



**John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
Schools of Distinction in Arts Education Award Nomination Questions**

Art as essential component

The mission of the Tacoma School of the Arts is to establish an urban center offering a creative path of learning, which emphasizes human expression through the visual and performing arts as central elements in academic achievement and lifelong endeavors.

The Tacoma School of the Arts aims to:

- Stimulate higher-level thinking and problem solving skills
- Provide advanced training in the arts
- Prepare students to meet the challenges of the 21st century
- Include experiential and innovative approaches to learning
- Use both public and private facilities
- Connect students to the larger community
- Build this creative learning community in Tacoma's urban core

Total numbers of Arts Teachers in the School

	Number Employed Full-time	Number Employed Part-time
Dance	1	1
Music	3	1
Theatre	1	1
Visual Arts	3	1

In addition to the eight full-time arts teaching staff (each teaching a full load of 6 classes totaling 48 arts classes) the school contracts with Adjunct Artists, who teach an additional 5 sections of art, which include Hip-Hop, Jazz, and Advanced Graphic Design.

Tacoma School of the Arts (SOTA) is an all day high school program that includes a full selection of visual and performing arts as part of the academic day. Students typically take eight (8) classes that include all the classes necessary to graduate and enter college at the University level. Students enter as sophomores and choose one of nine art majors (dance, theatre, vocal music, traditional music, alternative music, audio recording and songwriting, painting and drawing, graphics, photography, and video) around which academic studies focus.

Teachers create avenues that tackle contemporary issues for today's youth, by fostering relevant education and learning objectives through student-centered learning topics. Curriculum is delivered through project-based lessons that link classroom activities to the world at large.



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Instrumental Music	Music Theory 1,2,3	Songwriting 1,2	Jazz	Orchestra
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Drawing & Painting	Drawing 1,2,3	Painting 1,2	Life Drawing	
Graphic Design	Graphic Design 1	Graphic Des. 2		
Photography	Digital 1 & 2	B&W 1 &2		
Video Production	Video 1,2	Screenwriting	Directing	Journalism
Song Writing & Audio Recording	Music Industry	Audio Recording 1,2	Songwriting 1,2,3	



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Creative approaches to learning

Creative problem solving and inquiry are the foundation upon which all lessons are based. This approach is reflected in the student driven research and art work created.

Art is infused and integrated into the traditional academic classes. Students are often asked to create an artistic response to their research and learning. This response is assessed for subject content and artistic merit based on state and national art standards and rubrics.

Art teachers work with traditional core academic teachers on a regular basis to create arts integrated lessons across content areas. This occurs in several ways:

- Teachers often block classes together (for example, physiology and life drawing, or calculus and illustration) and teach academic content through the lens of art.
- Art teachers utilize topics and themes taught by core academic teachers and create art project guidelines based on what is going on in those classes (for example, dances created about science concepts, photographs created for creative writing poems, or music created in response to historic events, etc.).
- Teachers work across disciplines and create unique classes for the J-term (January term between Fall and Spring semesters or Mini-term (end of year)) such as "Protest Songs of the 60s," "Local Social Documentaries," and "Dance Videos."

The J-Term, started in our first year, is SOTA's most refined look at integration and creative approaches to learning. Teachers are encouraged to work in integrated teams to offer classes that weave their disciplines of expertise. This three-week mini-term is all about creative learning through special projects, study abroad, and internships. It is arts integrated components that provide intensive and innovative learning experiences outside the traditional academic setting. When teachers design these classes, student input is a large part of the formula. They often suggest areas of interest and are the drivers behind workshop choice.

All students are encouraged to study their chosen discipline in depth. In addition, students are asked to study a range of topics and subjects. Mastery in a particular art medium needs to be more than a matter of mechanics. What separates art from technique is that the art is made about . . .something: And that "something" is learned and explored in other classes and out in the world.



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Parental involvement

We consider our classrooms open laboratories for learning. In that spirit, they are open to parents for visits and volunteer opportunities. We think of parents as a key component in the triangle of learning.

Many of our parents are members of the *Connections Program*. The idea of the program is to create better communications between the home and school. We currently have about a dozen groups that meet monthly in homes with our staff.

This year, we have implemented a monthly evening program, *Essential Elements*. Parents learn what is going on in the classroom and leave with practical talking points that help them discuss school with their students.

Parents are engaged with teachers and their artists in the conversation about art making as they participate and watch monthly showcase exhibitions organized and put on by the students. Parents are often seen accompanying students on stage as partners or back-up musicians.

During our annual all school camp retreat each Fall, parents lead in activities such as drum circles and improvisational jam sessions. As the school year takes shape, parents can be found in and around studios – they often pose for life drawing classes, participate in impromptu jam sessions, or act in student films. As their own artistic voice emerges, many participate in evening classes taught, in the same school facilities, by many of the same Adjunct Artists that teach during the day at SOTA.



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Other cultures

Other cultures are a celebrated part of the curriculum across the school. In addition to an emphasis on other cultures taught through our Humanities classes, our *Adjunct Artist/Instructor* program offers culturally diverse classes such as *World Dance*, and *Jazz*. In the same way that we teach our students to immerse themselves in their art, we emphasize immersion in a culture through travel, service, language, and food. We are intentional in utilizing culturally diverse exhibitions and shows as a starting point for our student generated projects.

We believe that one way to truly understand another culture is by being friends with someone from another place or background. The small school atmosphere has minimized, to a large degree, social "cliques." In this way, students are able to form friendships that they otherwise would not in a large comprehensive high school setting. We have an active student exchange program. This program is growing stronger as we form partnerships with schools in Asia. We expect six Chinese students starting the fall of 2012: This will be in addition to the usual six exchange students we host annually from Europe, Asia, and South America.

SOTA has implemented a strong Service Travel and Learning component to the program. During J-Term and Spring break students travel to China, Italy, and Cambodia to perform pre-arranged volunteer work in orphanages and farms. Students live with host families or in school dorm settings, learn about the language and culture. This is accompanied by research and study both prior to leaving and as part of travel within the host country.



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Community connections

SOTA was built on the notion that “school” and “community” are one. The school is intentionally placed in Tacoma’s downtown corridor so that students have regular access and contact with the city’s rich cultural institutions. Dance classes have been held at the Broadway Center; students often find themselves at the Tacoma Art Museum studying and drawing from the collection.

Partnerships with cultural institutions and the University of Washington Tacoma offer opportunities for our school to host classes in facilities around downtown. In addition to the three school district buildings, classes are held at the University and in local museums. A partnership with Urban Grace Community Church has allowed us to build an audio recording studio in their space, allowing for community access to SOTA recording facilities.

The community also accesses our rich art studios. The University of Washington holds their art classes in the SOTA sculpture studio. Classes available to the community are offered through Metro Parks and are hosted by the various art departments. SOTA students serve as paid camp staff for junior high school aged artists during the summer. SOTA students also write and execute art lessons to elementary school aged kids through the Arts Connect program at the Tacoma Art Museum.

Through the *Adjunct Artist* program, working artists from the surrounding community come to the school to teach semester long classes in specialized subjects such as Improvisational Jazz, Advance Graphic Design, and World Dance.

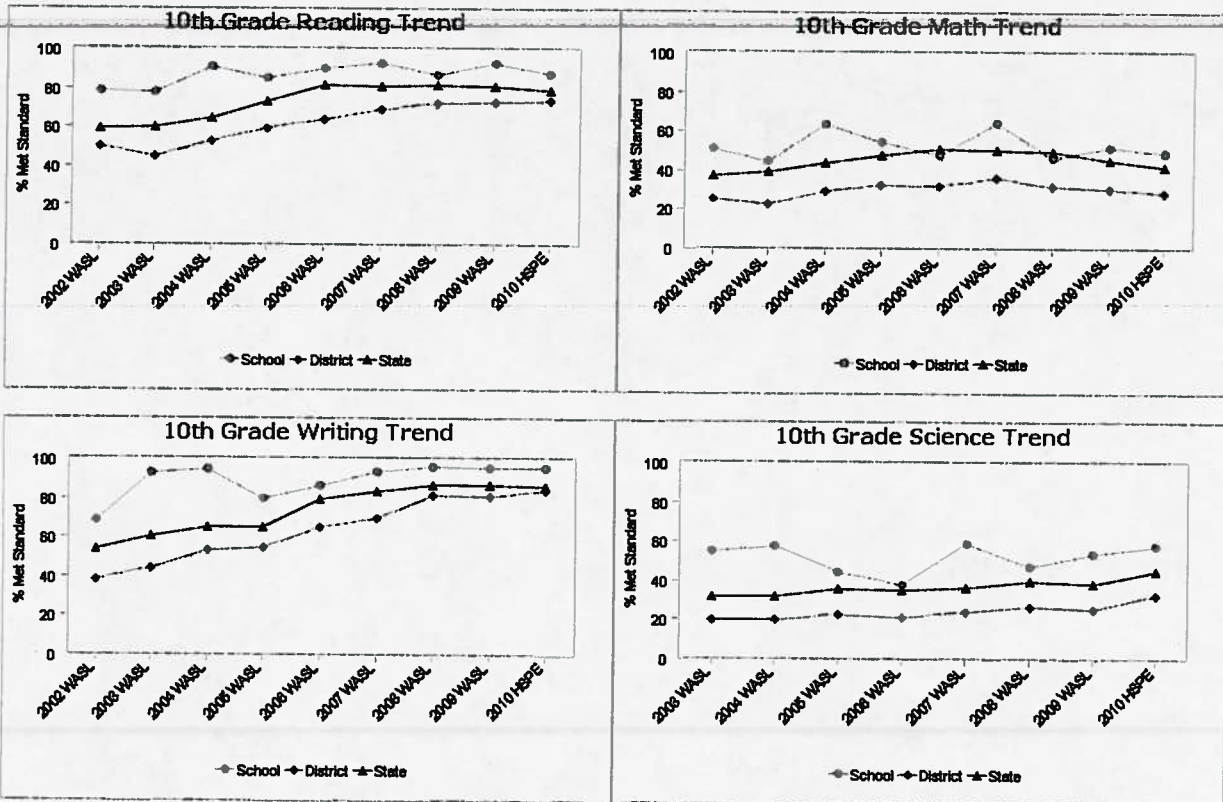


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Student achievement

Charts below are from the Washington State OSPI school report card website.

<http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/wasltrend.aspx?groupLevel=District&schoolId=2074&reportLevel=School&orgLinkId=2074&yrs=&gradeLevelId=10&waslCategory=1&chartType=1>



As illustrated by the charts, students at the Tacoma School of the Arts are clearly achieving standards at rates higher than the rest of the state and much higher than the rest of its school district. We strongly believe that creating avenues that tackle contemporary issues for today's youth and fostering relevant education and learning objectives through student-centered learning topics for our students is a major factor in our success. We seek to engage students with their learning through our teachers, local artists, designers, and engineers by delivering curriculum through project-based experiences that link classroom activities with real world experiences.

We have graduated about 1,000 students since 2003. About 70% still keep in touch with use through Facebook. Of those, 58% tell us they participated in post high school education or training – this is in comparison to about 28% district wide.



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Demographics

Our student demographic is typical of our state. We do have a slightly higher rate of special needs students. Because we are the only high school with an all inclusion model of learning, many students with special needs seek our program.

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Summary description

Tacoma School of the Arts (SOTA) is a small school that offers a creative path of learning, which emphasizes human expression through the visual and performing arts as central elements in academic achievement and lifelong endeavors. We address contemporary issues for today's youth, by fostering relevant education and learning objectives through student-centered learning topics. Curriculum is delivered through project-based experiences that link classroom activities to the world at large. It is located in the city's urban core amongst its cultural institutions. SOTA is an arts focused high school program that includes a full selection of visual and performing arts as part of the academic day. Students typically take eight (8) classes that include all classes necessary to graduate from high school and begin college. Students enter as sophomores and choose one of nine art majors (dance, theatre, vocal music, traditional music, alternative music, audio recording and songwriting, painting and drawing, graphics, photography, and video) around which academic studies focus.



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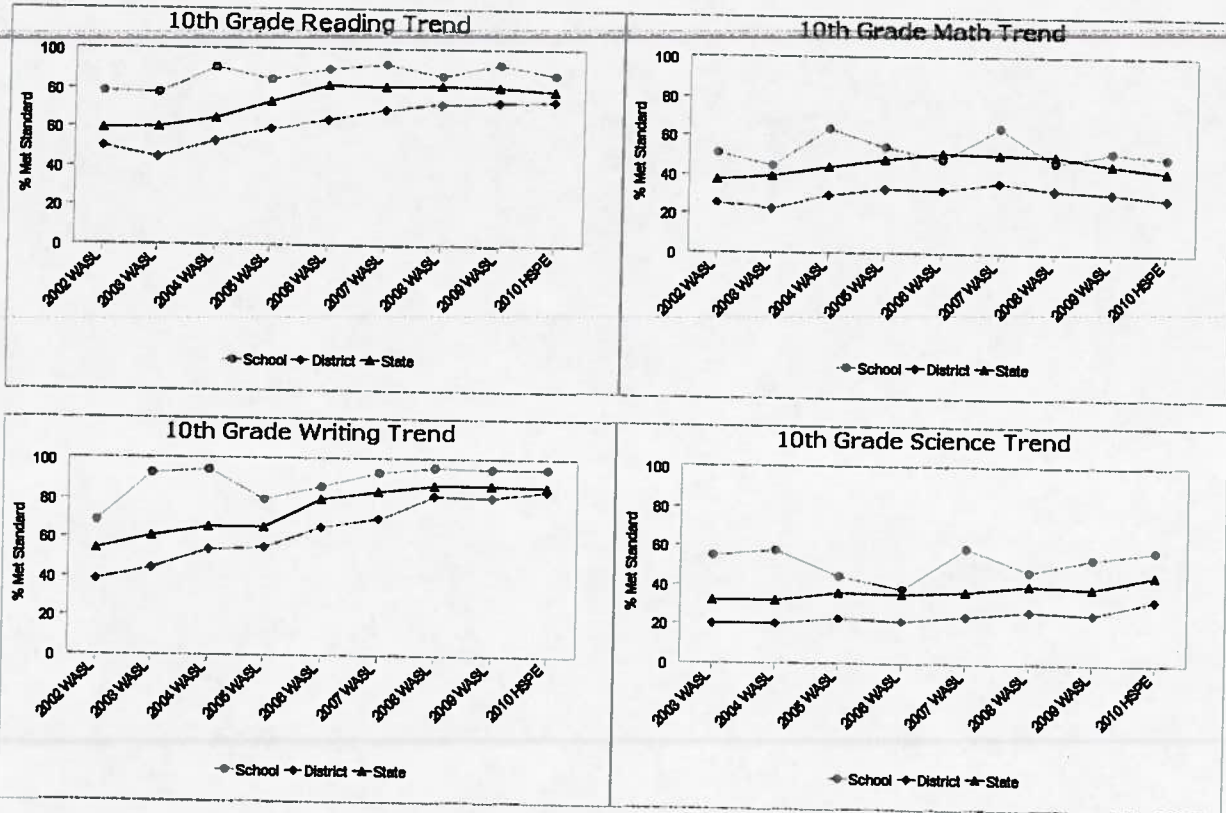


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