

# *U.S. Department of Education*

## *2018 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program*

[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Dr. Carise Comstock

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

Official School Name Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 321 East 3rd Street

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

<u>Bethlehem</u>	<u>PA</u>	<u>18015-1309</u>
City	State	Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Northampton

Telephone (610) 868-2971

Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Web site/URL http://www.charterarts.org/

E-mail ccomstock@charterarts.org

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\*Ms. Diane LaBelle

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)    E-mail dlabelle@charterarts.org

District Name Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts Tel. \_\_\_\_\_ (610) 868-2971

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 Mr. Mario Acerra

(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. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2018 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. 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 2012 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: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, or 2017.
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 has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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 (2017-2018) 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
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 1 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
  - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2017 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
<b>PreK</b>	0	0	0
<b>K</b>	0	0	0
<b>1</b>	0	0	0
<b>2</b>	0	0	0
<b>3</b>	0	0	0
<b>4</b>	0	0	0
<b>5</b>	0	0	0
<b>6</b>	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	32	123	155
<b>10</b>	35	125	160
<b>11</b>	35	121	156
<b>12 or higher</b>	36	120	156
<b>Total Students</b>	138	489	627

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 2 % Asian
  - 8 % Black or African American
  - 12 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 72 % White
  - 6 % 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 2016 – 2017 school year: 6%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain.

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, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	15
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	20
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	35
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	600
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.06
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	6

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: 33 %  
Total number students who qualify: 210

8. Students receiving special education services: 8 %  
50 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.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>3</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>17</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>27</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>1</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4
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	4
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	48
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	5
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	6

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 13:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	93%	93%	93%	93%	93%
High school graduation rate	99%	99%	98%	98%	96%

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 2017.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	116
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	59%
Enrolled in a community college	8%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	20%
Found employment	12%
Joined the military or other public service	2%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes  No

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 Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts provides a unique environment that fosters a creative, rigorous, academic approach to learning and a development of talents in the arts. Built on passion, discipline and a commitment to excellence, this integrative educational experience inspires all students to believe in who they are and in what they can accomplish.

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

Any student who resides in Pennsylvania who is entering 9th, 10th, 11th, or 12th grade is eligible to audition for acceptance into the Lehigh Valley Charter School for the Arts (Charter Arts). An “academically blind” audition process bases acceptance upon talent and potential in their art major. This process brings a diverse group of students into the artistic studio and academic classrooms. No students are rejected due to academic weakness. A waiting list for each grade and artistic major is created based on a rubric score determined at the time of the audition. The registrar contacts the appropriate people on the waiting list in the event of an opening at that grade level and major.

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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Charter Arts is a regional charter high school for the arts attracting students from a twelve-county area in eastern Pennsylvania. In 2017-2018, Charter Arts serves 627 students from forty-seven school districts. Students audition for acceptance into one of seven artistic majors: dance, theatre, visual art, literary arts, vocal music, instrumental music, or figure skating. Charter Arts' unique arts-centered curriculum pairs pre-professional training in the art major with a rigorous core academic program.

Charter Arts is based on the vision of a group of dedicated individuals from the Lehigh Valley who recognized the need for a school to serve creative young people. A Board of Directors was formed in 1996 representing business, educational, and artistic leaders.

Charter Arts held its first classes in 2003 with an enrollment of 267 students. For twelve years, Charter Arts was located in part of a renovated warehouse that lacked natural light, proper HVAC systems/controls, and support spaces needed for the school's emphasis on the arts. Despite the challenges and limitations of the rented facility, Charter Arts succeeded at creating a distinct culture to serve and nurture young artists who look at life from a creative viewpoint. Charter Arts embraced a philosophy of inclusion from its inception which carried over to the new facility and continues today. Students are recognized for being their unique selves allowing them to focus on learning instead of trying to "fit in."

A tradition that is dear to our alumni and embraced by students is that of receiving a single rose on the first day of class and again at graduation. Borrowing the custom of giving flowers to actors, dancers, and figure skaters after a performance, students receive a flower that may symbolize their significance as an artist. This tradition began when Charter Arts opened its doors for the first time in 2003. The entire school appreciates the rose tradition even when the flower petals, leaves, and bits of stem litter the hallways, sometimes escaping from lockers days after the first day of school. Faculty, staff, and students view this as evidence of the special nature of the tradition.

While Charter Arts opened in 2003, the school's new, state-of-the-art, LEED Gold-Eligible building opened in September 2015. The 91,000-square foot modern facility was designed to support a comprehensive education in the arts with innovative studios spaces and various performance venues, including a 350-seat theatre at the heart of the building. The new facility is considered by the community to be a significant milestone in the continued redevelopment efforts in Bethlehem's South Side arts and entertainment district. The new school is located in close proximity to other arts organizations and educational institutions, allowing for innovative collaborations.

Charter Arts is unique in that a student's artistic experience extends beyond their artistic major. Our students meet high expectations - artistically, academically, socially and emotionally - because their artistic strengths are carried into everything they do. As students experience success in their art classes, on stage, in studios, and performing in the community, they transfer that success to their core class work. Students are impassioned, motivated, and appreciate their time at Charter Arts. They learn self-confidence, develop discipline and a focused work ethic. The inclusion of art in every aspect of their education allows students to experience success they might not otherwise achieve in a traditional educational setting.

To support our unique learning environment, our school schedule is customized to allow students to spend three hours every day in their artistic major. Students also have the opportunity to study with our esteemed faculty outside of their major through elective coursework. For example, a visual art major spends three hours in major and may take electives in dance, theatre, etc. throughout the day in addition to meeting their core credit requirements (English, math, science, social studies, and world language).

Core subject and artistic teacher teams have revised and integrated the curriculum to include the arts and to meet PA Core Standards and other artistic standards, such as the National Standards for Music Education. Additionally, as a Title I Targeted Assistance school, we have established a tiered intervention support system for students who are academically at-risk of not meeting state standards and graduation requirements in English, math, and science. This tiered system ensures that all students have opportunities to succeed by

providing individualized tutoring and skills support.

In 2016 and 2017, Charter Arts was identified as a Title I Reward School for high achievement, placing us in the top 5% of all Title I schools in the Commonwealth of PA. Charter Arts was selected to present at the PA Improving School Performance Conference in both 2017 and 2018 Presentations focused on ways in which school leadership and classroom teachers have impacted and increased student achievement at Charter Arts from 2013 to present, resulting in a school performance profile (SPP) score of 89.2 in 2017.



## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum:**

Charter Arts' unique arts-centered curriculum pairs pre-professional training in an artistic major with a rigorous core academic program based on the Pennsylvania Standards Aligned System (SAS) and the PA Core Standards. To meet the academic needs of our unique student body, Charter Arts offers core classes in English, mathematics, social studies, and science with levels from college preparatory (CP) to honors and advanced placement (AP). As a Title I Targeted Assistance School and based on local criteria, including but not limited to basic and below basic state assessment scores and failing course grades, students who are at risk of not meeting the states rigorous graduation standards are also eligible for supplemental remediation instruction in English, mathematics, and science.

#### **Reading/ English Language Arts:**

The English Department curriculum provides diversity of literature with an emphasis on the human condition. Students will be prepared for lifelong engagement with oral and written communication beginning with an introduction to the foundations of language and literature, followed by studies in American and British literature. The curriculum builds language skills sequentially from freshman through senior levels. In addition to CP and honors courses at each grade level, Charter Arts offers two AP courses available to juniors and seniors. The integrated writing/literature-based courses introduce, develop, and refine students' skills in all aspects of the writing process including literary analysis essays, personal essays, creative, and research writing. In addition, developmental skills in close reading and analysis are approached through the study of both fiction and nonfiction texts that center on the genres of short story, poetry, novel, drama, essays, speeches, memoir, film, etc. A major emphasis is placed on the development of critical thinking and analytical writing skills through class discussions, collaborative projects, and written communications. Students have the opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary studies by examining history, culture, and art alongside the literature they read. The main goal of the department is for students to have daily opportunities to hone the five literacies necessary for cogent and concise communication: listening, thinking, speaking, reading, and writing.

#### **Mathematics:**

The mathematics curriculum stresses the importance of meeting and addressing the diverse needs of all students with a wide span of mathematical courses from Algebra 1 through the rigors of differential and integral calculus in a college level AP Calculus BC. All courses align with the PA Core Standards, which include four standard areas: Numbers and Operations, Algebraic Concepts, Geometry, and Measurement, Data, and Probability. These standards offer a balance among conceptual understanding, procedural skills, and problem solving with an emphasis on applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges. In all courses, students employ high level thinking to solve multi-step problems in authentic scenarios, often through the support of collaborative activities and interactive technology.

#### **Science:**

Our science department places a heavy emphasis on the scientific method, problem solving, investigation, collaboration, and scientific writing. All students complete a foundational year of biology in ninth grade as they prepare to take the Pennsylvania Biology Keystone Exam. Sophomores enroll in Environmental Science and then select from offerings including Chemistry, Physics, Astronomy, Anatomy & Physiology, and AP Biology. Students often dual enroll in science courses beginning in the sophomore year to work through the full science curriculum. All science courses include regular laboratory work and are designed to prepare students to take more advanced science courses at the collegiate level. Students often show their mastery of content knowledge in artistic ways, for example through creating science videos or plays.

#### **Social Studies:**

In an effort to prepare all students to become productive citizens, our social studies department has developed curriculum ranging in scope from Western Civilization to United States History (USH) and American Government. In our USH courses, curriculum is organized by themes rather than chronological order, such as oppression and women's rights. This change in curriculum allows the focus to be on a

conceptual understanding of history over time rather than on memorizing specific facts and dates in order and is important as we expect students to make informed decisions in a culturally diverse and democratic society. Beyond the four-year required curriculum, students have the opportunity to investigate the study of both psychology and sociology.

#### College and Career Readiness:

The guidance department employs a consistent, student-centered approach that supports each individual's growth and pursuit of their goals. This commences in the freshman year when students are enrolled in a seminar, which addresses: transitioning into high school, self-exploration, and career opportunities. Additionally, students learn how to match personal interests with satisfying career options by using Naviance, college and career readiness software, to identify their strengths and interests and align those to postsecondary goals. Further, school counselors support students with tasks such as completing job and college applications, resumes, scholarship and FAFSA forms. Charter Arts is currently developing curriculum for two new required preparation courses, college and career prep and financial literacy. In 2017, of the graduating class of 116 seniors, 110 students pursued higher education and/or artistic training, receiving \$4.1 million in grants and scholarships.

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Charter Arts offers seven artistic majors where students apply theory to practice as they are critiqued by teachers and peers in order to grow as artists. Students audition individually to be accepted to Charter Arts, and after enrollment, students are challenged individually. Motivated and dedicated students may be offered additional opportunities for performances and exhibitions outside of the classroom.

Dance majors have daily 90-minute ballet and modern technique classes where they learn self-discipline, physical control, properly executed alignment, and technique. As students' abilities mature, they demonstrate increased individual artistic expression through musicality, quality of movement, and choreography. Senior dance majors attend the National High School Dance Festival annually where students earn dance scholarships for post-secondary education.

Similarly, students enrolled in figure skating engage with a curriculum focused on challenging individual students in technique and performance. Students perform in three school shows per year to showcase their growth and talent. Charter Arts has a partnership with the Ice Theater of New York where students receive master instruction by coaches and elite-level skaters in the field.

Literary Arts majors explore the relationship between literature, reading, writing, and performance of the spoken word while honing their craft and producing works in various mediums. Students analyze and write critically and creatively, experimenting with their own creative voices in the construction, production, and performance of original works. This intensive program provides students with a rigorous curriculum rooted in the creative process.

Instrumental and vocal music majors are immersed in music theory and history and are challenged with technique classes for their individual instrument and vocal parts. Students are required to participate in ensembles and choirs to round out their performance experience, and in 2016-17, our music departments participated in over 90 performances at our school and within the local community. The Touring Choir is nationally recognized and will perform at Carnegie Hall in May of 2018. The Touring Choir earned a gold medal at the 2012 World Choir Games, which was the highest award for a high school choir at the prestigious international event.

Our theatre department offers a pre-professional program and provides students with classes designed to encourage students to create imaginative and compelling characters, to regard their voices and bodies as creative instruments, to expose them to theatrical literature, and to instill in them a sense of respect and professionalism for the art form that will stay with them throughout their lives.

In visual art, students draw, paint, sculpt, design, and study art history. Courses inspire students to begin to perceive connections between art and other subject areas, and through practice, study, analysis, reading, and

research, they learn to apply discernment to the art they create. Students showcase their work in our school's Corpora Gallery and invite the public in monthly as part of a community-wide "First Friday" event.

Charter Arts currently embeds nutrition within each artistic major as it pertains to that particular artistic area. For example, in dance, students study their bodies, health, and wellness. In Figure Skating, students study injury prevention, nutrition, and conditioning.

As part of our required curriculum for all students, our Health and Wellness course, which will launch in 2018-19, will focus on improving the whole self and will engage students in conversations about healthy living and the consequences of risk-taking behavior, including, but not limited to, the use, misuse, and abuse of drugs and alcohol and sex education. Students will explore the availability of mental, social, and emotional resources within their local communities, and they will research and debate national health policies and legislation and the impact of these policies on society.

Students have the opportunity to explore three languages: Spanish, French, and Chinese (Mandarin). The mission is to provide 90% target language instruction in all courses from levels one through Advanced Placement (AP). Using task-based assessments, students demonstrate progress in communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and community as identified by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). By level four, all students reach ACTFL Intermediate-Mid proficiency level and will be able to converse in lengthy conversations in the target language.

Through the use of Google classroom, students are able to utilize Chromebooks, Chromecasts, and an online resource library to collaborate in and outside of the classroom and deepen their understanding of their artistic craft. Students within all majors have access to the EBSCO online research platform.

Charter Arts uses Classroom Diagnostic Tools (CDT), a set of online tools that provide diagnostic information. CDT assists teachers in identifying students' academic strengths and areas of need, allowing them to target specific learning issues.

### **3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:**

Our mission at Charter Arts is to provide a unique environment that fosters a creative, rigorous academic approach to learning and a development of talents in the arts. Built on passion, discipline and a commitment to excellence, this integrative educational experience inspires all students to believe in who they are and in what they can accomplish. Thus, we strive to provide rigorous, standards-aligned instruction in all courses to ensure that students are always challenged.

We know that our creative students are eager to learn in unique ways and are not motivated by a basic lecture-style approach. Therefore, classroom instruction is structured to meet students' needs and utilizes their artistic disciplines to better understand content in all areas. For example, when learning about figurative language in English class, students select song lyrics, annotate the figurative language, and illustrate the language and mood with their own drawings. In dance, students study and research ancient forms of movement, and rather than take a test, students have to recreate the Greek pyrrhic dance, or war dance. In math class, students use real-world experiences and turn them into word problems to solve, such as needing to calculate how much paint to order when preparing to paint our murals on the exterior of our new building.

Charter Arts teachers monitor student learning throughout the year using student learning objectives (SLOs), and this continues to be at the forefront of departmental discussions and professional development. The expectation is that all Charter Arts teachers will monitor student growth and/or content mastery using teacher created assessments in a particular class (of their choosing) three to five times a year as a way to benchmark and track student learning. English, math, and science teachers also use Classroom Diagnostic Tools (CDTs) to track student growth and mastery. School leadership supports teachers with analyzing Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS) teacher reporting, making specific accommodations for students, adjusting instruction, improving curriculum, etc. During professional development, teachers share and collaborate, challenge one another, and provide each other with

constructive feedback so that they can improve instruction. This formative process ensures that teachers are tracking student learning throughout the year rather than waiting until the students take the summative state Keystone Exam to know if students have mastered content and were able to meet state requirements.

When teachers identify that a student may need additional supports in order to achieve success, they recommend the student to our Student Support Team (SST). This team reviews each student's current grades, attendance, discipline, etc. to determine what supports might be most helpful, and the SST may provide intervention recommendations for the student as a result. These interventions may include suggestions for classroom changes, such as a change of desks, but could also include supports ranging from after school tutoring to a permission to evaluate for special education.

One specific intervention, which has proven successful as evidenced by our Keystone Exam scores, is our workshop model. If a student has participated in a core class, such as biology, algebra I, and 10th grade literature, and is unable to earn a proficient score on the Keystone Exam, they are enrolled in a workshop course the following year. In tracking the data for these students enrolled in Keystone Workshops, students are growing on average between 15 and 20 scale score points in biology and algebra and over 30 points in literature in one semester. While this is enough to move some students to proficiency, others continue to need additional support. These students have a third tier of intervention available to them which is called the Project Based Assessment course based on subject-specific content. This course provides a smaller teacher to student ratio in which teachers model curriculum content more specifically for students as needed. This tiered-intervention model works! For example, last year in 2017, out of an 11th grade class of approximately 165 students, only a small portion were still considered not proficient - 8 in literature, 17 in biology, and 28 in algebra. This focus on remediation and attention to providing individual students with instructional support as needed has been one of our keys to success.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### **1. School Climate/Culture:**

Upon acceptance, Charter Arts students commit to artistic and academic growth and achievement. By tapping into the intrinsic motivation that drives students as artists, and offering unending support, our faculty helps students meet our high expectations.

Charter Arts utilizes a team approach to ensure a culture and climate focused on student success. Our Student Support Team (SST), meets weekly and includes our in-house school psychologist, three guidance counselors, two grade level assistant principals, the student services liaison who addresses student attendance and truancy, director of special education, school nurse, athletic trainer, and principal. This team discusses concerns in the following areas: academic and social-emotional, medical, and discipline and attendance and makes recommendations for testing, in-class interventions, and further referrals for counseling when appropriate. Charter Arts also has an active Student Assistance Program with eleven trained staff members offering support through a referral-based program.

Informally, school administrators, counselors, and teachers meet with students and engage in communication with families, ensuring prompt responses to student needs and concerns. We believe that if students can feel safe and heard, they will partner with us to sustain positive school culture.

Charter Arts students come from disparate cultural backgrounds, households, and educational programs. Prior to arriving at Charter Arts, many students experienced bullying and were often underappreciated for their talents. Students may enter with low self-esteem, fear of the unknown, but hope for a different learning experience and a more nurturing environment. Once enrolled in Charter Arts, students gain self-respect as their talents are developed, appreciated, and rewarded. With this self-respect comes a thirst for knowledge and an increased interest in the arts and academics. Students approach learning in ways that foster questioning, problem solving, and critical thinking. Art becomes the vehicle for developing the self-confidence they need to successfully embrace college and self-advocate for their future.

An organizational goal of Charter Arts is to create a 21st Century Learning Experience. One of the ways we achieve this is through using the community of Bethlehem as a campus for learning: Charter Arts students perform, work, and volunteer in the area. Students give back during the year through community and global efforts such as raising money for the Haiti Health Relief Fund, pediatric cancer, breast cancer, and the NAACP. Student Council also organizes twice yearly blood drives by arranging for the Blood Mobile to come to the Charter Arts campus.

Charter Arts facilitates faculty committees that help shape processes and procedures for the school; shared decision making is a part of our culture. For example, this year, our new student handbook committee recommended the adoption of new student expectations schoolwide: Be Safe, Respectful, Responsible, Professional, and Creative. This motto has helped all faculty and staff hold students accountable this year and has improved the way we interact with students, helping to build a more positive learning environment.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

Charter Arts is located in the arts district of South Bethlehem; our community is our campus. This philosophy encourages students to be fully involved as positive community citizens.

Charter Arts students have been performing, working and volunteering in the community throughout the school's existence. Our students perform at local venues including: Cafe the Lodge, Godfrey Daniels, Touchstone, ArtsQuest/SteelStacks, Hotel Bethlehem, Moravian Village, local schools, and PBS39. Performances in the community bring diverse families from a twelve-county region of PA into the heart of Bethlehem. These opportunities provide our students with professional experiences and give our neighbors a chance to see our students as contributors to the greater good of the community.

Charter Arts offers special programming for families to educate parents. For example, our guidance department hosts college readiness programs annually, and our local community partner, the Center for Humanistic Change, helps our parents stay up-to-date on social topics that are relevant like drugs and alcohol, school safety, and social media.

Recently, we held a special event for school stakeholders and local community members entitled School Safety: A Collaborative and Proactive Approach. Our keynote speaker, Dr. Peter Langman, is a national expert on the psychology of school violence and the parent of two Charter Arts alumni. After his presentation, we facilitated a panel discussion with Dr. Langman, the local chief of police, our school CEO, principal, and school counselor and licensed behavioral therapist. The discussion was driven by questions submitted by attendees before and during the event.

Our school has an active parent association which works to raise funds and support the school through multiple annual events, including a Bingo Night, Fashion Show, and a Spring Gala. Student involvement is key for each of these programs. For instance, 13 of our students displayed fashion designs alongside professional designers at our annual Fashion Show this year, while over 100 students participated by walking the runway and producing the show. Additionally, parents volunteer within each artistic department.

Charter Arts is viewed as a community partner for many local organizations and serves as a unique resource center and venue for various events. Organizations frequently host informational sessions for the community, such as the Community Action Coalition of the Lehigh Valley which provided residents with an opportunity to learn about neighborhood improvement projects, including basic home repairs and the creation of pocket gardens and community green spaces. Other community collaborations include partnering with organizations that serve individuals with disabilities to provide special opportunities to view student performances and rehearsals.

Charter Arts also offers a unique educational program for adults called the Venture Academy organized by professors from neighboring Lehigh University. This program encourages lifelong learning and is open to all adults in the community.

### **3. Professional Development:**

Charter Arts' school leadership sets high expectations and asserts that both student and teacher learning are of utmost importance. To that end, teachers participate in three full curriculum work days throughout the year to allow teachers time to focus on data analysis and curriculum development. In addition, every Wednesday students are released early so that teachers have common time to work and collaborate. Summer workshops are offered on a rotating basis for each department where teachers are paid to collaborate and analyze student data, review current instructional practices, develop common assessments, and adjust departmental curriculum to meet students' needs where the data identified gaps in learning and achievement.

During the summer workshop series data is reviewed at all levels. Meetings start by reviewing broad, schoolwide data, and then the principal breaks it down for teachers by subject area, grade level, teacher, class, and individual student proficiency by anchor standard and module. Transparency is key, and teacher names are associated with scores during these discussions. The principal continues to work on engaging teachers in data dives so that teachers can share best practices with one another, ensuring improvements for all students. For example, when one teacher shows greater gains on a particular anchor standard than another teacher, both teachers are encouraged to discuss what lessons and class activities may have yielded different results so that they can improve instruction based on what works. As a result of these data discussions, curricular improvement within departments, and pedagogical improvements in the classroom, we have seen a dramatic increase in student achievement. For example, in 2013, only 42% of 11th grade students were proficient in biology, and in 2017, 89.4% of students earned a proficient or advanced in biology.

Teachers also participate in a week of back-to-school professional development prior to students starting

each year. Charter Arts' administration conducts surveys to determine the various professional learning needs of faculty and adapts the weekly sessions according to identified needs. Charter Arts encourages all members of the staff to attend conferences and workshops outside of school on a regular basis.

Our teachers are leaders in their field, and 100% of our artistic faculty members engage in professional endeavors outside of school, including performing, directing, and coordinating arts programs. These real-world experiences help our teachers provide students with lessons that are based in both theory and reality.

#### **4. School Leadership:**

As a charter school, the leadership structure includes a Board of Directors whose members are selected through a nominating committee. At Charter Arts, a Board of 9-15 members is responsible for hiring the Executive Director/CEO and the oversight of school policies. The Executive Director/CEO is the driving force behind the vision and strategic plan and works closely with the principal and administration to maintain focus on the overarching goal of student success. The strategic planning process occurs every five years with a committee consisting of Board members, faculty, staff, alumni, and parents.

Research regarding school leadership and continuous improvement contends that principals should be responsible for establishing continuous improvement and data-based collaboration. At Charter Arts, we believe that school leaders have the ability to improve student learning indirectly by improving organizational capacity such as human, social, structural, and fiscal capital, and by challenging teacher beliefs, knowledge, values, and instructional practices. This concept is supported by the Consortium on Chicago School Research and the framework of essential supports for school improvement (Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, & Luppescu, "The Essential Supports for School Improvement: Research Report," Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2006). This framework was created based on data collected by a longitudinal study of Chicago Public Schools and identified the areas in which school leaders must focus their efforts if they want to see sustained school change, i.e. improved student outcomes. The five essential supports include leadership, ambitious instruction, professional capacity, parent community ties, and student-centered learning climate.

Charter Arts school administration focuses on each of these five essential supports and instructional leaders monitor instruction, track student academic progress, work to provide the space and time necessary for teachers to work collaboratively to plan instruction with other teachers, and provide ongoing coaching and support as necessary. Building teacher capacity is not a one-time event, and we work to embed organizational systems and structures into our annual routine to allow for multiple opportunities to improve teacher learning throughout the year. For example, our school principal hosts subject-specific data dives with teachers each summer. These conversations support teachers in reflecting on what instructional practices worked and what may still need improvement and have been a major driver of continuous improvement and increases in student achievement since 2014 when this work began.

In addition to building our organizational and teacher capacity, we also lead by example. Charter Arts' leadership regularly reviews available school-wide data and makes adjustments as needed. We conduct student, staff, and family needs assessments to plan strategically for school improvement. We engage community stakeholders and infuse arts into curriculum as we know that when students are passionately involved in what they do, they achieve success. Our increase in student achievement was not an accident. It is the result of strategic, instructional leadership impacting organizational systems and structures to allow space and time for teacher collaboration, which impacts teacher learning and instruction and ultimately student learning.

## **Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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The success of Charter Arts is based on differentiated instruction. This key strategy provides different students with different avenues to learning. By focusing on the individual needs of students, Charter Arts faculty is able to reach a population from disparate backgrounds with diverse educational needs. Students are provided with the opportunity to focus on their individual artistic passion, allowing teachers to identify individual strengths and target instruction to lead students to success.

At Charter Arts, we do not draw a line between our artistic areas and core classes, concentrating on one set of skills when it comes to our students' majors and another in math, science, history, language, and elective studies. We believe that contemplation and planning, reading and writing, collaborative projects, self-assessment and peer-critiquing, and revision is a valuable process that spans all studies and the development of artistic expression. Our classes in artistic majors aren't just about mastering a grand jete or learning how to play harmonic chords. And an English class, for example, isn't only about novels and essays. Assignments in all majors focus on the core requirement of evidentiary-based support to prove their thesis and basis for understanding, incorporating important critical-thinking, synthesizing, and communication skills, often blurring the lines between performing and presenting.

For instance, vocal techniques study the historical content and the analysis of poetry/character and include literature preparation. Dance and figure skating vocabulary culminates with an explication of technique and reflection of performances. A theatre class explores character motivation and focuses on comparing and contrasting authors' works across various genres. An English or American Literature class assigns an explication of a work of art - whether a masterpiece or an original - inside a literary movement or offers the option of choreographing a dance that is emblematic of a literary theory, with written explanation. A social studies class creates an original score of a historic event. Figure skaters transform scientific processes and physics into movements on ice. Building on each student's intrinsic motivation and strength of their major helps them to be successful across all disciplines, programs and plans created and delivered by our dedicated staff with the intent of removing any borders and boundaries that impede the goal of earning a well-rounded arts-and-humanities education and erasing any notion that learning is "different" depending on the subject area.

Further, we put into practice the standard that every assessment must meet the same academic rigors across curriculum and are made along a comparable yardstick. Because whether our students continue with a formal education, pursue a professional artistic endeavor, or choose a different path, our practice of a holistic approach to skills-based learning across all Charter Arts curriculum fosters a successful transition to life after high school and prepares students for any field they choose to enter.