

RENAISSANCE ARTS ACADEMY
2019 CALIFORNIA DISTINGUISHED SCHOOLS SIGNATURE PRACTICE
Schoolwide Design for Ensemble Learning:
Flexible Groups in a Multi-Age Open Classroom

For the past 16 years, RenArts' faculty, administration, students, families and board have worked together to create and refine a cohesive pedagogical environment and practice that supports schoolwide student success through ensemble learning. Key elements include: Open Classroom, Faculty Teaming, Multi-Age Groups, Differentiated Instruction, and Ensemble Culture.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: The RenArts school facility is a renovated warehouse in Northeast Los Angeles. The interior is an open plan with a spare industrial layout: brick, wood, concrete, and high ceilings with exposed beams and ductwork. Minimal walls enclose music and dance studios for sound containment. Studios are on the periphery and visible to the central room through large windows and glass doors. Instructional groups meet at mobile learning stations throughout the open classroom, each group visible to the community and in relationship to the other groups in the shared room. Furnishings are simple, practical and easily rearranged: the learning stations are homemade (Costco baker's racks on wheels with white boards mounted on one side); student work surfaces are lightweight (Ikea tabletops with screw-on legs); chairs are stackable. Space is allocated such that no portion of the building is limited to a single use or definition. The entire facility is intentionally multi-purpose and open-ended, with sprung dance floors in the open classroom as well as in the studios; portable keyboards, computers and monitors readily available in any area; and music stands throughout. The openness of the space mirrors the program – a place to build knowledge together, with room to think, to wonder, to explore, to contribute. The mobility of the learning stations allows the room to be easily cleared by students, and the flexible, multi-purpose use of space facilitates the daily conversion of instructional areas into the rehearsal halls, studios, workshops, and theaters that house the afterschool Conservatory. The absence of hard borders within the space creates permeability in the learning experience, affording students multiple opportunities to explore concepts and integrate inquiries within and across subject boundaries.

FACULTY TEAM: The open-classroom environment is integral to RenArts's overall program design, including faculty deployment. The open floorplan creates a flexible interactive space that is shared by the collaborative faculty team. There are no walls between subjects and all faculty and student interactions are transparent. RenArts' core faculty members each hold multiple credentials and supplemental authorizations. Working together with academic and arts experts, the team curates and implements enriched learning experiences that target 'powerful literacy' in all subjects. Rooted in the pioneering research of Paulo Freire, 'powerful literacy' distinguishes between the 'functional literacy' of a domesticating education and the type of dynamic knowledge-

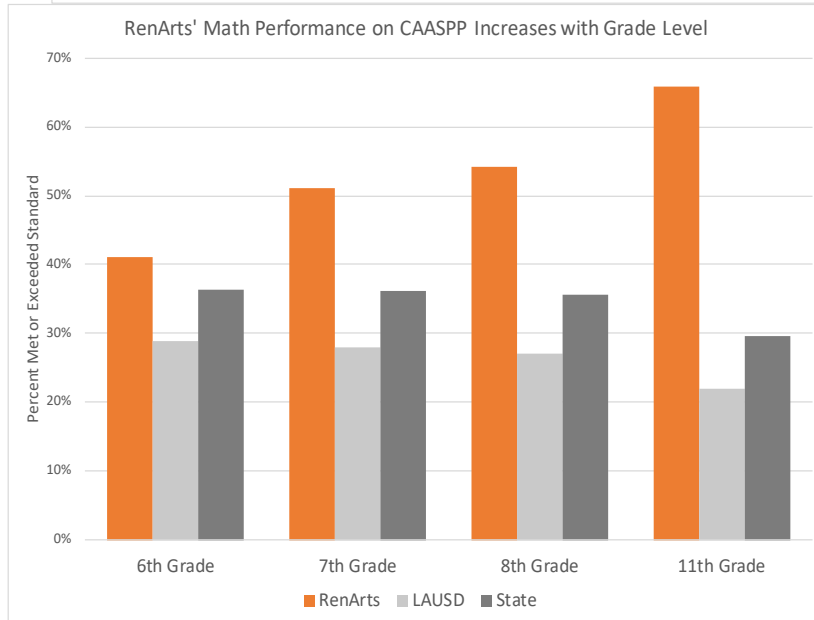
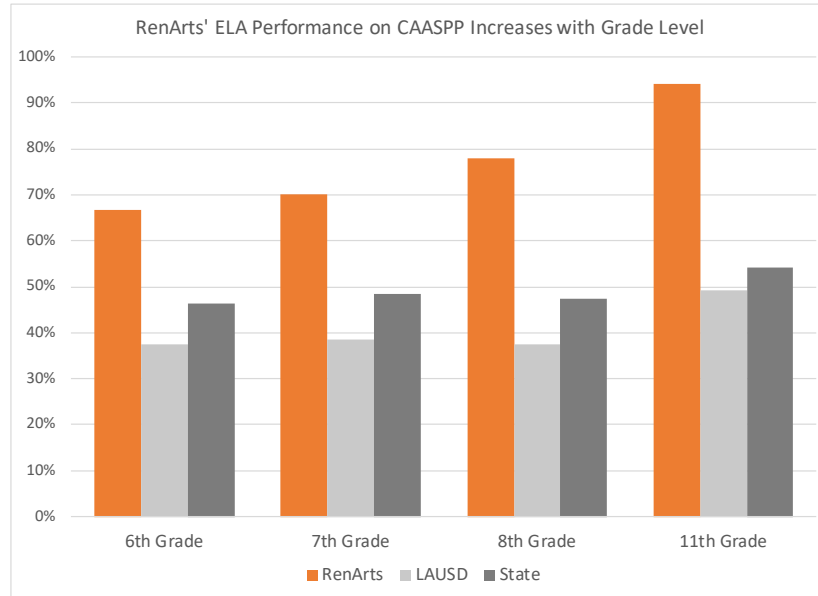
building designed to expand political and sociological horizons. To maximize curricular integration, the full faculty team collaborates both within and across subjects. At RenArts, the nature of the shared space both supports the fluidity of ideas between academic and arts disciplines, and delineates the temperament of the room. The flexibility of the multi-age student groups reflects RenArts' program-wide commitment to equitable access for all students to the highest quality instructional resources. This approach is supported by RenArts' carefully monitored system of flexible faculty teaming – a long-standing practice that has been observed and studied over the years by visiting arts and education experts, both national and international. Faculty cohesion is reinforced by RenArts' annual two-week Professional Development Institute in August, plus regularly scheduled whole-faculty PD sessions throughout the year, nurturing a professional community in which student success is strongly aligned to ongoing faculty self-reflection, peer evaluation and continual shared inquiry into improving teaching and organizational practice as guided by RenArts' Mission and Goals.

STUDENT GROUPS: In RenArts' open classroom, middle and high school students work together in small, flexible, multi-age groups. Students are grouped appropriately for learning, with no formal distinction between grade levels. RenArts' learning structure and pedagogical approach proceed from the belief that all students, including those at educational disadvantage, learn best from instruction that is accelerated rather than remedial, reflecting high-level thinking and content for learners at all levels. All scholars study the same subjects and themes, with individual challenge levels differentiated by depth and complexity aligned to instructional need. All instructional groups are fully inclusive, have accelerated learning goals, and target the development of autonomous scholarship in the ensemble setting. There are no 'free periods' – even for seniors. All scholars are scheduled into instructionally appropriate groups in Humanities (ELA/Social Studies), Math, Science, Latin and a full range of arts coursework – every day, every year. Through cognitive apprenticeship, the collaborative learning ensemble engages all students in the construction of shared meaning, supporting long-term success for all. The multi-year instructional framework acknowledges 'jagged growth' patterns and provides students multiple opportunities to access concepts, build skills, and contribute to the learning community. All academic and arts programs – both curricular and extra-curricular – are made fully accessible to all students (English learners, students with special needs, students at socio-economic disadvantage) ensuring full participation, ongoing support, peer collaboration, and multiple modalities for both understanding and expression. All scholars access the full curriculum – and multi-year spiraling provides all students with the time, access, and individually calibrated supports to successfully complete the college preparatory A-G requirements that maximize post-graduation educational and career options. Classroom strategies are replicated in RenArts' tuition-free afterschool Conservatory where performing ensembles build cohesively on in-school arts instruction, guided by RenArts' exceptional music, dance and visual arts faculty.

SCHOOL CULTURE: There are no auditions or pre-requisites – admission is by lottery and 95% of incoming students have no prior arts training. In 2015 RenArts began gradually expanding from 6th – 12th grades to a full TK – 12th span, working to increase the reach of the program’s multi-year learning trajectory. At every grade level, RenArts approaches all academic and arts work from an ensemble perspective that respects the arts as intellectual and academics as creative. Learning occurs, and is assessed, both individually and in coordination with others. Dedicated preparation and rehearsal is essential to the successful functioning of both the individual scholar and the group. Shared curricular and performance goals contribute to both individual growth and the creation of a cohesive community that supports success for all students. 100% of students participate in high-level arts instruction both in school and after school. Students work together to create and present two schoolwide performances annually, each of which runs for six nights. In 2017-18, over 5,000 audience members attended the performances, with 90% of parents reporting that they attended more than one school performance during the year. The collaborative school culture supports RenArts’ 0% suspension and 0% expulsion rates and high rate of parent participation.

PROGRAM ALIGNMENT: RenArts’ core curricula address California State Content and Performance Standards, English Language Development (ELD) standards, and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Differentiated instruction enables standards-focused learning experiences for all students — through the recursive presentation of foundational concepts and processes, students have multiple opportunities over a multiple year arc to gain the knowledge necessary to succeed beyond secondary school. RenArts’ LCAP explicitly capitalizes on the power of differentiated instruction through multi-age, ensemble learning in an open classroom to improve student outcomes in ELA and Mathematics, and addresses each of the State Priorities through consistent focus on closing the achievement gap as measured on CAASPP.

STUDENT OUTCOMES: The most authentic measure of success for a secondary school is student graduation rate and post-graduate college and career opportunities. RenArts has a 15 year history of 100% graduation, with 97% of graduates accepted to four-year colleges. 100% of graduates complete both A-G requirements and a UCOP approved CTE pathway in Arts, Media and Entertainment. 49% of the class of 2018 was accepted to the University of California. Colleges that RenArts grads either currently attend or have graduated from include all UC and CSU campuses, MIT, Columbia, Yale, Brown, Brandeis, Reed, Cornell, West Point, Oberlin, Occidental, NYU, Vassar, RISD, Bennington, Gaucher, Lewis and Clark, Sarah Lawrence, University of Wisconsin Madison, Indiana University Bloomington, and more. The following charts illustrate comparative school/district/state performance showing students ‘at or above standard’ on the 2016-17 and 2017-18 CAASPP tests (two year average). RenArts’ year-over-year trendlines showing increased numbers of students meeting and exceeding standards provide an additional outside measure for assessing the cumulative benefit of RenArts’ carefully calibrated approach to multi-age ensemble learning.



We invite you to take a brief peek behind the scenes to see the students at work in RenArts' flexible space: <https://vimeo.com/280825130/39855fa35d>