

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2016 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [ ] Title I [ ] Charter [X] Magnet [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Mrs. Kelly Douglas-Jackson

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Academy for Performing Arts

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1776 Raritan Road

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Scotch Plains State NJ Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 07076-2928

County Union County

Telephone (908) 889-8288 Fax (908) 889-1666

Web site/URL http://www.ucvts.tec.nj.us E-mail kjackson@ucvts.org

Facebook Page  
https://facebook.com/pages/Union-County-Technical-Schools-fan-page  
Twitter Handle http://twitter.com//ucvts Google+ \_\_\_\_\_

YouTube/URL \_\_\_\_\_ Blog \_\_\_\_\_ Other Social Media Link \_\_\_\_\_

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Mr Peter Capodice E-mail pcapodice@ucvts.tec.nj.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Union County Vocational Technical Schools Tel. (908) 889-8288

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board  
President/Chairperson Mrs. Jane Lorber  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.

## Part I – Eligibility Certification

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The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The public school has met their state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) using the most recent accountability results available for the year prior to nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, a public school must meet the state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) for the year in which they are nominated (2015-2016) and be certified by the state representative. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2010 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2015-2016) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 0 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 5 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 5 TOTAL

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
  - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
  - Suburban
  - Small city or town in a rural area
  - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2015 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	10	45	55
10	3	47	50
11	6	37	43
12 or higher	7	34	41
<b>Total Students</b>	26	163	189

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 3 % Asian
  - 16 % Black or African American
  - 23 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 52 % White
  - 5 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2014 – 2015 school year: 0%

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	0
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	0
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	183
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.000
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	0

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %  
0 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 10 %  
Total number students who qualify: 19

8. Students receiving special education services: 1 %  
1 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- 0 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 0 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 0 Other Health Impaired
- 1 Specific Learning Disability
- 0 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers	13
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	0
Paraprofessionals	0
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 14:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	95%	97%	97%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**  
Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2015.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	48
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	100%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.  
Yes    No X

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

The Academy fosters the discipline, integrity and passion necessary for students to succeed at the post-secondary level and as members of the performing arts community.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

Applicants must be Union County residents and currently enrolled in 8th grade in order to apply. The admissions process for full-time students at the Academy for Performing Arts High School requires applicants to attend one of five information sessions scheduled in the fall. Students must pre-register and attendance at an information session is a required step in the admission process.

In addition, students must submit an application and transcripts to the Admission's Office and take an admission's examination which includes two sections, Language Arts and Mathematics.

Applicants are selected from a diverse population of eighth grade students in Union County. The following criteria are considered for admission: Grades in Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies & Science (7th grade & 1st marking period 8th grade) and the admissions examination, (Mathematics & Language Arts).

Students applying to the Academy for Performing Arts interested in Dance or Theatre are also evaluated in an audition process. The district hires outside adjudicators to score students in all auditions. Auditions are only granted for applicants who have met the minimum academic qualifications and who have selected the Academy for Performing Arts as their first choice school.

## PART III – SUMMARY

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The Union County Academy for Performing Arts (APA) is an innovative four-year high school, immersing students in honors' level academics while training in a pre-professional artistic setting. The culmination of the program allows the student to complete their senior year by taking college-level courses receiving college credit at Kean University. Our students come to us from twenty-one different towns across Union County with strong academic abilities and a passion for the arts. These towns span from the urban to suburban areas and vary both culturally and economically. This diversity is truly an important part of APA where acceptance is celebrated. In addition, the Academy fosters the discipline, integrity and passion necessary for students to succeed at the post-secondary level and as members of the performing arts community. Our students are trained artists who understand the commitment and dedication required to do their best.

The Academy for Performing Arts was established just seven years ago. APA students major in dance, theatre or technical theatre and take classes in their majors every day. Through their experiences in the classroom they become confident artists who are prepared for the demands of the performing arts field. Our success is due in part the strong relationships we have with Kean University, the Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company, The George Street Play House, and a host of other resources that visit our campus to present master classes each marking period. Experiences like these keep our program, strong, innovative and unique.

Unique is the one word that describes us best. What is most unique about APA is the fact that our students attend Kean University during their 12th grade year. This means there are no APA students on the campus of Union County Vocational Schools (UCVTS) for their senior year. They are all at Kean University, taking college courses that they can utilize to advance their standings at Kean or transfer to another college. In order to prepare our students for college, students participate in a "Transition to Kean" program which is a series of workshops that help our students develop the skills they will need to deal with the demands of a college environment. It is not just our students who participate in the "Transition to Kean". Our teachers actively play a role as well as they constantly stress the importance of responsibility and character throughout the year.

Our school has a very competitive admissions process. Students not only have to pass an admissions test in order to get in APA, but they must also be selected through an audition process.

While attending APA, students are constantly working to improve their craft. Their commitment to excellence can be seen as they use co-curricular periods to practice scenes and work on student choreography. They are future actors, actresses, dancers, directors, stage designers, and so much more.

One hundred percent of our population have passed the vocational certificate portion of our program issued during their junior year, in addition to having a 100% passing rate on the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). Our curriculum not only focuses on advanced content, but also problem solving, project-based learning and writing across the curriculum. Our goal is to ensure that our teachers are constantly improving our curriculum. With this in mind teachers are given a curriculum period every day to update curriculum and develop new ways to help our students succeed. Our day is divided into a four-segmented blocks which alternates between an A/B day. This method of scheduling gives teachers the opportunity give more in-depth lessons. In addition, it gives students more time and support that they will need to become successful.

Our school does not only stress the importance of academic excellence. Our students' development as productive members of society is also well fostered at the Academy for Performing Arts. As a part of the APA graduation requirement, we expect all students to graduate with at least twenty hours of community service. Not only do we provide students with opportunities throughout the year to volunteer on campus, in addition we also encourage students to volunteer in their own communities. This combination of advanced academics and social responsibility helps our students gain the experiences they need to compete and succeed in today's society.

We encourage our students to take ownership of their academics. Students have the opportunity to self-advocate in co-curricular study sessions that are available for them each day. All APA students have the choice to either attend a club meeting or attend an extra help session for a thirty minute period, before or after their lunch. This helps students get the academic support they need to be prepared for college and it ensures their ability to take leadership roles in our society.

The accomplishments at the Academy for Performing Arts include being named one of News Week's Best Schools in 2013 and being named one of the Best High Schools by U.S. News in 2015. In addition, The National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium (NASDCTEC) selected APA as a recipient of the first annual Excellence in Action award in 2014. The award... "recognizes and honors superior Career Technical Education (CTE) programs from around the nation that exemplify excellence in the implementation of the Career Clusters and have a meaningful impact on student achievement and success."

## PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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### 1. Core Curriculum:

Our curriculum documents are dynamic; our teachers contribute to them regularly. Teachers have one curriculum period each day which is used to improve their curriculum. Once every five years teachers perform a major revision during a vertical articulation. Our curriculum documents are organized in units containing objectives, learning activities, assessments, pacing and resources. Each is designed to exceed state defined standards, which we believe provides the rigor that drives student success. Our English Language Arts and mathematics curriculum address the Common Core Standards. Our other curriculum address the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards as well as the Language Arts Literacy Common Core Standards.

In a unique agreement our seniors take all their classes at Kean University. Completing their senior year concurrently as freshmen in college at Kean is one of the main reasons for our overall curricular approach. We are preparing our students to be successful at Kean. We are proud of them and of what they have achieved. They fulfill their high school graduation requirements with success, and a number of them also earn a 4.0 in their college courses.

Our English Language Arts curriculum is comprised of World Literature, American Literature and British Literature. At each grade level, our students are engaged in the analysis of a variety of literary genres aligned with interdisciplinary history coursework. Our curricular approach was chosen to focus on thinking, speaking, and writing critically. One way our students acquire these foundational literacy skills is by using them in all their classes. In their senior year our students take College Composition and Research & Technology.

Our students take World History, United States History I, and United States History II. Our students acquire the foundational skills by learning the unit concepts side by side with the same time period that they are studying in their English Language Arts course. We have chosen this curricular approach in order to be able to teach history in an interdisciplinary way aligned with ELA and in order to address the NJ State high school graduation requirements.

Our students take Combined Algebra, Geometry/Trigonometry, and Math Analysis in their first three years. We have chosen this curricular approach in order to give all our students the opportunity to take calculus before graduating from high school if they so choose. For students performing below grade level, we offer Algebra II, which they can take instead of Math Analysis. In their senior year our students have the choice of math courses to take. Our students take a placement exam before entering their first year here. The results of this exam allow our teachers to identify the foundational skills acquired or needed for each student. Teachers can differentiate instruction in order to meet the unique needs of each student.

Foundational math skills are also acquired in our freshmen Scientific Data Analysis & Inquiry semester course. Students take this course along with is Biology, in their first year. They take Chemistry, as sophomores and Physics as juniors. In Scientific Data Analysis & Inquiry students learn data graphing techniques, how to write a formal lab report, measurement conversion, basic statistics and probability. Seniors can choose from a variety of lab science courses at Kean.

Our teachers help our students acquire foundational skills by including lesson activities that allow students to receive immediate feedback from their teacher and peers. Many lesson activities are designed to include elements of student choice which has been shown to improve student learning. In order to improve the skills of students who are performing below grade level we designed co-curricular periods for students attend extra help sessions with their teachers and meeting with peer tutors assigned to them through a peer tutoring program run by the National Honor Society in our school.

For students performing above grade level we provide opportunities for them to advance through our coursework at more rapid pace. Students take a placement exam in the spring before their freshmen year

and are then placed in the appropriate mathematics and world language courses. We also provide opportunities through-out their time here to advance through our courses through a process we affectionately call summer advancement.

Efforts to support college readiness include opportunities to prepare for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Testing (ACT) exam. We administer the ACT exam and the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) exam to all our students. Data from the results of these tests are used by teachers to formulate their annual Student Growth Objective goals. These goals influence their teaching. Efforts to support the career readiness of our students include senior internships, master classes with professionals in their field of study and opportunities to perform their craft to the community.

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

All of our students take a course in their vocational area of study, Dance or Theater, every year. These classes meet every day for an 83 minute block. As a reminder all other classes meet every other day for 83 minutes. By meeting every day we provide concentrated study for our students in the performing art of their choice.

For the students who choose Dance, their coursework is comprised of Dance I, II and III and in their senior year Technique & Theory of Ballet, Technique & Theory of Modern, Technique & Theory of Jazz and Dance Styles. In Dance I, II and III our students study both the theories and practical application of technique in dance. The students' skills are developed through routine technique classes as well as viewing dance and analyzing its theories and applications. The dance teacher serves as both facilitator and mentor to the students.

For the students who choose Theater their coursework is comprised of Theater I, II, and III and in their senior year Advanced Scene Study, Performer's Presence, Improvisation, and Dance Musical Theater. Theater I, II and III consists of acting technique, dramatic theory, theater history, technical theater, and theater as business. These skills are scaffolded between grade levels so as to prepare students for both what will be expected in college and also in the career world beyond. This is accomplished by building upon hard work, knowledge and experience from the previous year. This helps our students acquire the essential skills they need.

Our Dance and Theater teachers set the tone to create and maintain a non-judgmental atmosphere which supports risk taking, enables higher level thinking skills and comfort in exploration and growth.

During their first three years our students complete one marking period of Health and one marking period of Fitness each year. During their sophomore year the marking period of Fitness uses Project Adventure apparatus. Students learn how to work as a member of a team, develop leadership ability, and improve their problem-solving skills. This program challenges the students to push themselves out of their comfort zone when performing various fitness activities. The Health marking period curricula varies by grade level. Freshmen learn about topics such as nutrition, eating disorders, chronic diseases, and sexuality. Sophomore health addresses character education, decision making, self-esteem, suicide prevention, stress management, alcohol and drugs. Junior health addresses Pregnancy, Childbirth, Driver Safety, Organ and Tissue Donation.

All of our curriculum rely on the advantages using technology offers. Our district is in its second year of a one-to-one technology initiative. Starting in 2014 every freshman student is issued a school owned and maintained Chromebook for use in their studies here. In our theater classes students use MacBooks and film editing software. In our ELA and History classes students use Chromebooks and the computer lab to do research. In almost all our classes our teachers and students use Google Classroom on daily basis. Our students readily use technology at every opportunity and our teachers have found many effective ways to incorporate that willingness into their lessons.

All our students study a foreign language for their first three years here. Our students begin their course sequence based on the essential skills they have acquired before coming us. Placement into their Spanish

course is based on an exam students take in the spring semester before their freshmen year with us. We offer Spanish I, II, III and Advanced Placement Spanish Language and Culture. In Spanish I essential skills are acquired through a focus on listening and speaking. Reading and writing are introduced slowly. Our Spanish teachers have taken advantage of the district's one-to-one technology initiative and have introduced e-books. With this digital approach students can work at their own pace to acquire essential skills in listening and speaking.

All our students take two marking periods of Financial Literacy during their sophomore year. Our financial literacy course is an example of how our students meet graduation requirements in innovative ways. Financial Literacy is taught through an online course. The course is taught by on-site district teacher and utilizes Money U and Edmodo as instructional venues and the foundation for online discussion.

### 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Our teachers use various instructional approaches and methods in order to provide different ways for students to address their goals and meet higher expectations. Many times scaffolding is used with different instructional approaches used at each level. Instructional strategies used at the lower levels, are implemented to give knowledge and to assess student skills before moving on to higher levels. With an 83 minute block, teachers can plan a variety of activities within one lesson. A typical lesson in a math or science class starts out with a short lecture, then moves on to guided practice in small groups while the teacher circulates and provides immediate feedback to students. The teacher transitions to a cooperative problem-solving activity that often involves at least one open-ended and/or higher level thinking question.

Our English curriculum and History curriculum are aligned by time period allowing for one of our best examples of interdisciplinary teaching, our "Speak Easy" project. This cooperative learning activity allows our junior students to research and play the part of an important individual from the early 1900s. The culmination presentation is a full day event where an audience of students and faculty can enter the world of that time period. Originally created by another high school in our district, this project is fully embraced by our students due to their love of the performing arts.

In many of our classes, and specifically in our Theater and Dance classes, our teachers include in their lesson activities student designed rubrics for high quality work. This enables our students to better monitor their own progress and invest themselves even more in their learning.

In addition to our teachers being available to students for extra help during co-curricular periods, our teachers provide videos and power point presentations on their Google Classroom sites so that students can revisit lessons as often as they need. Our teachers are experienced and successful at providing challenging activities that allow students to work at their level, above or below grade level, alongside their peers. In one example, our freshmen and sophomore history teachers did a series of lessons using team teaching. The lessons involved preparing for and participating in a formal debate about gun control. Students researched individually, formed their group based on their opinion and formulated talking points and response working cooperatively.

### 4. Assessment for Instruction and Learning and Sharing Assessment Results:

At the Union County Academy for Performing Arts (APA) assessment is always a big topic of conversation. From the teachers' first day back in September until the end of the school year, teachers and administration are looking at and using data to inform decisions. Incoming freshmen take two written exams, and audition before being accepted into our school. The Admissions Test assesses mathematics and English skills and is used to determine standing among other students who apply to our school. The Placement Test, written by our teachers, assesses mathematics and Spanish skills. It is used to determine course placement for freshman year. Our freshmen teachers analyze the data from these tests and use the results to create a Student Growth Objective used to guide and evaluate their teaching. Our dance teachers use the audition results to form the freshmen dance groups in order to strengthen skills in subgroups of students. Our Combined Algebra teacher uses the data to carefully plan her lessons in order to focus on the pre-algebra skills individual students are lacking. She also uses that data along with test results early in the year to

request intervention for individual students who are performing below grade level.

We use standardized test results, PSAT, ACT, PARCC, NJBCT (New Jersey Biology Competency Test) to evaluate ourselves as a school, and form school-wide goals. In addition our Physics teacher uses the data from the PSAT results to create his Student Growth Objective used to guide and evaluate his teaching.

In our Theater and Dance classes students do daily and a weekly self-assessment in the form of journal writing. The teacher and student use this to monitor progress and focus on essential skills.

Our school uses PowerSchool with a parent portal, and email to share assessment results with stakeholders. Teachers update their e-gradebook at least once every ten days. Stakeholders receive e-notifications when a gradebook is updated and can immediately log on to see the details that provide the context of the grade entered. At the midpoint of every marking period teachers enter comments in narrative form in addition to number grades which provide meaning to the number grade. Our teachers also send email messages and make phone calls to parents/guardians when grades are high, or below passing or show a significant decrease or increase. When appropriate, the message also includes interventions being offered to their child to help them improve.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Motivating students is a task that our teachers take seriously. They work together at faculty and grade level meetings to come up with innovative plans to make sure our students are challenged and supported. Our teachers have common planning time as well. They use this time to constantly look at data with their peers to find ways to help students make the improvements they need to be career and college ready.

Our students attend college classes a year earlier than their peers so we prepare them by teaching them to advocate for themselves and accept responsibility. It starts during the first few weeks at school. Students are introduced to our co-curricular periods which they can participate in every day. During these thirty minute time slots, they have the ability to attend extra help sessions in any field of study that they might need. In addition, because students come from twenty-one different towns it is quite helpful that they are able to hold meetings during these co-curricular periods. Our students have the opportunity to get the academic help needed, and the ability to participate in clubs during co-curricular periods. This scheduling benefits our students because it makes it possible for them find a balance between academics and social responsibilities.

Our teachers understand the need for this balance and they work hard to create an environment that encourages positivity each day. You hear it during announcements. You see it as you look at bulletin boards that boast of upcoming events. You even see it in the pride that our custodian takes in making sure our building is clean and ready for the business of the day. The Academy for Performing Arts is more than just a school. It is a family that constantly works to make sure our students succeed. There are teachers available across campus to help them prepare for exams or read over a papers. Our students learn quite early that we have resources right on campus to help ensure their success.

To support our growth and encourage positively, we have established a leadership committee that meets every other week to discuss school culture and community outreach. This leadership group consists of all of the presidents and vice-presidents of every organization in the school. The committee meets with the principal and teaching supervisor twice a month to try to implement changes that will ensure the success of all students who attend the Academy for Performing Arts. The committee plays a vital role in helping APA consistently evaluate the culture of our school. In addition, it helps to ensure that our students are not only academically challenged, but are able to have opportunities to build character and become leaders.

The administration values input from our students, families and teachers. We have a steering team that works with our Middle States Coordinator to implement goals that will help the program grow. We also have a school improvement committee that gathers information from teachers to help plan professional development opportunities that are valuable for staff. Our school creates a culture that celebrates and values our teachers.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

The Academy for Performing Arts High School has a Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSO) that is actively engaged in supporting our students and the needs of our program. The organization supplies parent volunteers for field trips, Relay for Life and special performances. The PTSO works with the principal to constantly communicate the goals of the program on a regular basis. At our Back to School Night the PTSO is there to discuss important information with parents and sell spirit wear. They also play an important role in supporting our dance and theatre program with funding for bussing, master classes and refreshments for every performance. The principal and supervisor attend every PTSO meeting to discuss school events, student concerns and other valuable information. In addition, the PTSO works with the program to help assist with Town Hall Meetings where the principal and superintendent answer questions. Communicating with parents is an important part of the success of APA. In addition to attending the PTSO meetings, the principal communicates information to parents through the website and a weekly newsletter.

As a part of a vocational program our school also has an industry advisory board that helps the program make decisions that will best impact the students. Our board consists of college professors, teachers, students and professionals in the performing arts field. We meet several times per year to evaluate the program and listen to suggestions to make improvements. For example, we used recommendations from the Advisory Board as we developed our newest program, technical theatre. The group worked with us to come up with suggestions for staffing, equipment and curriculum that would help make our program thrive.

Since the Academy for Performing Arts is a public vocational high school, the district holds five fall information sessions for the community each year. At these sessions each academy makes a presentation that outlines their programs. The presentations also outline assessment data, including test results and college acceptances. In addition, potential students are taken on building tours to learn about the Academy for Performing Arts experience. At the information sessions, perspective families receive a school profile pamphlet that is updated yearly and submitted with college applications. The profile provides the statistics from previous classes, test results and information about our students' course sequence. This information can also be found on our website.

Our assessment scores are not only presented through information sessions, they are also presented at the PTSO meetings and presented annually to the Board of Education. Students are recognized at the board meeting when their assessment scores and high achievements earn those awards. Parents are kept aware of these scores because APA mails individual score reports to parents for state tests such as the PARCC and the New Jersey Biology Competency test (NJBCT).

### 3. Professional Development:

The Academy for Performing Arts professional development program gives our teachers the opportunity to create their own professional development goals. Teachers are asked to come up with at least three goals each year. These goals include a plan that supports student achievement. For example, the world literature teachers and the world history teachers develop plans to work collaboratively on various projects throughout the year. The projects require that the two disciplines work together to establish lessons and formal assessments. At the end of each year, teachers meet with building administrators to review the professional development goals they have created.

In addition, the district has hired a professional development coordinator who helps plan opportunities throughout the year. The coordinator sends out a survey two to three times per year asking staff members about what their professional needs are. Then the coordinator organizes professional development for the district. For example, every February teachers have the opportunity to attend at least four rotating workshops on topics such as google classroom and PARCC. Teachers have the freedom to sign up and attend workshops that will help them.

There are other workshops offered after school throughout the year run by teachers. The district allows teachers to research and develop their own workshops to present to their peers. Teachers who present are paid for their services. Teachers are notified about the professional development opportunities through emails and My Learning Plan which is the software used to assist teachers in keeping track of their hours. The software also makes it easier for administrators to monitor teacher professional development. Our professional development program through MyLearning Plan is aligned with the New Jersey State Standards and our district goal. Workshops cover topics that help teachers stay current with NJCCS and high stakes tests like the PARCC.

The district supports teacher development through professional development opportunities including the newly established "Teacher Leaders" program established to help teachers educate teachers about the ways to implement PARCC style questioning tools. Teacher leaders help research and develop workshops for their peers which are presented during discipline meetings. By providing teachers with time to collaboratively develop assessments, teachers are better equipped to give students the tools they need to succeed. Last, the Academy for Performing Arts is also in the process of developing academic and achievement goals for the Middle States Accreditation process. These goals are aligned with many of the professional development goals of our school.

#### 4. School Leadership:

The Academy for Performing Arts leadership team consists of a principal and teaching supervisor. The leadership philosophy is that the school administrators cannot achieve their goals without the support of the stakeholders. These groups include teachers, students, parents, support staff and the community. Each of these groups play a key role in the function of the Academy for Performing Arts. They help the school set realistic goals, make valuable decisions and act as resources for school improvement.

Students, parents and teachers can easily access the administration because there are only two members that are full-time administrators. They find it easy to set up appointments to communicate their needs or concerns. Even though we only have a principal and teaching supervisor located in our main office, we also have a curriculum coordinator, who helps monitor all curriculum changes and needs each year. This person reports directly to the principal and keeps track of when curriculum should be revised or written. The coordinator views edits and additions to all APA curriculum and then gets the documents approved by the Board of Education at the end of each year. The coordinator also ensures that the curriculum is revised every five years.

In addition, a student activities coordinator helps to maintain the building calendar of events. This position includes keeping track of all activity approvals and funds available for each club. Our Student Activities Coordinator works closely with club advisors who lead organizations like, the dance club, National honor Society, music club, and Relay for Life. Advisors organize student elections and help in monitoring the selection of student boards each year. The boards who are elected make important decisions for their organizations.

Stakeholders are a key element of our success. In order to ensure that we are having meaningful discussions with all stakeholders, APA has a school improvement team which includes the administrators and one teacher. This group meets several times per year to identify professional development needs. APA also has established a leadership council with the administration and all of the presidents and vice-presidents of all of the organizations. These group meets for the purpose of looking at school-wide activities that would benefit the program. This year the group decided to dedicate more time to creating opportunities for our program to do more community service for the community we live in.

The leadership at APA understands the importance of involving stakeholders in decision making therefore, the program is constantly looking at ways to communicate to those impacted. In addition, APA uses Town Hall meetings, PTSO, leadership and school improvement meetings to get the valuable feedback they need to make improvements for today and the future of the program.

## Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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At the Academy for Performing Arts, students take the ACT Aspire exam during their freshman year and the PSAT during their sophomore and junior years. Every year the administration meets with each discipline to review the data and establish classroom practices that will help to improve student scores in the future. Teachers work on teams to look and trends in the data that indicate what students are really successful at and where there needs to be a more guided effort. With that in mind, we have all of our teachers make a commitment to writing more in the classroom. We developed a Writing Across the Curriculum initiative that required that all teachers give students the opportunity to write in response to non-fiction literature throughout the year.

To be more specific, the English teachers shared resources on using MLA format in every class. Teachers were given rubrics used to score standardized exams to help them stay consistent. The expectation is that all APA teachers use the rubrics across the curriculum so that students are receiving the valuable feedback they will need to make improvements. In addition to analyzing the data from our standardized tests to help drive instruction, we also use the information from the test to identify students who need extra help. For example, students who are unsuccessful on the PSAT were given a mandatory math or English help session during co-curricular. Teachers are able to work with small groups of students to provide assistance. Students get the individual and small group practice they need to be successful on future tests. These sessions last between six to seven weeks.

Lastly, all Academy for Performing Arts classes are taught at or above grade level. Instruction is modified to differentiate in a way that actively encourages each child to reach his/her potential.