



A<sup>+</sup> Schools Program  
*of the North Carolina Arts Council*



Since 1995, A+ schools have used the arts as a catalyst for creating connections and making schools engaging, meaningful and enjoyable places to teach and learn.

# A+ Schools Program

The A+ Schools Program is a whole-school reform model that views the arts as fundamental to teaching and learning in all subjects. In A+ schools, teaching the state's mandated curriculum involves a collaborative, multi-disciplined approach, with the arts continuously woven into every aspect of a child's learning.

**“The A+ Schools Program is the largest, longest-running, most-successful, arts-based whole-school reform effort in the nation.”**

**George W. Noblit, PhD, UNC-CH**  
*Author of **Creating and Sustaining Arts-Based School Reform***

The central vision of A+ is to build enhanced, creative, arts-integrated learning opportunities for all students. For schools, A+ gradually becomes a comprehensive education reform because other changes in school practice, in areas from assessment to scheduling and collaboration to parent involvement, radiate out to achieve this central vision. Each A+ school develops a unique school identity around the arts that deepens and enhances the educational experience and prepares each student for the challenges of today's creative and global economy.

# A+ Schools Fast Facts



Established in North Carolina as a public/private partnership in 1995, A+ is now a program of the North Carolina Arts Council and serves more than 25,000 students statewide each year.



Cited in N.C. Department of Public Instruction publication *Balanced Curriculum* as an exemplary program, A+ meets N.C. curriculum accountability standards.



Researchers attribute program success to continuous practitioner-led professional development, arts integration and arts education, and the use of statewide support networks for teachers and school administrators.



A+ is featured prominently in numerous local and national publications including the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities report, *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America's Future through Creative Schools*.



Integrating dance standards with math standards,  
A+ Kindergarteners analyze, create and compare shapes.



**“Our kids are smiling! You can’t quantify that with numbers, but you feel it the moment you walk in the school.”**

**Principal, A+ Middle School**

# The A+ Essentials

The key to the A+ Schools Program is our eight A+ Essentials™. Developed by the original 25 A+ schools in North Carolina, the Essentials provide a framework for developing a successful A+ school.

**Arts** Valuing arts integration, arts education and arts exposure as essential to creativity and learning

**Curriculum** Planning intentional integration of disciplines to promote enthusiasm for learning

**Enriched Assessment** Developing experiential, collaborative and reflective measures of mastery, beyond testing

**Multiple Learning Pathways** Providing many different learning opportunities to support development of the whole child

**Experiential Learning** Creating hands-on, real world application of learning standards to support engagement, innovation and critical thinking

**Collaboration** Strengthening partnerships across the school community while promoting shared leadership and intentional connections

**Infrastructure** Organizing school priorities and schedule to support transformative learning and shared vision

**Climate** Building a creative, supportive environment where teachers and students are excited about learning together

# NC A+ Schools at a Glance

- A strong and growing network of A+ schools across the state are actively modeling A+ practice and philosophy, participating in high-quality A+ professional development and sharing best practices.
- Hundreds of thousands of preK – 12th grade North Carolina students and educators have been impacted by A+ since its inception in 1995.
- Title I status is not required, however the majority of our A+ schools are Title I.
- A renewed focus on both early learning and high school is helping to expand the N.C. A+ network in those areas in addition to our already strong elementary and middle school network.
- Our home in the North Carolina Arts Council, part of the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources, provides a wide variety of resources and opportunities to A+ network students, educators and schools.
- Partnerships with local and national groups strengthen our model and offers a rich array of connections and resources.
- As a founding member of the National A+ Schools Consortium, North Carolina continues to collaborate with and guide A+ Schools Programs in other states across the nation.



**“A+ is the hardest work I have ever had the privilege of taking part in for the immediate and long term benefit for my students and myself.”**

**6th Grade Math Teacher, A+ Middle School**

# How A+ Schools Perform

Years of research and evaluation show that the A+ Schools Program has significant effects on schools, communities, teachers and students including:

+ Engaging instructional strategies that enhance learning for all students.

+ Better attendance for students and teachers and fewer disciplinary problems.

+ Development of a creative school culture that benefits all groups of students regardless of cognitive development, ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

+ Stronger organizational capacity and shared leadership across the school and richer parent involvement and community engagement.

+ Enriched arts-based academic environment with more ways for students to understand and demonstrate understanding.

+ Growth in achievement measures at a level equal to or greater than other schools across the state without sacrificing a balanced curriculum that includes all disciplines.



During the study of how plants survive in the environment, A+ fifth graders create art based on a Monet masterwork.



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**Transforming schools through  
the arts since 1995**

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