk high school students, reporting that grades improve and academic progress occurs when students are actively engaged in activities that involve culturally relevant and artistically-rich experiences. Indeed, the integration of arts education programs and diverse cultural experiences into standard curriculum has the potential to meet the educational needs of Nebraska's Native American youth by bringing enthusiasm and determination back into their lives (*Champions of Change*, pg. 36). Arts education may also positively influence Native American students' perceptions and relations among other racial groups (*Champions of Change* pg. 15). Furthermore, involvement in arts, particularly music and theater, are highly connected with achievement in mathematics and reading. A recent study by James Catterall (2009), entitled *Doing Well and Doing Good By Doing Art*, confirms significant differences in achievement, attitudes, and behaviors among youth with high arts involvement compared to those with low involvement. This study has particular implications for this Kennedy Center partnership with Umo'ho'n Nation School, as well as for underserved and ELL youth enrolled in other school programs.

This Kennedy Center partnership offers a number of other benefits as well as affiliation with this national network of partnership teams. In addition to ArtsEdge (the Kennedy Center's free digital resource for learning in and through the arts), the Lied Center is able to contract with nationally-known teaching artists such as John Bertles, Deb Brzoska, Karen Erickson, Rosalind Flynn, Glenis Redmond and Judy Thibult-Klevins. These Kennedy Center artists come to Nebraska to offer professional development experiences such as *The Science of Sound*, *Poetry Off the Page*, *Teachers and Teaching Artists: An Elegant Fit*, *Curriculum-Based Readers Theater* and more. The Kennedy Center also offers paid professional internships after which the Lied Center's student intern program was originally created, that are open to interested Lied Center interns.

This program aims to reach students/teachers at all grade levels pre-K through 12th grade, and all subject areas. It is designed to meet the improvement goals of the school and the community. The Lied and its partners extend learning beyond "performance," into a meaningful and transformational experience for all students and teachers involved.

In 2011, the Lied Center's Partners in Education program received national recognition when it was featured in a Kennedy Center publication presenting six programs across the country whose research on K-12 student learning was compelling.

For more information contact Nancy Engen-Wedin by phone, 402.472.4707 or by email, [nengenwedin2@unl.edu](mailto:nengenwedin2@unl.edu).