

Southwood Academy of the Arts opened in August 2011 with 125 sixth grade students. Serving the entire Anderson community as a pure magnet school (no attendance zones), Southwood Academy provides a rigorous academic experience while using the arts as a vehicle to success. The core curriculum for ELA, math, science, and social studies is based on state and national standards, but is enhanced with learning opportunities integrating the arts. In addition, students are able to receive accelerated instruction in art, band, chorus, orchestra, dance, and musical keyboarding and composition.

With such a small number of students, the faculty and staff are able to build a strong sense of community and self-worth. Students' strengths and accomplishments are celebrated on a daily basis through a school-wide morning meeting. Also, performances and exhibitions are scheduled throughout the year to spotlight the children's talents.

During the 2011-2012 school year, Southwood Academy of the Arts established a reputation for excellence in the Anderson area. Students in Anderson School District Five participated in national norm-referenced testing using NWEA's Measures of Academic Progress. Subjects tested included mathematics, reading, and language. The students at Southwood Academy outscored the national average and other district middle schools in all areas throughout the entire year. Furthermore, last year's sixth graders outperformed their peers in the district on benchmark measures for mathematics, reading, science, and social studies.

This drive for superiority was also evidenced in the arts. Visual art students displayed their artwork at the Anderson Arts Center during Youth Art Month. Band and orchestra students competed in the upstate solo and ensemble competitions and all students received either "excellent" or "superior" ratings. The orchestra competed at two separate competitions last spring and received "excellent" scores at both. This was quite an accomplishment for sixth grade musicians!

The PTSO and School Improvement Council worked hard last year to develop a family-friendly culture where the arts and academics are supported and celebrated. The PTSO members created organizational by-laws, sponsored school dances, held movie nights for students and parents, and hosted a Family Fun Day and Cookout. The School Improvement Council crafted a mission statement with educational belief statements, wrote goals and objectives, and initiated action plans for academic and artistic improvement.

The arts engage students in ways that other subjects may not by encouraging creative risk-taking. Through the arts, children can see themselves as creators who value their own ideas and respect the ideas of others. At Southwood Academy of the Arts, students' talents are nurtured as their potential is realized.

Gary Bruhjell, Principal
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