



NORTH DAKOTA COUNCIL ON THE ARTS

# Dakota A+ Schools Network Pilot Program Initiated in Bismarck

## The Dakotas Work with Other States to Implement School Reform Model.

BY BEN NEMENOFF

North Dakota Council on the Arts

BISMARCK - The North Dakota Council on the Arts (NDCA) and the North Dakota Arts Alliance/Alliance for Arts Education (NoDAA) have partnered with the South Dakota Arts Council, South Dakota Alliance for Arts Education, and South Dakotans for the Arts to develop the A+ Schools Program in North and South Dakota. The NDCA and NoDAA are currently involved in a multiple-step process with their colleagues to the south and with organizations in North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Arkansas to create the A+ Schools Network. "These partnerships are a crucial part of the network," says Linda Ehreth, Arts in Education Director for the North Dakota Council on the Arts. "They not only allow all of us to share available resources and openly exchange news and ideas, but also lay the groundwork for a philosophy that can benefit participating schools and students."

The A+ Schools Program, based in North Carolina, is an approach to teaching and learning grounded in the belief that the arts can serve as a vehicle on which teachers can teach and students can learn in all subjects. It is a comprehensive school reform model useful in implementing the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation by using the arts, Multiple Intelligences, thematic unit instruction, curriculum mapping and authentic assessment to achieve student proficiency, learning, and achievement. A+ Schools combine interdisciplinary teaching with daily arts instruction in drama, dance, music, and visual arts. Its focus on teaching and learning in arts integration is supported by an extended theoretical framework drawn from Harvard professor Dr. Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. The A+ Schools Program was first initiated in North Carolina in the mid-1990s by the Kenan Institute for the Arts and was developed through an eighteen-month planning process across the state, funded by a partnership of both public and private sponsors including the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, The Wachovia Foundation, Inc., and Philip Morris Companies, Inc. Although initially

developed outside of state government, the program received early financial and in-kind support from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina General Assembly, and is currently becoming part of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Professional development for teachers and school administrators is a key component of the program. Staffs of participating North Carolina schools, for instance, have participated in workshops and institutes that offer hands-on experience in the arts and instruction in evaluation and administration of the program. During the 2001-2002 school year, the NDCA brought a team of teachers, parents, and arts specialists to North Carolina to meet with Gerry Howell, Program and Professional Development Director for the A+ Schools Program. The visiting team spent two days visiting A+ schools and meeting with teachers and the program's professional development staff (known as the "A+ Fellows"). During the summer of 2002, Howell, along with A+ Fellows and education consultants Michelle Burrows and Kevin Warner, visited Fargo to introduce the A+ Schools Program to North Dakota educators. Participants engaged in discussion, question-and-answer sessions, and arts activities including a sample educational exercise called "The Ocean Habitat: Learning Science Through Creative Movement."

In April 2002, the NDCA and NoDAA initiated an A+ Schools pilot program with Roosevelt Elementary School in Bismarck. Roosevelt completed a series of preliminary preparations during the 2002-2003 school year and is currently involved in a three-year implementation process that will result in that school becoming North Dakota's first participant in the Dakota A+ Schools Network and serving as a model to other schools in the state. Fran Rodenburg is the principal of Roosevelt and Riverside elementary schools. "Children learn in different ways," says Rodenburg. "A+ complements the traditional instruction model used in schools today. Using arts instruction, teachers can bring the multiple intelligences theory into reality, addressing the many ways that children learn - by movement, touch, visual, and other ways - in addition to the traditional verbal and mathematical methods."

The long-range goals of the Dakota A+ Schools Network include the creation of a voluntary A+ Program in North Dakota similar in scope to that in North Carolina and with funding available to North Dakota schools through the Department of Public Instruction.

More information on the North Carolina A+ Schools Program can be found online at [www.aplus-schools.org](http://www.aplus-schools.org). More on Oklahoma's program can be found at [www.okaplus.ucok.edu](http://www.okaplus.ucok.edu). Information on the Dakota A+ Schools Network can be found on the NDCA's Web site, [www.DiscoverND.com/arts](http://www.DiscoverND.com/arts), or by calling the NDCA Arts in Education Director at 701-328-7593.