

1. Avanti High School is a public alternative school of choice located in the Olympia School District. Our student body consists of 165 students in grades 9-12, drawn from several (8) school districts from the greater Thurston County area. Students choose Avanti for a variety of reasons, one being the reputation of the staff. We have a correspondingly small staff of 7 full time and 1 part time highly qualified teachers who implement a performance-based curriculum that expects mastery learning to occur for all students. The foundation for all learning at our school rests in an environment that takes an interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning, with heavy emphasis on the arts as **creativity**.

Most students choose Avanti because arts education can be found in every discipline. While we only have one full-time art instructor, it is common and even expected to see the arts flourish in every classroom. The same can be said for reading, writing, critical thinking, and communication. However, students come from all around the area to our school as a result of our school's reputation for the arts. In fact, creativity is the foundation of our school's core values, steeped in a set of intellectual skills and emotional dispositions, referred to as the Avanti habits of mind and heart. These **21st Century skills** are: critical thinking, mindfulness, compassion, reflection, connection, responsibility, communication, quality, resiliency, joy, integrity, **inspiration and creativity**. To illustrate the importance of creativity in an Avanti education we have our core values embodied within a poster found throughout the school; on it is an Inukshuk or stone marker often found in frozen tundra of the Arctic Circle, left by the Inuit peoples, in the shape of a human. Each stone of the Inukshuk holds a core value or habit of the mind and heart; with intention, the legs on which it stands hold the words **creativity** and **inspiration**, as we believe that both serve as the foundation of all learning.

Avanti's emphasis on the arts is readily visible both inside and outside of the building. Although our square footage is small, the walls and display cases are full of creative student work. **Collaborative** murals and mosaics are prominently displayed on most inside walls, and individual student work is displayed throughout the building on a rotating basis. An example of our interdisciplinary approach can be found inside the building just outside of the science classroom where students from three different disciplines constructed a virtual cave that was used as a visual reminder of classroom outcomes for displaying the science, art, and history of a cave. On a larger scale, outside of the building our students from all disciplines contributed to the construction of three separate garden spaces (Japanese Zen garden; Sagan Satellite herb and vegetable garden; and Madison-Avanti Giving garden) which house student art installations, including painted signage, sculptures, painted benches, and the creation of a large fused glass fence that serves as a symbol for our school's emphasis on creativity and arts education.

All students are engaged in arts education at Avanti from the moment they walk through the door. For our new students, arts education begins during a 3-week period we call orientation. During this time, all new students are introduced to an interdisciplinary experience where they take one class that lasts their entire school day including English language learning, multi-media and technology skill building, and arts education. Since we have a highly individualized learning experience, all students self-evaluate for brain preference tendency, create personal learning styles inventories, and go through a battery of other academic related assessments which would happen during the student's English language arts and media portion of the day. During their art instruction, students create papier-mâché masks, decorated to represent something they learned

about themselves in their personal learning styles activity, then they are expected to write a mini biography in correlation to their self reflection.

After orientation, the arts are integrated across multiple curriculum areas into **individualized learning** plans. Students in all subjects are encouraged to demonstrate their creative learning, ranging from fine art projects to the more practical, such as architectural design for math projects or making art projects out of books in social studies. Teachers, as a group, meet to review each student’s academic progress every 20 days to determine the best path forward to graduation based on the needs, skills and abilities of the individual student and operating within the framework of state educational requirements. These meetings also serve as an opportunity for staff (from all disciplines) to collaborate on joint projects and learning outcomes for students; many of which have a special emphasis on arts education.

While everyone else contributes to arts education at Avanti, we are fortunate to have an award-winning art teacher as well, her name is Virginia Murray. At Avanti, student curriculum is highly individualized, so, we do not typically offer a specific art class by period. **Note: Students may choose to do ANY art medium, any period of the day, all year long, in class or as an independent learning plan (away from school). In other words, students enroll in art classes (any period) and engage in the medium of their choice; it is common for 15 different mediums to coexist in any given period of the day. Also, students have a voice in what they are learning, so, the teacher adapts the learning to each individual student to allow for individual inspiration to flourish.** The list below is a sampling of the most common learning plans attempted by students:

drawing	painting on canvas	figure drawing	papier-mâché
block printing	batik	screen-printing	pottery/ceramics
sculptures	stained glass	mosaic tiles	jewelry making
painting murals	photography	air brushing	felting/fabric

***All courses can either be taken for Art credit or elective credit.**

	Number Employed Full-time	Number Employed Part-time
Dance	0	0
Music	0	0
Theatre	0	0
Visual Arts	1.0 fte	0

Artists in Residence routinely at Avanti: Kristi Sogn; Dana Squires; and Ruby Re-Usable (a.k.a. Diane Kurzynna).

The above list is a sampling of what is offered (daily) in all art classes. If a student has an idea for another medium or mixed media, the art teacher works with the student to personalize the experience in her classes. A visitor to the art room would see students working individually and in small groups, with many different mediums, at tables, at easels, at wheels, in the hall and in the classroom.

2. There are many creative approaches to integrating arts education at Avanti. One of our habits of mind and heart is collaborating with others, which is manifested in various team building and group work projects seen throughout campus. Group work in the arts (and all classes) is encouraged because it provides peer support and modeling for the less experienced students to freely express themselves. Additionally, **collaboration** is a transferable skill and is identified as a 21st Century skill. A good example of a recent group collaboration is the ‘Earth, Air, Fire and Water’ mosaic series completed by the Freshmen class which included groups of two or three students working together to design and create 4’ X 4’ wood, glass, paint and tile mosaics, designed for display in the Olympia School District board room window sills.

Our Art teacher is also the co-director of the dramatic arts program at Avanti. Much of the student body is engaged in our theater program that puts on a school play every spring. The Art teacher collaborates with the English teacher and they engage many of our students in the performing arts in an annual ritual that culminates in a week of performances and a trip to the Shakespeare festival in Ashland Oregon at the end of the school year.

Past collaborative productions have included *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Come Back to the Five and Dime*, *Jimmy Dean*, *Jimmy Dean*, and others. Participating students sign up for a class for English, Art or elective credit, during which they learn about and participate in all aspects of theater production - costuming, set design, set building, set dressing, stage management, promotions and house management and of course acting, singing and dancing as appropriate.

Other collaborations have the Art teacher and the Career and Technical Education teacher combining students to promote the habit of teamwork by creating papier-mâché figures that will be temporary art installations for Olympia’s Arts Walk, which also connects Avanti with the local Arts community. Independently, our career and technical education (CTE) teacher offers a wide variety of individualized learning plans that include commercial arts, photography, video and computer graphics supported by state of the art photo editing software and computers for each student.

Other examples of arts education built into other disciplines would be our music offerings. While Avanti does not have a formal music program, we do offer elective instruction in music, through the math department, as music originates from the same side of the brain. Our math teacher instructs students in ukulele, folk music, and guitar. Students who want to participate in more traditional band, orchestra and choir programs are able to attend those classes at their home schools of residence if desired.

At Avanti, creativity is also encouraged through written and verbal expression. We have a group of students that perform Poetry Out Loud as part of the National Endowment for the Arts program. Students also combine art with the written word in our literary magazine, *Avanti-Garde*, and submit articles to other suitable publications like *Teen Ink*.

Students are also encouraged to create and dramatically inhabit characters for the annual Haunted School fundraiser. Through an English class focused on horror literature (e.g. Edgar Allan Poe), students write a backstory for the house and a backstory for their characters. They then build and run the haunted house as a public attraction for a few nights before Halloween.

School of Excellence in Arts Education Awards – Avanti High School

A few examples of other creative endeavors include a history student designing, constructing, and demonstrating the use of a Native American bow made from the branch of a yew tree; science students collaborating to build a giant model of a cell's protein factory within the school's hallway; and our twice a year mini unit weeks at Avanti, during which teachers from all disciplines or special guests from the community offer 4 day classes on a variety of subjects. Students may choose up to 4 classes. In the arts arena, the following mini units are a small sample of what has been offered over the last few years:

Día de Muertos dolls	Project Throwaway (trash to art)
Repurposing books	Mosaic
Community Mural Painting	Edible Art
Fairy Houses (environmental materials)	Jewelry
Street Art: Packing Tape People	Garden Art
Procession of the Species participation	Fabric art
Upcycling Clothing	Felting
Woodworking	Sewing
Garden Bench Building	Garden Box Building
Swing Dance	Ballroom Dance
Square Dance	Hip Hop Dance
Poetry Outloud	Writers Workshops
Song Writing	String Band
Guitar	Ukulele
Folk Music	Street Band
Acting 101	Pop up Book Making

With few exceptions, in all subject areas, students work from individualized learning plans that have a semester's worth of work to complete (75 hours), and students can work towards completing those tasks at their own pace, and in their own way; going faster or slower as needed. Because students and teachers are viewed as partners in creating individualized learning plans, there is plenty of room for creativity and inspiration.

3. We are fortunate to have several parents that contribute creatively to our community. We often have parents volunteer as artists in residence in classrooms and as guest lecturers willing to lead four-day mini units in their area of expertise. Over the years we have had parents in social studies classes, helping teachers integrate arts education by helping students create illuminated-manuscripts, Silk Road murals, and West African Islamic scrolls. Other examples include a parent that has connections to Broadway Theatre who worked with our students on making felt and costume-making; a local artist and Avanti parent that goes by the title "Ruby Re-Usable" who has come in to teach our students how to turn trash into treasure, how to upcycle clothing, and how to make Day of the Dead dolls. Parents are encouraged to engage at Avanti and we have been very fortunate over the years to have many of our parents engaged in the creative process. We have a **Community Liaison** person at Avanti that helps connect our parents to the school and our students to the greater community.

4. Cross-cultural communication and understanding is an essential component to our school's overall mission; all Avanti students must earn cultural awareness credits as a requirement for graduation. To facilitate that agenda we have developed a Social Justice

Institute where students are offered a series of diversity workshops and opportunities each month throughout the school year. We have university professors coming in to talk about race and class; community organizations like the Safe Schools Coalition coming in to discuss gender and sexual orientation; and trainers from the Dispute Resolution Center of Thurston County offering workshops on conflict resolution skill building for students. The **Social Justice Institute** also sponsors book studies that use literature to deconstruct issues like race, class, gender, ethnicity with book study groups including Sherman Alexie's "Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian" and Jamie Ford's "Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet."

Other recent examples that use the arts to provide authentic learning experiences for our students include having a series of guest performers like Kathya Alexander and Adam Falkner. Kathya Alexander, a drama teacher from Seattle, came to Avanti for the Martin Luther King Jr. assembly this year, and she shared, through dramatic performance and story-telling, her experiences living through a segregated South in the 1950's. Adam Falkner, writer, performer, and educational consultant, came to Avanti and performed spoken word poetry to the entire student population. His Dialogue Arts Project (DAP) engages students and staff, using the arts, to help all participants collaborate and communicate more effectively across lines of social identity. After the performance he held a workshop with 60 students and staff on how to use the arts to help foster social identity, **cultural competency**, and cross-cultural dialogue.

5. Avanti students are generating a significant amount of art. Led by our art teacher, Virginia Murray, the students create and host an annual Avanti Showcase event, inviting the Olympia community to come to the school and see the art that Avanti students are producing. Much of that art is later contributed to temporary art displays throughout downtown Olympia for the **Arts Walk** that happens twice a year. Students involved in our folk music, guitar, strings, and ukulele classes combine forces to represent Avanti in the annual Procession of the Species parade.

Many of our students have connection with local theater troupes like Capital Playhouse; Olympia Little Theater; Harlequin Productions and Olympia's Family Theater, where the director is the parent of an alumnus. Being located close to downtown Olympia has helped keep our students connected with many local arts organizations and has helped us maintain **community partnerships**.

6. As a direct result of integrating the arts in a meaningful way throughout our curriculum we have seen a tremendous amount of academic success. In 2009 we were recognized by the BERC Group (for OSPI) as one of the top ten best alternative high schools in the state of Washington; in 2011 we were recognized as a **School of Distinction** and a **Washington Achievement Award** recipient. In 2013 we were recognized as a School of Distinction once again, and US News and World Report gave Avanti the Bronze Award; recognizing the school as one of the best high schools in the state of Washington. According to Schooldigger, Avanti is ranked 80th out of 439 high schools in the state; and Great Schools gives Avanti 5 stars for school quality.

Based on the 2012-2013 School Performance Report (OSPI), Avanti has 37% more low income students than next closest highschool; 90% of 10th graders passed the state reading

assessment; 96 % of 10th graders pass the writing assessment; and 81% of 10th graders pass the math exam.

Currently, Avanti has 165 students in grades 9-12 with a ratio of approximately 67.2% female and 32.8% male. About 30% of our students qualify for the free/reduced lunch program and 10% qualify for Special Education. Ethnic composition of our school is typical for the area: approximately 1.5% African American; 2% American Indian/Alaska Native; 1% Asian/Pacific Islander; 75% Caucasian; 8% Hispanic; and 12% identify as two or more races.

7. There was no arts program and no art teacher at Avanti in the year 2000. The Principal at that time, Joy Walton Kawasaki, approached art teacher Virginia Murray, then employed at Black Hills High School, and asked if she could develop a manual on how to integrate the arts into all subjects. Virginia produced an integration of the arts manual, and the school began to change its focus onto arts education. Two years later in the fall of 2002, a position opened at Avanti High School and Virginia Murray, a **Christa McAuliffe Award winning Teacher**, was hired. Along with helping the Avanti staff with the integration of the arts, Virginia started a very successful arts program at Avanti, which includes both visual and performing arts education. We are very fortunate to have an art teacher with such a broad background who is able to teach our students exceptionally well in all of these mediums. Since that time the arts have been integrated into all that we do at Avanti, and arts education has become the focal point for the school. Many students from traditional high schools have chosen to leave their familiar academic settings to come to Avanti to experience art in the way they prefer. Having individualized curriculum allows students to explore their passions and interests, when they want and in the way they to want to experience it. Some student voices include: “My favorite class was definitely art, because I had the opportunity to do any type of art I wanted. I have never enjoyed art before, but Virginia was so welcoming and kind that it made me feel like I belonged at Avanti” and “In art class it was a lot of fun because I got to paint a mask and show how my style is...Mrs. Murray is the most awesomest art teacher I have ever had. ...The last art class I was in we literally did nothing.”

Others include: “I really appreciate that Virginia simply stated that our masks are due when we finish, and not having a cap on our artistic pieces makes such a huge difference in my mind. Having stress and worry alongside my artistic process was something that felt so wrong in the past, and I felt an immediate sense of gratitude in her for understanding that need.” Also, “I also love making art, and the art room has so many possibilities that I might be able to try different styles of art to do for when I become an adult.”

A favorite student quote that is a good example of how Art at Avanti nurtures creativity is “Almost all of the assignments consisted of us [the students] choosing our own path, whether it was what color to paint a mask in art to what book to read in English. It really allowed me to express my creative side.”

Arts integration at Avanti High School has provided for a balanced approach to educating students. Integrating the arts at Avanti has assisted the staff in meeting the social-emotional and cognitive growth of a student population dominated by right-brain thinkers, helping to produce **well balanced individuals** with 21st Century skills, as indicated by our all of our recent successes.