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Portland's Kúkátónón Children's African Dance Troupe works to preserve the cultures of the people of Africa.

Culture and Learning

African dance troupe integrates arts with education

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THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The deep smoldering sounds of the Djembe drums rumble in the distance, and a chant is called back and forth between the children. The Kúkátónón

African Dance Troupe moves through yet another rehearsal in Portland, rekindling a love for African dance and music.

Kúkátónón has been in Portland for over 30 years and has successfully taught African cultural traditions to hundreds of student performers, while exciting hundreds of thousands of audience members with their unique artistic dance and drum program.

For the upcoming year, Kúkátónón

has decided it will start expanding its dancing and drumming lessons to integrate performing arts with math and science.

The group is collaborating with arts education specialist Wendy Thompson of Whkeena Arts and Education to work with its teaching artists to design a pilot curriculum that integrates dancing and drumming with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, or the STEM fields.

The goal is to give the students a well-rounded school-based learning program, using the intersection of arts and STEM. A study by the National Endowment for the Arts demonstrates that students who actively participate in the arts tend to score better on science and writing tests, and are more likely to feel motivated to go to college.

The curriculum will fall in line with

state and federal Common Core standards, as well as Kúkátónón's artistic work and connection to West African culture.

According to Thompson, the children can expect lessons on Polyrhythms, which focus on rhythm, dance, and mathematics; as well as the science of West African dance and drumming which provide insightful lessons on the laws of motion and the physics of sounds.

The versatility and flexibility of this new program will allow students to explore learning in a non-traditional, creative setting. Math and science have always been intrinsic in dancing and drumming; now the children of Kúkátónón will get to experience that in new and exciting ways.

For more information, visit the dance group's website kukatnon.org