

<https://www.kvue.com/article/news/community/austin-isd-opens-first-fine-arts-academy-for-elementary-students/269-260160996>

COMMUNITY

Austin ISD opens first Fine Arts Academy for elementary students

Blackshear Academy hopes to attract more students with creative learning, fine arts programs

Author: Quinita Culpepper and KVUE (KVUE)

Published: 6:22 PM CDT August 26, 2014

Updated: 6:22 PM CDT August 26, 2014

AUSTIN -- Imagine a 6-year-old learning about the works of Shakespeare. It's happening at one Austin elementary school that caters to the fine arts.

Those hoping to attract more students to the new Blackshear Fine Arts Academy say it will help kids foster an early appreciation for the arts and keep them in the classroom.

This year, the East Austin campus is rebuilding and re-branding as the Austin school district's first Fine Arts Academy for elementary students.

"Every single teacher here at Blackshear Academy is using creative learning techniques in the classroom," Yesenia Herrington, AISD's Creative Learning Initiative Coordinator said. "So not only are the students getting science, math, reading, writing, but they're actually getting it in an engaged way through the arts. And when students are engaged in the arts, they're less bored in class and that translates into higher graduation rates and higher test scores. And teachers have fun."

Over the years, this neighborhood school has had some of the lowest enrollment numbers in the district. That's changing, as more and more Austin parents begin to transfer their kids here.

"Our projections for this year was listed at 212 as of yesterday we were at 277," Principal Betty Jenkins said.

Regular classes go on as usual until 1:30 p.m. The rest of the school day is devoted to the arts. The children take creative dance from teachers at Ballet Austin, and they'll compose and record songs, as well as create full-length theater productions.

With activities such as choir, orchestra and art available to every child, Jenkins says the Academy opens up a new world for so many of her students. "Last year we ended at 97% low socio-economic status which means 97% of our students receive free or reduced lunch," she said. "For many of them it is the only opportunity they will have to participate in a structured sequential fine arts program."

The district hopes more artists, businesses and organizations will step up to help the kids use their creativity in the classroom and enrich their academic lives.

Blackshear Fine Arts Academy is still accepting transfers from across AISD.