

New West Charter School Model Programs and Practices

School Information

CDS (County District School) Code: 19756636120158

County: Los Angeles

District (Local Educational Agency): SBE - New West Charter

School: New West Charter

Demographics

Enrollment: 875

Location Description: Urban

Title I Funded: No

School Calendar: Traditional

Charter: Yes

School Overview

The mission of New West Charter School is to provide an academically rigorous, highly individualized education for 21st Century students in grades 6 – 12. We are proud to serve 875 students in middle school, high-school, and hybrid-online learning programs. In the decades to come, personal success will require increasingly high levels of competency, independence, and self-reliance in an ever changing, ever more complex society, whether individuals choose to manage their own businesses, work within public or private organizations, or raise families whose children will face the same challenges. New West will produce competent, independent, self-reliant students by creating a learning environment that promotes academic excellence and strong character development as the antecedents for success in college preparatory high school programs.

New West Charter School is founded on the following precepts:

A rigorous core curriculum that provides a strong foundation in reading and language arts, mathematics, science, and history and social science, supplemented with diverse enrichment opportunities in world languages, visual and performing arts, physical education and health, and information technology;

A robust program of community service and extracurricular activities designed to have maximum synergy with the academic program;

Clearly defined and closely monitored performance standards that assure progress toward the school's educational goals in full compliance with all applicable state standards;

A cooperative community of parents and educators that shares responsibility for the school's governance, operation, and educational program in the best interests of the school's students;

A goal of a small student body, taught in classes as small as resources permit (we aim for 30 students or less per class); and

A personal learning environment that both encourages and challenges each student according to his or her ability through differentiated instruction within an integrated curriculum.

New West maintains high expectations for all students and believes every young person is entitled to a rich and varied curriculum. The overall approach is to positively reinforce success and to create opportunities for students to demonstrate their strengths. All students are provided the support needed to meet the Charter School's desired exit outcomes for academic excellence, character development, and life skills. The Charter School commits to narrowing the achievement gap between all student subgroups, socioeconomically disadvantaged and non-socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Model Program and Practices

Name of Model Program/Practices: **Becoming a Versatile Artist**

Length of Model Program/Practices: 5-8 years

Target Area(s): Performing Arts

Target Population(s): ALL STUDENTS AT NEW WEST CHARTER; American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Filipino, Hispanic or Latino, White, Two or More Races, Socioeconomically Disadvantaged, English Learners and Students with Disabilities

Strategies Used: School Climate, Parent Engagement, Social/Emotional/Behavioral Support, Professional Development, Implementation of Academic Standards Basics, Health Support

Description



The High School Dance Team performs for their peers at the Welcome Back Rally in August 2018.

The Performing Arts program is an integral part of the instructional program at New West Charter School. The program offers all students opportunities to express themselves creatively through public performance, original choreography, student-created choreography, and original music compositions. The department is comprised of several disciplines that include various levels of dance and music from grades 6 through 12, therefore, giving all students an opportunity to participate in the arts program. The program prides itself in its ability to provide an environment of learning in a safe, fun, nurturing, and supportive atmosphere to encourage students to appreciate, respect, and enjoy the arts. New West Charter School's performing arts program develops students that become well-disciplined and detail-oriented, not just in the arts, but in all academic and elective subject content areas. Students explore the techniques of a wide range of exemplary role models that allow them to develop their own artistic processes.

Innovative instruction in the performing arts program is provided by New West teachers Brittney McBride and Larika Clark, who are professional world-class dancers, and musician/composer, Joseph Cooper. Coach McBride is the middle school dance director and has been teaching dance at the middle school level for 11 years at New West Charter. She has been a professional dancer for over 20 years and was a member of the professional tap company, "Rhapsody in Taps" for 2008-2014. The high school dance director and department chair, Larika Clark, has 11 years of teaching experience at the high school level. In addition, she was a professional dancer for 15 years, spending her professional dance years touring with Britney Spears and Usher, and performing at Disneyland. Joseph Cooper, the music

director, has spent the past decade working as a freelance composer for film and television, as well as for chamber ensembles, concert bands, and marching bands.



Brittney McBride



Larika Clark



Joseph Cooper

New West's performing arts faculty is unique from other performing arts teachers due in part to their multifaceted training and dynamic real-world experience. Coach McBride, an experienced and passionate dancer also studied saxophone. Coach Clark has numerous years of training in theater, and Mr. Cooper has 10 years of dance training, performance, and show design. The New West performing arts faculty have experience in multiple areas of performance that allow them to draw from practices in other disciplines that greatly benefit their respective classes and effectively collaborate as a team.

The performing arts are a dynamic tool for teaching and learning in all core subjects and a highly-effective method for making learning engaging. Learning to perform develops self-esteem, builds identity on campus, and teaches kids how to express themselves to cope with everyday adolescent challenges. Our goal is to expose students to creatively use the tools given to become a versatile artist. A versatile artist has the following qualities:

- Knowledge of multiple performance disciplines (music and dance)
- The ability to accept and use criticism for growth within the discipline from peers, workshop instructors, and teachers (critiques)
- The willingness to accept failure and an understanding of how to overcome obstacles (audition processes)
- Rehearsal and performance etiquette
- Open to experiential and creative processes
- The desire to go beyond what has already been achieved

Implementation and Monitoring

Dance



High school Dance Team students perform in the Spring Concert at Barnum Hall in Santa Monica in May 2018.

The dance department is organized by a skills-based assessment/audition at the end of each school year to place students in the correct level. In the middle school grades, students can advance through classes at the Introduction, Beginning, Intermediate and Performance Team levels. Likewise, in high school, we offer students the chance to grow through Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, and Dance Team classes. All dance students, in every level, receive an opportunity to explore various dance styles such as Jazz, Ballet, Contemporary, African, Tap, and Hip-Hop. Exploration of the various dance styles creates opportunities for students to expand movement vocabulary and become a versatile artist.

The emphasis in becoming a versatile artist starts with our daily routine. When students walk into the dance room they begin with the *First Five*, which provides them an opportunity to independently practice basic dance foundations, such as balance, body alignment, flexibility, and core strength. This takes place within the first five minutes of class to mentally and physically prepare the mind and body for the lesson.

Once students are mentally prepared for class we then begin our warm-up and stretches. Warm-ups teaches students to prepare the body to execute the physical requirements of dance. We focus on cardio, core building (abs and glutes), and increasing flexibility. Warm-up can be an individual or group activity. Individual options provides a time for students to focus

on specific flexibility goals and personal growth. Group option gives students time to learn new exercises from each other (during student led warm-ups) or to increase knowledge from our instruction. We believe this part of the class is important for students to understand the discipline and focus to prevent injury and increase longevity.

Technical skills are practiced daily after the group warm-up is completed. We begin with this section of class by introducing our *All Stars* of the day. *All Stars* lead technical skills across the floor and is used as demonstrators for their peers. The skills that are practiced daily are turns, kicks, leaps, jumps that are essential to all dance styles. *All-Stars* creates leadership, dedication, and understanding of technical skills within a student and establishes a class incentive to be chosen as an *All-Star*.



Middle school dance students work on choreography in January 2018.

Once technical skills are practiced, students combine those skills into a combination or sequence. Dance teachers create short combinations that combines all the technical skills that were taught within one particular lesson. This practice checks for understanding of the skill, and their ability to execute the combination with fluidity and detail.

To solidify a strong dance foundation, partner peer critiques are essential. We often partner struggling learners with advanced students in mixed-ability groups so they can receive the proper critiques to continue to practice and master the technical skill. The critiques are formed

into a *Compliment Sandwich* which consists of a positive comment, an area of improvement, and a challenge to push to achieve a future goal. Students tend to benefit from this practice to help elevate their peers and also show a further understanding of the skill.

Once the technical skills are reviewed, an expression activity with either choreography and/or improvisation is practiced. In our program, communication through movement is highly stressed. Students use this time to showcase their abilities to communicate a specific theme, idea, or emotion through choreography and improvisation. Specifically, dance teachers are looking for performance qualities, which entails facial expressions, movement execution, body alignment, and detail of technique.



Middle school Performance Team members practice a routine in the dance studio in January 2018.

Our classes conclude with a group discussion called *Bring It In*. During this time, we discuss with students what they need to work on at home, and the skills they will work on in class the following day. We reiterate the unit learning outcomes and how we are going to achieve them. Students are able to ask questions, and draw conclusions about the lesson and themselves. Growth is the goal and is a continuous focus throughout our daily lessons and unit plans.

In conclusion, the emphasis on becoming a more versatile artist encourages students to acquire different dance styles, explore movement, creatively think outside of the box, and encourage peers to develop their artistry. We encourage a safe environment for all students to freely and creatively portray ideas through movement. Producing art builds self confidence at the middle and high school levels, and motivates students to achieve higher expectations.

Music

High School Ensemble performs a Winter Concert at Pepperdine University in December 2018.

Each ensemble from middle school through high school follows the same daily routine. At the beginning of each class, students warm up as a group. This primes students for the rigorous musical workout that they are about to engage. Following the warm-up, the entire class works on at least one technical exercise. This exercise is always linked to something in the repertoire the groups are working on. Whether it be the key of one of the pieces, a difficult rhythmic pattern, or a tricky interval, it is essential that this exercise leads toward the repertoire. Finally, students work on key points of the repertoire for the remainder of rehearsal. The overall theme of this standard of practice becomes repetition. Not only is it important for students to achieve a skill, but each student can reproduce the skill at the same level in subsequent events.

The entire program is built from a ground-up approach starting in sixth grade. Incoming students that have not yet started any musical training can start in Beginning Band, Beginning Strings, Percussion Ensemble, or Vocal Ensemble. These early entry point courses introduce the students to basic performance skills in their respective disciplines. Students that have prior performing experience from elementary school or private lessons have the opportunity to audition for Intermediate Band or Intermediate Strings. Additionally, those ensembles are filled

with seventh grade students in their second year of music training. Once students enter eighth grade, they begin preparations for the level of performance required in high school. At this stage, all string, wind, percussion, and vocal musicians are combined into a large chamber ensemble. This group trains students in the techniques of contemporary music at a very early start by thrusting them into new levels of musical independence and cooperation.



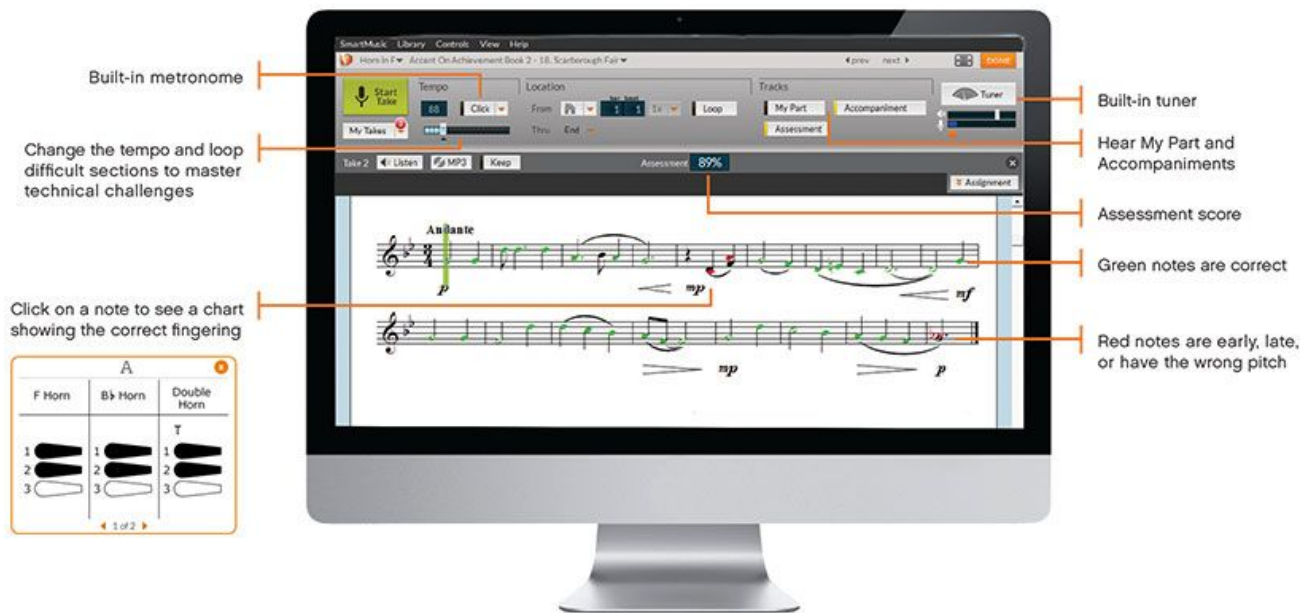
The High School Ensemble performs at a school-wide assembly in December 2018.

Young students spend the entire school year performing music composed specifically for the group's instrumentation that is tailored not only to their skill level, but to effectively push them toward more advanced techniques and skills. Once a student reaches high school, they remain in this setting while performing at an advanced level. Compositions are again created specifically for the instrumentation and student ability.



Middle school flute players prepare for the Winter Concert at Moss Theater in Los Angeles in December 2017.

The music department utilizes SmartMusic as a tool for both formative and summative performance assessments of students. SmartMusic aids students not only in learning their music at home, but effectively learning how to practice through the use of visual aids. As shown in the example below, SmartMusic can help students achieve high success in pitch and rhythm accuracy through the system's non-biased audio assessment of a student's performance. Notes that are correct turn green whereas incorrect notes turn red. This gives students that have untrained ears the ability to see errors that their ears did not know were being made thus becoming a much needed visual aid.



SmartMusic is a large portion of how students are graded in the music department, currently comprising 40% of their grade, with at least one assignment due every week. It becomes an essential extension of the classroom directly into the student's home because learning how to practice is essential. Not only does a young musician have to learn how to make sounds and read music, they also need to self-diagnose problems and correct them, which is impossible for a beginning student to comprehend without any prior knowledge. SmartMusic is the tool that helps bridge the gap between classroom rehearsal and home practice and is provided at no-cost to all students. It is necessary for students in the music program to understand from the beginning that the bulk of the work to become a strong musician is completed outside of class and rehearsal time is used to introduce and refine techniques as a group. This approach creates two positive effects and one of those benefits aids in classroom management. When students have taken the necessary time to work on the skills needed to contribute to a productive rehearsal the class can move at a faster pace. It also has the potential to alleviate

any performance anxiety with their peers. If students have taken the time to do the work on their own, they can successfully reproduce it in the classroom.

Due to the continued growth of the music department, the high school curriculum will be expanding at the start of the 2019-2020 school year. Students will have the opportunity to audition for the premier music ensemble named the *New Music Ensemble* which will serve as the musical flagship for the department with the goal of travelling and performing contemporary music around the world. Students will also have the option of being placed in the *New West Ensemble*, a group that will function to perform more at school events and concerts, and finally, the *Concert Choir* will be available for those students that want to perform in a strictly choral ensemble.

Results and Outcomes



Mr. Joseph Cooper's view as he conducts the middle school ensemble in December 2017.

Over the past four years, the dance program has grown from 30 middle school students to 220 students with the expansion of the high school. Meanwhile the high school music ensemble has nearly quadrupled in size over the past four years due to the high retention of eighth graders remaining in the music program into high school. For example, in the 2015-2016 school year, only 14% of the students in ensemble were ninth graders. Today, ninth graders fill 68% of the class roster.

New West administration is fully supportive and well-versed in the impact of a thriving performing arts program. The executive director and vice principals not only ensure that the programs remains as a central curriculum choice for students from year-to-year, but continue to ensure essential funds are allocated to ensure the programs continue to grow. The administrators observe and evaluate the performing arts departments twice a year. These evaluations are not only useful for the administration to check on department growth and well-being, but for the staff to remain in pursuit of department goals. The administration team allows the staff to reflect on personal and department areas for growth and helps teachers create plans to achieve those goals. The performing arts faculty meets at a minimum of twice a month to discuss department specific needs and goals. The music director and both dance directors also hold seats on the Leadership Team which includes all grade level and department leads, who meet the first Wednesday of every month with the administration. Frequent teaching and administration collaboration ensures that the performing arts department works together not only to effectively teach the entire student body, but thoughtfully supports the large population of students who are identified as English Learners, students with disabilities, and students that are Socioeconomically Disadvantaged.



The middle school dance room at Pico opens its garage-style door for a performance in January 2019.

New West's administration also provides the music and dance teachers with the opportunity to set their own goals. The teachers thrive on the opportunity to continually learn and surpass prior achievements. The LCFF funds allocated through the New West Charter LCAP ensures that teachers are able to attend professional development conferences in their specific content areas. Last year, the dance directors traveled to New York to attend workshops on various

styles at The Broadway Dance Center. In addition, the music department is currently working on a two-year action plan to perform out of the country by Spring 2021, which includes performing out-of-state by Spring 2020.



Middle school percussion students find their rhythm in December 2017.

New West has been a part of the school education partnership program with the Wallis-Annenberg Foundation and Dorothy Chandler Theater for the last two years. This partnership provides students an opportunity to attend two live professional performances per year. The Wallis Theater also provides bus transportation for all of our students. Each year, over 100 students provided donated tickets to attend professional performances such as Alvin Ailey, Diavolo, and the Chicago Hubbard Street Dance Company. All students participate in a Q&A with the performers. These experiences will continue to inspire students to create and produce their own works of art.

The dance studios and music room are available to all students to rehearse, and record during nutrition, lunch, and before or after school. This also gives an opportunity for students to support each other through their creative processes. Staff openly assists students with college applications by writing recommendations and preparation for video and live auditions. The staff fully supports students to explore numerous performance opportunities whether it is at college, professional, or commercial level.



The music room at Pico opens its garage-style door for a back-patio performance in January 2019 (left). Dance students during and after a performance at the Pasadena Pumpkin Festival in October 2018 (right).

Giving back to the community is always at the forefront of the performing arts department. In the past five years, the New West Dance Teams have participated in the Pumpkin Festival at Kidspace Children's Museum in Pasadena, California. Students volunteer to provide entertainment for the 2-day event. All proceeds benefit all Kidspace programs, which provides free and reduced price admission for nearly 80,000 children and families from underserved communities.

Both the dance and music programs have state-of-the-art rehearsal spaces for students to learn and thrive. The middle school and high school dance studios have a rebound floor with marley flooring and a fully mirrored wall. The middle school music room has a fully equipped space that also serves as an outdoor performance space with the aid of a glass garage-style door on one wall. The high school music room is the largest room at the Armacost school site and the music department fully takes advantage of the space.

Though New West does not have their own large performance space for concerts, the department utilizes area concert halls for large performances including Knott's Berry Farm,

Staples Center with the Los Angeles Clippers, Barnum Hall at Santa Monica High School, The Moss Theater at New Roads, and most recently, Smothers Theater at Pepperdine University. Concerts are open to the general public and are performed to capacity crowds on a regular basis. Most importantly, the **students of the performing arts department are encouraged to do what they love most** which is to perform for their peers on-campus during lunch, assemblies, and after school.



High School Music Ensemble performs for their friends at a Spring Rally in May of 2018.

The performing arts at New West not only serve as a creative outlet, but for many students as a much needed emotional and social outlet. For some, the overnight competitions, field trips, and performances are events that they may have not previously experienced and look forward to participate and create new experiences. The department works diligently to ensure that all students are able to experience these opportunities, regardless of physical abilities, race, and socioeconomic status. For many students, performing arts electives are what they look forward most to in their school day and serve as motivation to participate to the highest level of their abilities. Through our performance programs, students become versatile artists through multiple course offerings, peer and faculty critiques, a leveled program achievable through auditions, a strong work ethic, numerous creative outlets, and the ability to surpass expectations.

New West has focused significant LCFF funds directed at specific and targeted LCAP goals which are designed to underscore impact of the visual and performing arts programs offered at our school. (Ref: State Priorities, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 and 8 as per EC sec 25060 and 52066) by ensuring we are committed to *“Developing an Identity Built on Academic Rigor and Individuality and Effectively support the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in all core subjects and elective subjects”*.



Middle school students perform in the Spring Concert at Barnum Hall in Santa Monica in May 2018.

The success of New West’s performing arts department and their specific continued focus on model practices in “**becoming a versatile artist**” results in students developing strong traits of rigor, individuality, performance and competence. We wholeheartedly believe such model practices, refined over years, contributes to distinguishing us from other schools in Los Angeles and has a direct impact on a wide variety of attainment levels achieved students at New West.

The California Department of Education’s Dashboard measures indicates trends related to achievement standards within the California Accountability System. A review of specific accountability measures that include College and Career Readiness, Academic Attainment and Graduation Rates from Fall 2018 illustrate that New West Charter students in both our middle and high school programs, far exceed the achievement and performance standards of most of the comparative middle and high schools within the local school district of Los Angeles Unified.

In conclusion, over many years we have found that teaching our students to **become versatile artists** makes a sustained and powerful difference to their overall achievement standards and sets them on a clear path for success in school, college and career. Most importantly these model practices are very thoughtfully designed to be impactful for every student who attends our school. The examples below provide a brief insight of our versatile artists in action.

- (1) The New West Charter high school's New Music Ensemble in their 2017 Spring Concert performance of [*Daydreaming*](#) by Joseph Cooper at the Moss Theater.
- (2) The dance department faculty, choreographers, and students performing [*This Is Us*](#), a promotional video created to showcase the new Pico campus.