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PICASSO ONCE SAID, "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up." Childhood and adolescence provide perfect timing for introduction to fine arts. The mind is capable of fabulous, sometimes miraculous, forms of expression, and according to Einstein, "It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge." That is what fine arts is all about.

Current research strongly suggests that participation in certain extracurricular activities, such as fine arts and athletics, significantly reduces a student's likelihood of failure or dropout. Given that the correlation between dropout rates and criminal activity is well documented, many educators believe a quality fine arts program is not only beneficial to students but has a higher social benefit as well. The Frisco Independent School District (FISD) believes in both the social and individual significance of music, drama, band and art programs and is motivated to provide excellence in fine arts classrooms.

#### LEADING FINE ARTS

Frisco ISD will encompass twenty five elementary schools, seven middle schools, four high schools and two special program centers when classes begin in the fall of 2007. That's a far cry from a decade ago when the district included a total of only five schools; Acker, Rogers, Curtsinger, Staley and Frisco High. With this tremendous growth comes the strategic issues that arise when determining how best to provide FISD students with a well-rounded curriculum at every grade level, in every subject. The logistics of aligning subject matter



Dr. Daryl Trent

photo by Chris Fritchie

## Guiding Creativity

By Debbie Vallejo

from one grade to the next, following standards set by the state, keeping up with the latest teaching technologies, while at the same time allowing teachers some autonomy in the classroom, can provide administrators with a logic puzzle that never ends.

There are drama, art and band teachers at every middle school. The high schools have the same, plus additional teachers for dance, and the elementary schools all have their own art and music teachers. The number of educators teaching in the FISD fine arts program is currently at 160, and obviously rising every year. The rapidly growing department found itself in serious need of a leader to handle the many changes. After conducting comparison studies

of other similar school districts, the school board elected to create the Director of Fine Arts position for Frisco ISD when it became obvious teachers and students would benefit from the addition. Dr. Daryl Trent was hired to fill the new spot last spring after serving as band director for Frisco High School for 27 years.

When the Trent family arrived in Frisco almost 28 years ago, the city had a total population of approximately 3,400 people (they've witnessed a lot of growth considering the current number of FISD high school students alone is now over 4,000).

Before the creation of the director position, fine arts teachers discussed concerns or questions about their program with their principal. Dr. Debra Nelson, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, explains

how a great deal of time was wasted because there was no one person to call on for answers to specific fine arts curriculum or administrative questions. "A principal would spend time locating information, or call the administration offices and we would spend time calling other faculty members or individuals outside of the district. It took a great deal of time to find key information for the program," says Dr. Nelson. "Dr. Trent knows people all over Texas. If he doesn't know the answer to a question, he is able to locate someone who does."

Deciding on the perfect individual for the job took a lengthy screening process and several interviews. In the end Dr. Trent won out because of his clear qualifications and the extensive experience he brought to the position. "He has a wealth of knowledge, led

an award-winning band and is highly regarded by other band directors in the area. He also knows Frisco ISD and has many key contacts throughout the state,” explains Dr. Nelson. “Dr. Trent has made a seamless transition into his new role as Director of Fine Arts.”

Teachers, students and principals all benefit from the new position. When principals are hiring fine arts teachers, Dr. Trent is able to screen applicants first and pass on only the most qualified individuals. In addition, teachers receive answers to important questions in a timely manner because they have one person to approach instead of multiple individuals to call. April Holland teaches dance at Frisco High School. “Dr. Trent speaks on our behalf and works with us if we have any questions. He responds quickly if there is anything we need,” explains Ms. Holland. “As a district grows it’s easy to get lost in the shuffle. Having a director means that won’t happen.”

## CURRICULUM

The material covered in fine arts classrooms is driven by the standards set by the state. Each teacher is responsible for teaching the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills requirements for their particular subject matter at their particular grade level. Even so, aligning curriculum and providing educators with the support they need to teach to the best of their ability is a large task. Dr. Trent assists teachers by providing them with administrative support and curriculum guidance when needed. “Having a Director of Fine Arts unifies the fine arts departments district-wide and coordinates the elementary and secondary levels within each fine arts discipline,” explains June Waggener, an art teacher for Frisco High School. “Since Dr. Trent has been a fine arts teacher for our district for so many years, he is aware of the rewards and the responsibilities of an arts educator. From his wealth of

experience, he is able to make informed decisions, give good advice and strong direction to the fine arts teachers of our district.”

Another important aspect of the position is helping teachers share ideas, while also teaching the same content at the same grade levels, across the various



*Student art*

*photo by Chris Fritchie*

schools. “Dr. Trent can get all fine arts departments in all the schools on the same page, so we are all teaching the same thing,” explains Julie Trocquet, a dance teacher for Frisco High School. This becomes particularly important so students do not lose out on instruction as more schools are built and it becomes necessary for students to change locations due to rezoning.

## SUPPORTING THE FINE ARTS

Why are fine arts important? Current research suggests study in the arts strengthens creative thinking skills, increases verbal ability, positively impacts social learning and is a valuable tool for teaching children with special needs. There is even some evidence that dance instruction increases cognitive thinking skills and teaching drama to young children may positively impact reading and writing ability. “It doesn’t matter if you are talking about music, drama, dance or art,” explains Dr. Trent. “Study in the arts benefits and adds to the development of a child in a way they can’t get anywhere else.”

Frisco ISD prides itself on supporting all aspects of the educational experience. Whether it is athletics, academics, technology or fine arts, the Fisd student has many options from which to choose. A student with a gift in fine arts will benefit from the support of the administration, both in money and in deeds. The budgets set by the principals in each school are generous toward fine arts. When there is a need, the community steps in and raises funds to help the students on field trips, extra training opportunities, competitions and camps. Band, cheerleading, drill team, choir and orchestra often have booster clubs to help with fundraising.

Every two weeks, art produced by Fisd students is put on display at the administration building. The Youth Art Month exhibit in the spring at Centennial High School will showcase young artists of various ages from all over the district. “One of the great things about the exhibit is it demonstrates the artistic development of our students from elementary all the way through high school,” says Dr. Trent. “You walk through and look at the art work and you think ‘Hey, I’d hang that at my house.’”

Frisco fine arts teachers are encouraged to think “outside the box” to come up with new ways to teach and develop their students. Pete Hazard is the new band director at Frisco High School. He made the move to Frisco because of the support he found from parents and administrators. Mr. Hazard created a band leadership team made up of juniors and seniors. Band members apply for the positions and once accepted are responsible for leading certain sectionals, assisting in practice sessions and providing leadership for other band members. “The kids are great and the parents very supportive,” explains Mr. Hazard. “Everything we do revolves around our goals for the band and developing a positive culture where kids spend their time building each other up.”

The month of December saw the Frisco High School band and art programs combine resources during the Annual Sweet Shoppe and Silent Auction and the National Art Honor Society Holiday Art Show. The band's chamber ensembles performed while art students displayed their work throughout the halls of the school. Admission to the event was free and allowed members of the community to see firsthand how music and art transform children. "We are using music to develop kids," says Mr. Hazard. "We want them to be better people when they leave us."

I've seen cheerleaders cheer during football games and then march with the band during half-time.

Dr. Trent also makes sure the programs are as flexible as possible, allowing students to participate in multiple activities. "Daryl has always been inclusive," explains Dr. Nelson. "I've seen cheerleaders cheer during football games and then march with the band during half-time." Students are able to select involvement in more than one activity, as long as their schedule allows it.

#### A MATTER OF PRIDE

"My favorite thing about my job is I get to be a part of Frisco," says Dr. Trent. "This is such a strong district. It's something I am proud to be a part of."

It is important to support our teachers so students are insured the best instruction possible in every subject area. Teaching students to harness their creativity in a way that is both beneficial to themselves and others around them is an important part of their education. The abstract painter Hans Hoffman (1880-1966) would articulate a teacher's importance with one statement, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." Well put.

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