

# Out-of-School Time Stories

## BOOST Grantee and Behavioral Health Spotlight: Jessye Norman School of the Arts



GEORGIA STATEWIDE AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK

Nestled in the heart of Richmond County, where the arts once struggled to find their voice, the Jessye Norman School of the Arts (JNSA) has emerged as a beacon of hope and creativity. Gary Dennis, the Executive Director, recalls the school's founding as a response to a glaring void in arts education, stating, **"Our program was founded because there were approximately 36,000 students in Richmond County and only two full-time art teachers."**

### Fostering Belonging through Arts

As JNSA has evolved over the years, both its scope and impact have expanded significantly. Dennis highlights the increased recognition of the arts' value since the program's inception, with a now much higher number of art teachers in the area. Despite this progress, challenges persist, with arts programming often being an area impacted by budget cuts making.

JNSA serves students from fifth through 12th grade, creating a nurturing environment where creativity and diversity thrive. Dennis takes pride in



#### Youth Served in Year Two:

136 in Afterschool

145 in Summer



#### Grades Served:

K-12

#### Counties Served:

Columbia, Richmond

#### Programming Offered:

Afterschool & Summer

#### BOOST Grant Purpose:



Expand Access



Reduce Barriers



Increase Quality

#### OST Government Funding Sources:

BOOST Grant, Learning Loss Grant

#### Behavioral Health Supports:

Tier 1 and Tier 3 supports

#### Website:

[www.thejnsa.org](http://www.thejnsa.org)



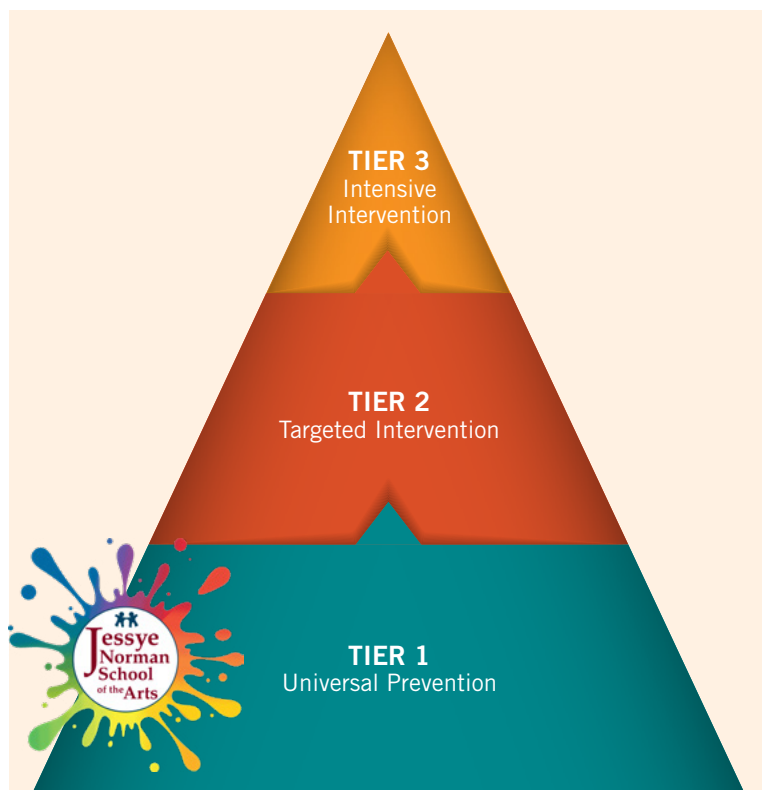
the school's demographic mix, with "70 to 75% of our kids coming from low to moderate income households," showcasing the school's dedication to accessibility and inclusivity. This diversity fosters a unique learning environment where students from varied backgrounds can share experiences, fostering understanding and growth across socio-economic divides.

The school's curriculum mirrors its diverse student body, offering programs in drama, dance, music, visual art, digital art, filmmaking, and podcasting, among others. These programs are structured to parallel the rigor of college courses, offering a high level of sophistication and quality instruction. "It almost feels like college classes," Dennis asserts, emphasizing the school's commitment to delivering an exceptional arts education.

## Addressing Behavioral Health Needs

Similar to many high-quality afterschool and summer learning initiatives, JNSA has proven to be an excellent environment for delivering universal prevention, or Tier 1 behavioral health supports, to young people. The JNSA Creed, recited every day, is essential for building student character as it emphasizes values beyond academics, focusing on moral and ethical development and encouraging excellence in all areas of life. **The Creed promotes responsibility, respect, integrity, perseverance, and resilience, preparing students to face challenges and contribute positively to society.** Dennis shares anecdotes of students who, bolstered by the skills and confidence acquired at the school, have pursued careers in technical theatre and other arts-related fields. This holistic educational approach, balancing arts and academics, underscores the school's efficacy in nurturing well-rounded individuals.

Beyond the arts, the school plays a pivotal role in fostering students' academic success and personal growth through several Tier I strategies facilitated by both internal program staff and contracted vendors that support emotional regulation, reduce stress and anxiety, and develop relationship skills. **JNSA emphasizes emotional development and proactive engagement, using evidence-based tools such as Erikson's Developmental Stages to help youth understand and normalize their feelings.** Group discussions encourage youth to express themselves and relate their experiences, fostering a sense of community and support. These conversations often lead to profound realizations and a deeper understanding of their personal growth. Remarkable moments occur when kids eagerly put aside their devices to participate in enriching discussions and activities.



Multi-Tiered System of Supports is a comprehensive multi-level prevention and support system that maximizes youth achievement and reduces behavioral problems. MTSS is divided into three tiers of support:

### **TIER 1: Universal Preventions**

Proactive supports for all students.

### **TIER 2: Targeted Interventions**

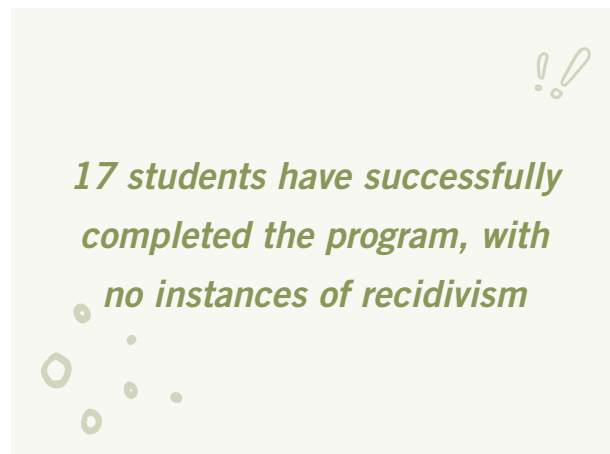
Additional help for students, usually provided in small groups.

### **TIER 3: Intensive Interventions**

Highly individualized support for students with significant needs.

**A recent partnership with the District Attorney's Office of Richmond County has allowed JNSA to offer a unique pathway through its arts diversion initiative: successful completion leads to the dismissal of pending charges.**

While the program primarily provides Tier 1 supports, this initiative has led to Tier 3 (intensive intervention) supports for a particular subset of students. Youth referred to the program attend anonymously with support from dedicated staff. **Case management is a pivotal component of the program.** Initially supported by the Family Counseling Center of Augusta, and now managed by an employee from the District Attorney's office, the program ensures each participant receives the necessary support to thrive. To date, 17 students have successfully completed the program, with no instances of recidivism. Although currently unfunded, the program remains committed to its mission. Additional funding would enable the employment of professional counselors, further enhancing case management and support services.



## Expanding Program Capacity

The transformative growth and expansion of JNSA have been significantly propelled by the BOOST program, serving as a catalyst for enhancing and broadening its offerings. Dennis explained how the funding has allowed the institution to expand existing programs and introduce new ones, greatly increasing its community impact. The BOOST program has helped grow services and scale the school's summer camps, especially with initiatives like free camps for Fort Gordon junior enlisted families. **"We have [expanded] in so many different places, and in so many different ways,"** Dennis noted, highlighting how BOOST funding has enabled them to reach new areas and extend their community outreach.

Moreover, the BOOST program has fostered new partnerships and collaborations, amplifying the school's efforts and resources. Dennis highlighted a variety of new collaborations fostered by the BOOST funding, including those with Augusta University and several elementary schools. These partnerships have not only expanded the school's capacity but also enriched the educational experiences offered to students, integrating them into a broader learning and artistic community.

The program's impact on the school's staff and their professional development is equally noteworthy. Dennis recounted how the BOOST funding has enabled staff members to attend statewide training and enhance their skills, ensuring continued growth in the quality of instruction and expertise available to students. Dennis's enthusiasm for the changes brought about by the BOOST program is palpable, describing the experience as "phenomenal" and noting how the funding has transformed his perspective on working with state and federal funds.



Building on the transformative effects of BOOST funding for staff development, JNSA exemplifies how a commitment to excellence, community engagement, and holistic supports can create a lasting impact in the realm of arts education and youth well-being.



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Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) is a competitive grant program administered by the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) and operated in partnership with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). BOOST offers \$85 million via three-year grants, renewed annually, with funding made available through the American Rescue Plan. The grants program is aimed at promoting evidence-based practices and whole child supports in afterschool and summer learning programs. BOOST is designed to expand access, reduce barriers to enrollment, and increase programmatic quality to improve outcomes for students and families throughout the state. GSAN provides recommendations for grant awards based on rigorous application criteria and offers technical assistance and training to grantees to ensure successful implementation. All grants are approved by GaDOE, ensuring alignment with statewide priorities and goals.