

Arts Integration: All Fine Arts Disciplines



HISD Fine Arts Operational Framework

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“GE hires a lot of engineers. We want young people who can do more than add up a string of numbers and write a coherent sentence. They must be able to solve problems, communicate ideas and be sensitive to the world around them. Participation in the arts is one of the best ways to develop these abilities.”

– Clifford V. Smith, President of the General Electric Foundation

Overview of Arts Integration

Arts integration is simply the fusing of the fine arts and all other learning. Through its simplicity, it provides endless opportunities to breathe life into the daily rituals of school, bridging content that is often siloed in individual classrooms and providing opportunities for students to see how the world is interconnected.

In practice, arts integration is a term that is used loosely to describe varying approaches to merging the fine arts and foundation curricula. To develop a shared understanding, the HISD Fine Arts Department has built on a few of the strongest definitions across the region and the country by defining arts integration as:

A holistic approach to teaching that intentionally fuses learning in the arts with all other content areas, creating a dynamic learning environment that leads to a well-rounded, engaging education in support of the whole child.

High-quality arts integration:

- Is quality teaching, aligning with the characteristics articulated in HISD’s Effective Practices;¹²¹
- Is intentionally cross curricular, cultivating content mastery in both the foundation and fine arts subjects increasingly over time; and
- Creates a dynamic learning environment that promotes rigor and engagement through:
 - Support of the whole child (academic, social, and emotional domains),
 - Frequent and Consistent Cultivation Across a Range of Activities
 - Holistic fine arts engagement (students create, investigate, and witness),
 - Embrace of all four fine arts disciplines, and
 - Support from arts specialists, including fine arts teachers and teaching artists.

Arts Integration is an approach to teaching that can be used by any educator in their field of expertise and is not limited to a certain grade level or subject. When educators establish a fully integrated classroom, they create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that fuels new discoveries and an ever-growing awareness of the connections between subjects while generating opportunities for students to create and express themselves.

Additional benefits include:

- A safe and supportive classroom environment that encourages creative risk taking
- Engaging activities that promote language acquisition
- Natural development of Social and Emotional Learning competencies¹²²
- Developing trust by establishing peer-to-peer relationships between students and teachers as each party shares artistic ideas and includes the other in their creative process within a safe space
- Participatory classroom-management tools
- Opportunities for formative and summative assessment
- Improved teacher career satisfaction and retention

¹²¹ See “Aspects of Quality Arts Integration in the Foundation Classroom” for more details about how arts integration aligns with the HISD Effective Practices, 207.

¹²² Explore “The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)” for more information about a standards-based approach to Social and Emotional Learning, casel.org.

Aspects of Quality Arts Integration

Defining High-Quality Arts Integration

High-quality arts integration:

- Reflects recognized characteristics of effective teaching,
- Is intentionally cross curricular, and
- Creates a dynamic learning environment.

Effective Teaching

Quality arts integration is easily identifiable because it naturally aligns with the characteristics of quality teaching, like those outlined in HISD's Effective Practices.¹²³ By bringing the fine arts together with the study of other subjects, teachers build on the pedagogical skills they already possess and use the arts to create dynamic learning environments. A foundation teacher that approaches their class through the lens of arts integration uses the fine arts in a holistic manner to accomplish their goals and a fine arts teacher uses the foundation skills to build connections between their art form and the other parts of their students' lives.



Effective Practices

A high-quality, arts-integrated approach to teaching aligns with the HISD Instructional Practices because they:

- Are student centered and objective driven (I-1),
- Employ fine arts strategies to check for understanding (I-2),
- Offer creative opportunities for differentiating instruction (I-3),
- Develop high-level thinking skills through cross-curricular learning (I-4),
- Create routines to maximize instructional time (I-5),
- Communicate academic concepts in new and inventive ways (I-6),
- Promote high academic expectations for students (I-7),
- Encourage active student participation by all students (I-8),
- Provide pathways to redirect disciplinary issues that may arise (I-9),
- Build positive and respectful peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher relationships (I-10).

Ever-Increasing Intentionality

Arts integration is at its best when the fine arts and other learning come together intentionally and when that intention grows over time. Many teachers approach arts integration naturally. A visual art teacher may make a connection between an artist's use of line or shape and a geometry concept, or a social studies teacher may use a song to help the students memorize an important list of facts. While both examples represent excellent ways of getting the fine arts and other learning together in the same space, neither necessarily demonstrates a sustained and intentional deepening of learning in both areas. A teacher beginning their arts integration journey will use moments like these as a starting point to extend the learning in both areas in an on-going manner.

In Practice

Imagine a first-grade teacher that teaches their students a lullaby at the start of the year. They might begin by using the song as a calm way to initiate a transition between workstations. That act alone

¹²³ Houston ISD, *Effective Practices*, www.houstonisd.org/EffectivePractices.

may be an accomplishment, especially if they were not previously accustomed to singing and needed to gain the confidence to perform in front of their students.

Over time, as their comfort improves, they can look to extend the musical element by connecting with a music teacher or a teaching artist to learn how to play the melody on a simple instrument like a set of desk bells. This extension creates an opportunity for students to learn about scales and how to create melodies. With that knowledge in place, even these six-year-olds can begin to experiment with rudimentary composing by assigning new notes to the lyrics of the lullaby. With time, the students can take their familiarity with writing simple melodies to their work on reading comprehension by composing short melodic snippets known as motives to identify important characters or key moments in the sequence of the plot.

Dynamic Learning Environment

A fully integrated classroom is evident by the dynamic implementation of arts integration through:

Support of the Whole Child

Arts integration is most effective when it holistically connects learning across all educational objectives, encompassing the foundation subjects (Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies) and the fine arts disciplines (Dance, Music, Theatre, and the Visual Arts) while intentionally promoting social and emotional growth of the student (Social and Emotional Learning, also known as SEL). By rooting all learning in accepted standards (e.g. Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills or standards based on the CASEL Five Core Competencies¹²⁴), teachers ensure that learning goes beyond making superficial connections, building connections that inspire students' minds.

While a lesson may simply begin by connecting a single foundation subject and fine arts discipline, intentional arts integration fosters the connection of multiple subjects, fine arts disciplines, and SEL learning, ultimately breaking down the artificial barriers that often exist between subjects.

Frequent and Consistent Cultivation Across a Range of Activities

Arts integration is most effective when it is cultivated frequently and consistently in a manner that develops regular routines, allowing students to build understanding over time. These routines include:

- Daily rituals (e.g., using creative movement to initiate in-class transitions)
- Weekly rituals (e.g., examining a work of art each week to encourage language acquisition and preview concepts for upcoming lessons)
- Unit cycles (e.g., through the five phases of BSCS 5E Instructional Model—Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate)¹²⁵

Within any of the above routines, the benefits of arts integration are magnified when they are employed consistently because students come to understand the norms and expectations that are unique in each context.

In addition to consistent cultivation, arts integration is most effective when it incorporates a wide range of activities from small to large. An arts integration activity of any scope provides benefits in and of

¹²⁴ Explore The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) for more information about a standards-based approach to Social and Emotional Learning, www.casel.org.

¹²⁵ Explore BSCS Science Learning for more information on the 5E Instructional Model, <https://bscs.org/bscs-5e-instructional-model/>.

itself, but by engaging with arts integration across multiple scopes students build on prior knowledge gained during an individual lesson in order to engage more deeply with the content in a large project.

Holistic Fine Arts Engagement

Arts integration is most effective when students engage with the fine arts in multiple ways. They should:

Create – Students express themselves or demonstrate learning through creating in the fine arts, drawing upon the learning from both their fine arts and foundation classes.

Investigate – Students research and examine the art forms, artists, and specific works to understand them and their cultural and historical context.

Witness – Students engage directly with works of art in performance or display and are given space to draw connections between everything they learn in school and the world around them.

At their root, the fine arts are about communicating and expressing complex ideas, which is an ability all teachers strive to develop in their students.

Embrace of All Fine Arts Disciplines

Arts integration is most effective when students work within all four fine arts disciplines (dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts). Each of the four disciplines provide unique opportunities to explore other content in a way that is only limited by the teacher's creativity and their access to complimentary fine arts expertise.

Support from Arts Specialists

Arts integration is most effective when teachers are both willing to engage in an art form themselves and are willing to seek out support from fine arts specialists on their campus (fine arts teachers) and within their community (arts organizations and teaching artists). Strategically working with a fine arts teacher or teaching artist to augment a foundation teacher's own understanding of the arts will enable those teachers to realize the full potential of arts integration. These other constituencies from the Arts-Rich Ecosystem bring specialized knowledge and expertise to the students in a way that can inspire and broaden a student's understanding of what is possible, both artistically and as a career.

Other Considerations

Career Satisfaction and Retention of Teachers

Many teachers find that integrating the arts in their approach to teaching renews their passion and helps them connect with their students. Bridging the fine arts and all other learning leads to new discoveries for the teacher and the student alike. It is especially rewarding for a teacher to experience the joy of a student as they master complex material with greater ease due to the new perspectives that arts integration offers. While some may find the prospect of something like singing or dancing daunting initially, the vulnerability that is required to learn these traits is a wonderful way to model lifelong learning and to grow. Campus leaders across the region have noted that they have observed renewed passion that positively affected teacher retention on their campus when they promote high-quality arts integration.

Foundation v. Fine Arts Classroom: Distinction by Location

Arts integration will function differently in a foundation and a fine arts classroom environment. It is important to acknowledge that teachers in each environment are responsible for distinct educational goals and come to their work with a separate set of expertise. Therefore, campus leaders should not evaluate the quality of arts

integration instruction based on a foundation teacher's mastery of a given fine arts discipline or fine arts teacher's mastery of foundation content as long as the information that is shared with students is accurate.

Instead of holding teachers to a high level of expectation in both areas, teachers should be encouraged to use arts integration as an opportunity to model life-long learning behaviors as they become more proficient in the areas that they may not initially possess expertise.¹²⁶ In a culture that often values mastery, opportunities for teachers to exhibit the vulnerability required to learn new artistic pursuits are rare and necessary to cultivate courage and creative risk taking in our students.

A Cautionary Note

While describing quality arts integration, it is also important to identify potential pitfalls. We must ensure that no teacher is held accountable for the learning objectives outside of their area of expertise. Their responsibility should always remain true to their primary subject. This distinction has important implications for how quality arts integration is evaluated in each setting. There is great pressure to prepare students to perform well on standardized tests and meet other accountability expectations. Literacy and math scores are highly valued in state accountability, which creates pressure to maximize the time spent on these important skills.

When a fine arts class becomes simply an extension of literacy or math instruction in the name of arts integration, we take away important opportunities for students to receive a well-rounded education. These scenarios do not meet Texas Administrative Code compliance because we are depriving fine arts teachers the opportunity to teach the required TEKS for their arts discipline and we miss opportunities to inspire the students to make meaningful connection between the subjects, blocking them from the kinds of activities that provide many the desire to become better mathematicians, readers, and writers.

In reverse, the situation is equally concerning. We should not use the concept of arts integration to satisfy the delivery of fine arts TEKS in a foundation setting. It is important that all academic subjects (including the fine arts) are taught by teachers that are both certified and highly competent in their given area, and that sufficient time is provided for students to master each standard. Foundation teachers, even if they are certified as a generalist at the elementary level, should not be teaching the fine arts unless they have a demonstrated expertise in that art form. Quality arts integration is not a synonym for quality arts instruction and any effort to make foundation teachers responsible for fine arts TEKS should be avoided.

¹²⁶ Lifelong Learner is one of the six competencies in the HISD Global Graduate Teacher Profile. Explore the HISD Global Graduate Proficiencies for more information, www.houstonisd.org/cms/lib2/TX01001591/Centricity/Domain/37172/documents/Profiles_and%20competencies.pdf.

Establishing a Fully Integrated Foundation Classroom

There are many ways teachers can embark on their arts integration journey:

Start Simply, Build Slowly Over Time

The biggest hurdle for some foundation teachers to begin utilizing arts integration is deciding where to start. The multitude of possibilities can overwhelm and provide an initial roadblock, so it is important to keep the process simple and not get overwhelmed by the possibilities.

Align with Established Instructional Goals

Another common entry point is the alignment with established instructional goals. For example, examining district curriculum documents while looking for fine arts connections or vice versa can provide the starting point for a new arts integrated lesson.¹²⁷

Connect with the Campus Priorities

Alignment with campus programs or initiatives that a principal identifies as a priority will ensure that campus leaders support the classroom efforts. Arts integration aligns naturally with many of these types of programs. For example, connections can be made with the curriculum from International Baccalaureate, dual-language, immersion, early literacy programs, social and emotional learning initiatives, and STEM/STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) programs.

Build from a Teacher's Personal Interests, then Expand to Focus on those of the Students

Engaging arts integration is often fueled initially by the teacher's interests. It is generally accepted that great art offers new discoveries upon multiple viewings or experiences, so arts integration can begin by simply allowing the fine arts and foundation subjects to simply live in the same space. Once the first connection is made, others will naturally follow. As the teacher becomes more comfortable, it is important to focus on the fine arts elements that drive student interest.

Partner and Collaborate

It is good practice to look at who is readily available to collaborate and build partnerships with those that have additional fine arts expertise.¹²⁸ Identifying that support—through fine arts teachers, teaching artists, and district administrators—can help focus where to begin.

Connections to the Bloom's *Taxonomy*

Approaching arts integration through the principles associated with what is commonly referred to as the "Bloom's Taxonomy" can provide a conceptual model for developing a fully integrated classroom. The idea that a student must have factual knowledge before they can build conceptual knowledge, and so on, is applicable to arts integration. A teacher cannot be expected to simply release students to create freely in the arts if the groundwork is not already established in both the foundation and the fine arts areas. Ensuring that students have opportunities to develop their understanding of an art form in their fine arts classes is critical to expressing increasingly complex ideas. Scaffolding for both the student and the teacher becomes a vital component of a fully integrated classroom and will help to ensure that developing artists see the growth in their artistic creations over time.

¹²⁷ Explore the HISD Fine Arts Curriculum or the Fine Arts TEKS to generate ideas and find curricular connections.

¹²⁸ See "Arts Integration: Partnerships and Collaboration" for more information, 212.

Arts Integration: Partnerships and Collaboration

Understanding arts integration as an approach that utilizes the unique expertise of different people is key to creating robust experiences that stretch both the teachers and the students. Drawing upon the strengths of others will open new possibilities and make the process of creating arts integration opportunities more enjoyable.

Unfortunately, collaboration between foundation and fine arts teachers can be daunting given the complexities and demands of campus schedules, while partnerships with outside organizations may involve funding or administrative coordination that stretches the capacity of a campus's resources. Thankfully, there are creative solutions to both issues. As a rule, foundation teachers should begin looking for support on their campus. Teachers know their students the best and the proximity can be invaluable when making necessary adjustments and adaptations throughout the process. Look to teaching artists and outside organizations to provide strategic support and expand the reach of the arts opportunities available to students beyond what is possible with the fine arts teacher's campus.

Aligning Campus Schedules to Encourage Collaboration

The demands of campus schedules often do not allow planning time to align between the fine arts and foundation teachers, but that does not mean that it is impossible to collaborate. Creative campus leaders can find ways to align planning time through Professional Learning Communities, occasional cover for classes with high-quality associate teachers, or creative use of other educational experiences like a physical education class, time in the library, or time in technology labs. Although regular planning is always preferred, there are campuses that focus on arts integration in the region and nationally that have found that even establishing a way for fine arts teachers to plan with the foundation teachers quarterly has proven beneficial.

Maximizing Partnerships with Outside Teaching Artists and Arts Organizations

Teaching artists and arts organizations expand the breadth of arts integration on a campus. On a practical level, fine arts teachers have regular responsibilities to lead their classes and cannot usually spend a full day working with directly in the foundation classrooms. Additionally, many teaching artists have unique specialties within their fine arts discipline and can complement the fine arts teachers on the campus. For example, if a given campus has a strong orchestra program, bringing in an jazz vocalist will expose the students to a different style of musical performance. Similarly, working with a photographer from one of Houston's arts organizations will offer greater access to different mediums of expression if the visual art teacher's specialty is in working with clay. There will also be times when an arts integrated lesson will require a specific artistic skill. For instance, a ballet dancer could more easily address how they use momentum and inertia in their routines in connection to a unit on mechanical energy than a lighting designer, but that same lighting designer could play a crucial role in the same class when they cover optics by examining a variety of stage lights.

Professional Development

In addition to internal professional development provided through HISD's Arts Integration Specialist, the Houston arts community also provides a wide variety of professional development for arts integration. These opportunities vary and the Fine Arts Department can help to connect individual teachers to the people they need. They can range from an hour session on a weekend during the academic year, a week-long residency during the summer, or year-long mentorship in the classroom. Arts organizations provide training both on arts integration and focused study on improving one's artistic abilities, which can be an enjoyable supplement for a foundation teacher who is looking to get more comfortable using fine arts in their classes.

Additional opportunities to extend professional learning occur in both region and national conference, like those presented by the Kennedy Center annually.

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