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# National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

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EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

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**Lusher Charter School**  
**New Orleans, Louisiana**

## **Transcript: Building Culture and Enriching Learning through Art**

**Kathy Riedlinger, CEO, Lusher K-12 Charter School:** Lusher is a public school in uptown New Orleans, and it has had a reputation in the community for being a program that values diversity that has created a culture of kindness and that offers an amazing academic program that integrates the Arts.

**Therese Fitzpatrick, 1st Grade Teacher:** We have a lot of musicians and artists visual artists photographers and we work intensely with those specific artists to come into the classroom and help us enrich our curriculum.

**Kathy Riedlinger:** At the beginning of the development of this program. I had to really pull on some teachers to get them to take the artist and eventually what happened was I started having more and more teachers ask for the artists as word got around how much the kids liked it and how much the teachers were learning. It became an instructional tool and it became a way for students to learn very valuable things about curriculum and about learning. They learn to take risks. They learn to work collaboratively. They learn to innovate. **Narrator:** Reaching their current level of success took time and a commitment to preparing students professionally and academically.

**Patricia Ruf, 4th and 5th Grade Teacher:** I think the most important thing I've learned over the years was learning that I wasn't limited by anything other than my own curiosity. I didn't have to know how to play an instrument or dance or, or create wonderful sculptures, but I could go consult with artists and I could learn along with the kids that there's an academic side to Art and an artistic side to academics and I think that that really was what allowed me to embrace all of this on a daily basis

**Kathy Riedlinger:** Arts were not an add-on. The Arts were integrated not just in lesson planning but in status within the building, so we have leadership teams and we have them at every level artists are on the leadership team and they help us make the decisions and they have input into what we say. Let's talk about standards in both the Arts and academics and how are we going to prepare our kids for what's facing them?

**Mamae Hingle, K-5 Visual Arts Teacher:** So this morning I got to go and do an exciting project with the fourth-grade science teacher and the students have been learning about erosion and weathering and what are some forces of nature that can make different landforms less susceptible to the forces of erosion.

**Casey Hurstell, 4th Grade Teacher:** And so it really is I like bring the science. I like print out for Mamae all of our standards and then she just looks at it as like oh, like here are a whole bunch of ideas

**Mamae Hingle:** We're using a process called sand casting where they make an impression in wet sand and then they pour plaster of Paris into the sculpture.

The kids had sort of a shop of reinforcements whether it was chicken wire or twigs or adding more sand and as a team, they had to make hypotheses about how adding or not adding some of those materials could make their final sculpture less susceptible to the forces of erosion and weathering

Then we're going to arrange them Outdoors for several weeks to see how the forces of weathering rain wind water affect the features of the sculpture.

**Casey Hurstell:** I know my students are learning because I see how engaged they are with this process. I see as they're adding plaster to their molds. They're having conversations with on another: Oh, when do we stop putting in plaster? When do we add the chicken wire? When do we add the sticks? And then through that conversation I can tell they're really thinking and engaged in the science aspect of making this art.

**Steve Corbett, High School Principal:** I think one of the most important things to take away is that Arts integration can occur at any school. I think it's about leveraging the resources that you have outside in your community, but also recognizing that there's probably members of your staff that have talents. It's about providing a space where they can pursue those and it's about allowing teachers to take risks.

They don't need to force arts integration but instead create opportunities for students where they have the ability to do that and I think when our students have that ability, they'll start creating things that are pretty special.

**Rohan, High School Senior:** So because the school gives you so much freedom and what you want to do. They told me about their engineering program with NASA but also their certificate of artistry program for a specific art form. So I was able to do both, and I'll graduate with two different areas of concentration.

If someone were to ask me if this is just an art school, I would tell them no, it's not just an art school. It's a school that's got excellent Arts, but it has equally excellent academics and they really go hand in hand.

I find that people are generally try to put you in a box but Lusher has told me to respect myself and my own values and say break that box do both theater and engineering and anything else that you might want to do.

**Kathy Riedlinger:** Lusher is a school where a student can come and thrive regardless of the level of their talents. We'll use the Arts when we're happy when we're sad when we want to explore things when we want to celebrate. There's nothing like the arts to build a culture.