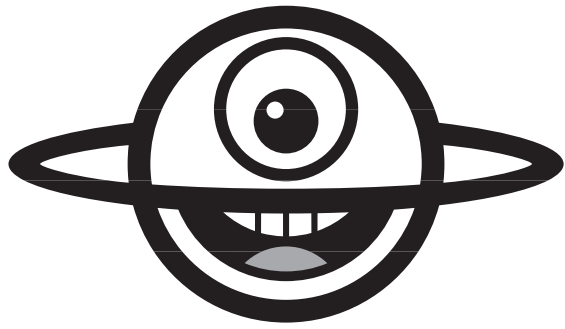




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Integrated Arts

Springfield program interweaves academics, arts

Something special is happening in Springfield: an opportunity for high school students to bring the arts into their education through The Academy of Arts & Academics Program. Instead of overcrowded classrooms, the program consists of small studios with 15 to 30 kids per class. People wander from one studio to the next drawing on the strengths of other teachers and fellow students, interweaving the work from one class to another.

"The arts are not taught as separate subjects but integrated into the regular classes. There is no dance class per se, but dance may be introduced to an English class, for instance," director Mike Fisher explains.

Everything the students learn is designed with real world applications in mind. In the digital photography class, everything is done on laptops, with no more notebooks and pens. And the students make presentations integrating computer applications like PowerPoint and Photoshop. This weaving of the artistic and academic simultaneously is particularly good for students who haven't thrived in the traditional school environment.

A3's alternative curriculum is part of the Oregon Small Schools Initiative and is funded in part with a four-year, \$312,000 grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Other organizations involved in the community-oriented program are the Wildish Community Theater, located across the street, used as additional work and rehearsal space, and the UO Natural History and Culture Museum, where students learn the practical applications of science concepts and principles.

The school has five staff members and several teacher-artists, supplemented by parental involvement and volunteering. Fisher already sees a significant difference in the students' education. "Fifty percent of students have a 3.0 or better."

Fisher has been involved with A3 during the two years of planning and research. The

hours are long and hard, but Fisher loves the job after working for 16 years in the theater department of Thurston High.

Digital photography teacher Stephen Speidel, an actor and photographer, taught at 4J schools, LCC and KRVM. His students are encouraged to produce videos, rather than just learn about them, which Speidel is enthusiastic about.

"I wish I had a program like this when I was in high school. I would be so much further along with my career because I would have learned so much more. Some of these kids are teaching me stuff I didn't know," he says, laughing.

'I wish I had a program like this when I was in high school. I would be so much further along with my career, because I would have learned so much more.'
- Stephen Speidel

There is a high level of respect between teachers, students and parents in the collaborative program. Student Zach Lehman says that compared to regular high school, "there is more freedom, people are nicer, there are no bullies or people ganging up on you." Zach, a freshman, applied to the four-year high school program after Fisher visited Briggs Middle School last year. Like all A3 students, he went through an application, interview and audition process to enter.

The school provides an introduction to a college level arts degree, once scorned by business, now desired for eclectic skills and problem-solving abilities. For more information contact the academy at www.athree.org **EW**

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