

MEMBERCENTER

What's the Big Idea

Tennessee Arts Commission's ArtistCorps Tennessee Program

EARLIER THIS YEAR, the Tennessee Arts Commission (TAC) launched its ArtistCorps Tennessee (ACT) program. The ACT program is based on the Corporation for National and Community Service's Learn and Serve America program and combines arts integration and service learning objectives into "arts-based service learning."

The initial federal model was created under the National and Community Service Act of 1990 to "distribute grants in support of service learning in order to enhance the education of young people, demonstrate the value of youth as assets to their communities, and stimulate service learning as a strategy to meet unmet community needs."

Guided by these principles, and with the goal to integrate arts learning, TAC launched a statewide version of the program to engage K–12 students in social justice and community research by working collaboratively with classroom teachers, teaching artists, and each other. "We evaluated our existing grant programs to schools and found a way to integrate our 'traditional' artist residencies with service learning," said Tennessee Arts Commission Director of Arts Education Kim Leavitt. "This allows us to utilize grant funds so that schools can pay teaching artists, while at the same time, adding a different dimension to the work by incorporating service and residencies focused on social justice issues."

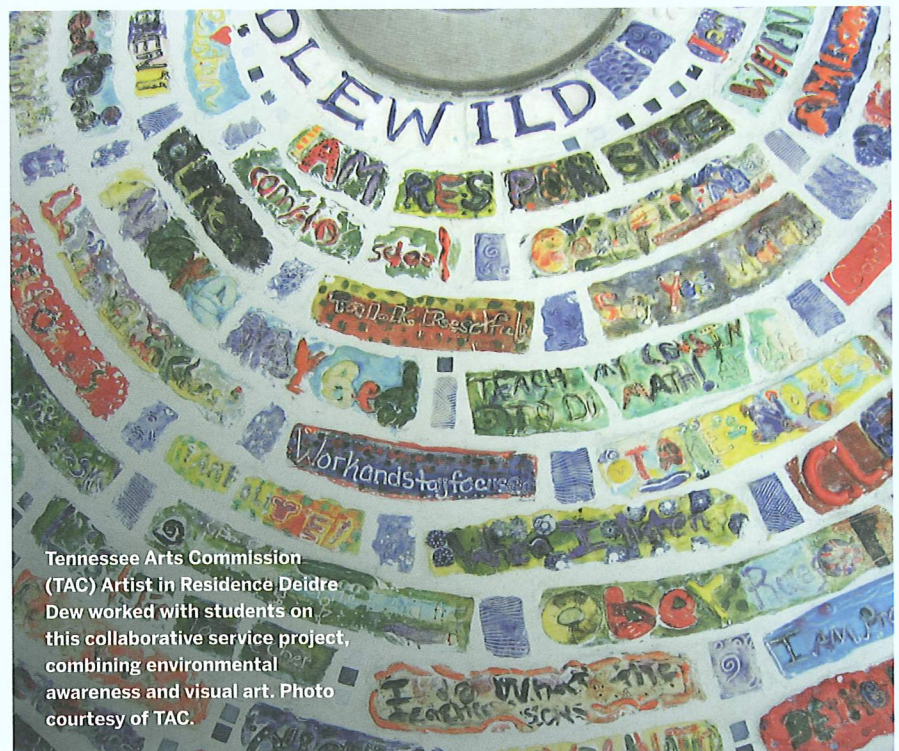
The students identify areas in their community that could benefit from the arts and work with those neighborhoods to identify their needs in community-building. The students, with guidance from their teachers and teaching artists, determine how best to serve their community through the arts. Each project lasts at least five days with the teaching artist present on site, helping the classroom teacher and students to create and present their ideas through an artistic medium.

"ArtistCorps Tennessee was developed in response to President Obama's platform that called for a national

volunteer corps of teaching artists to assist in providing arts learning opportunities in schools," Leavitt said. "As a state arts agency, our mission is to support the work of artists." TAC leverages its standing relationships with teaching artists in its Teaching Artist Roster and the Artist-in-Residence program to staff the ArtistCorps Tennessee program. The roster is very diverse, and includes professionals in dance, literature, storytelling, theater, and music.

Although the program was just launched, TAC is expecting impactful results while teaching students about citizenship, creativity, leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving.

For more on the ArtistCorps Tennessee program, visit www.arts.state.tn.us/artistcorps.htm. Download ACT's arts-based service learning guidebook for more examples of projects across the country and for tips on how to get started in your community.



Tennessee Arts Commission (TAC) Artist in Residence Deldre Dew worked with students on this collaborative service project, combining environmental awareness and visual art. Photo courtesy of TAC.