

Case Study: Visual Arts Program of Distinction Saint Francis Preparatory School, New York

the program

Whether students want to simply dabble in the arts or gain the necessary experience to attend a prestigious art college, the visual arts program at St. Francis Preparatory School offers a wide range of courses, providing something for everyone.

The program aims to foster sensitivity, skill, and appreciation of the arts while developing perception, personal insight, and conceptual thinking. The school's approximately 2,500 students in grades 9 through 12 may choose from 29 arts courses, ranging from art history and fine arts to video game design.

Each visual arts class is taught with a generous mix of instruction combined with hands-on activities, such as projects and field trips. The school's five full-time visual arts instructors and one full-time performing arts instructor are experts in their fields. In addition to providing instruction, each is also responsible for helping students navigate the college application process and position themselves for careers in the field.

Freshman level classes are designed as a general study in art, while sophomores are directed to choose from five art classes. By the time students reach grades 11 and 12, they are able to specialize with six-month concentrated courses.

Students showcase their work throughout the school building and at an annual art show. They are also encouraged to enter competitions throughout the year. In addition, students can earn the New York State Regents sequences in art and participate in the National Art Honor Society. St. Francis awards a certificate of Advanced Achievement in Art to students completing several key requirements. Some classes qualify for credit through St. John's University in New York City, N.Y.

In addition to a broad curriculum in the visual arts, St. Francis offers courses in performing arts, theater design, movement and dance, and production. St. Francis Prep has earned two other Programs of Distinction in Music and School Counseling.



the process

St. Francis has been offering art classes from its inception in 1974. At the time there were only three courses available: art, drawing, and painting.

The program has undergone significant growth through the years in response to student interests and to keep pace with emerging technologies. For example, computer graphics, photography with a darkroom, and fashion design were added in the 1980s. Later, freshman classes were aligned to focus on the Elements of Art and sophomore classes on the Principles of Design, ensuring that students receive a cohesive foundation that aligns with state standards.

St. Francis applied for the Program of Distinction in Visual Arts as a means of examining the department to help guide curriculum development and better understand student, parent, and staff perspectives. After receiving survey responses collected through the Program of Distinction application process, the faculty held several meetings to discuss the results and to develop program goals.

One of the school's goals continues to be to provide students an environment for intense and focused instruction in addition to self-expression and a sense of familiarity with Art.

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In the past decade, the facility underwent a significant renovation. Today, it features three general art classrooms, studios for drawing, painting, and ceramics, a Mac computer lab, and an animation studio. The department boasts 40 Mac computers, two digital photo printers, two 3D printers, video cameras, Icarus warm drawing boards, and animation light boards. Students can access iPads and use paintbrush and stylus pens in many of their classes.

The administration of St. Francis shows its commitment to visual arts with an annual budget that includes adequate funding for operations. To supplement, the visual arts department hosts fee-based events that double as opportunities to showcase student work and raise funds.

works from younger students. There was a reception, gallery show, music, and food. More than 150 people attended the event. This was a unique way of exposing prospective students to the visual arts program at St. Francis Prep. The school plans to expand on this program in the spring of 2020 with art classes and workshops for eighth grade students.



Lessons learned

- Use technology in the classroom. Incorporating technology into a visual arts program not only helps with the curriculum; it is also critical to preparing students for 21st century careers. Ensure there is funding for technology in your school's budget or fundraise when you can. Make sure to provide teachers with training on technology so that they are prepared to teach students how to use the equipment.
- Take trips. Recently, St. Francis students and teachers have taken trips in to England, France, and Italy. These excursions provided ample opportunity for art lessons and have inspired younger students to work hard so that they may have a chance at a future trip. We are currently planning a trip to Disney World for February 2020.
- Grow your National Arts Honor Society (NAHS) by promoting it as an opportunity for students to delve more deeply into the arts and be better prepared for college. The St. Francis Prep chapter of NAHS went from 15 members in 2012 to more than 100 members in 2019. Students volunteer 15 hours per year to support the school. This is a good opportunity for dedicated students to be recognized and to integrate the visual arts program into the broader school community.
- Engage middle school students. St. Francis recently hosted a Junior High School Art Exhibition to showcase

Program of distinction benefits

Earning the Program of Distinction provided St. Francis with external validation of the excellent work the students and faculty are doing in the visual arts program and has proved to be a helpful marketing tool. It also provided teachers and staff with valuable feedback from students and families that helped them develop a strategy for growth and continuous improvement.

for more information

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To learn more about Middle States Programs of Distinction, visit www.msa-cess.org.



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