# Duxberry Park Arts IMPACT Alternative Elementary School

Columbus, OH

Principal: Deborah Carter Superintendent: Gene Harris School type: District magnet Grades served: K-5, pre-k

187	Student enrollment
84.0	Percent economically disadvantaged
91.6	Percent non-white
<5.0	Percent Limited English proficient
15.5	Percent of students with disabilities
11	Teachers' average years of experience
\$58,793	Average teacher salary
\$15,831	Total expenditure per pupil

Genoa

Gibsonburg

old

Holgate

Bowling

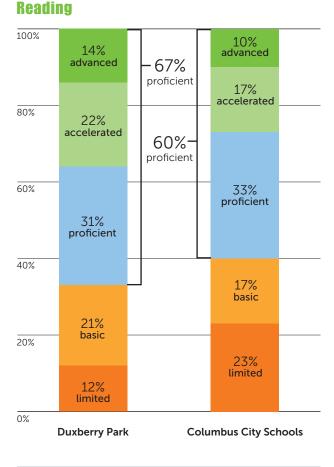
Gree

SOURCE FOR CHARTS: Ohio Department of Education interactive Local Report Card, 2008-09; reading and math calculations performed by Fordham Institute, see endnote 11.

# How Great Thou Art

Duxberry Park is an arts-integrated school that offers dance, art, music, and drama in a most unique way for its nearly 250 students.<sup>12</sup> Located in a tough neighborhood on the northeast side of Columbus, this school doubles as a veritable art museum, drama theatre, and music and dance studio. Despite having been an arts impact school since the 1980s, changes in staff and students over time ensure that the challenge of determining how best to teach children at multiple grade levels utilizing extended exposure to the arts is a constant struggle.

Student performances play to packed houses of parents and extended family members while student academic results exhibit steady growth in achievement. The school regularly outperforms its district



Percent of students by reading proficiency level, 2008-09 (Duxberry Park vs. district)

peers in both reading and math. And it excels academically despite serving a student population that is 84 percent economically disadvantaged, slightly higher than the district average of 81 percent. How does the school maintain its integrated arts concept while also delivering strong academic results? According to Duxberry Park's teachers, it requires every teacher to be flexible, to be willing to learn from their peers, and to accommodate what traditionalists would likely judge to be a chaotic—maybe even unnerving—beehive of student movement and noise.

Parents voiced their love for the variety of ways their children can learn, made possible through the com-



mitment of teachers who emphasize group dynamics and individual creativity. Parents believe their children are comprehending concepts more deeply through the daily use of multiple intelligences. Teachers claimed to have never experienced such a successful and intentional integration of classroom learning with the arts. They explained that at their previous schools teachers took a break or did some planning when their students went to their music or art classes. Not at Duxberry Park, where the arts and academics are one.

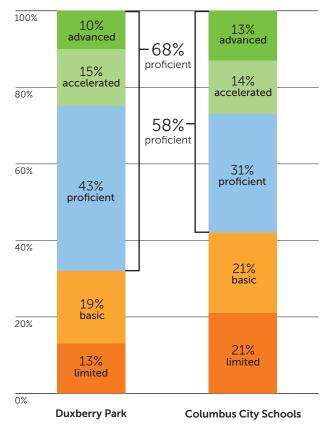
# Where Venn Diagrams and Art Collide

In one class, the art instructor asked his students to work in small groups to "frame" snapshots of key

points in a story by freezing themselves in various scenes. The classroom teacher was also present, and she joined the art teacher in instruction when the small groups were turned loose to begin working together. Collaboration between the art instructor and the classroom teacher was immediately apparent, as was the overlap between the art lesson, which used a mix of drama and drawing, and skill sets the students were working on in their regular classroom understanding Venn diagrams. Students used Venn diagrams, plotting commonalities and differences between their small group work, and enjoyed marrying art and drama in order to master the content in a creative way.

This level of integration can be found in core subject areas as well. A recent Duxberry Park project focused on the story of the Underground Railroad and how people in Columbus helped the northwardbound slaves. Students learned how escaping slaves were pursued by bounty hunters and ultimately had to seek refuge in Canada. What started as a social studies project for one grade level soon turned into a dramatic art production involving the entire school. Students took on the roles of escaped slaves and operators of Underground Railroad safe houses,

#### Math



Percent of students by math proficiency level, 2008-09 (Duxberry Park vs. district)





using drama to enliven the tale of the arduous and often dangerous journey undertaken by those seeking freedom.

## **Uncertain Future**

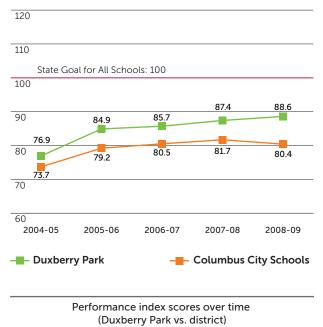
It was only a few years ago that dwindling enrollment landed Duxberry Park on the district's closure list. But thanks to the staff, parents, and at least one central office advocate, enrollment has grown to such a level that the school was not even considered in the current round of school closings. However, the school may encounter a significant challenge as students who currently attend the nine district schools scheduled to close in 2010 secure assignments to other schools, including Duxberry Park. In fact, the only other arts impact elementary school in the district will close this year and its students will get priority if they choose to move to Duxberry Park. This new wave of students could bring enough change to the school in one year to present a real challenge to its culture and tradition of academic success.

 "Beyond the important achievement test scores, if I establish trust with my peers, my kids' desire to learn increases, and more parents get involved—then I know I am successful."
Natalie Faeth, third-grade teacher

## This Is Where I Want To Be

The success for which teachers and students strive at Duxberry Park is an ongoing but challenging goal. Third-grade teacher Natalie Faeth, now in her third year at Duxberry Park, said, "It is very rewarding teaching here despite the demanding expectations of staff and students." When asked how she knows whether she is personally successful, she replied, "Beyond the important achievement test scores, if I establish trust with my peers, my

### **Performance Index**





kids' desire to learn increases, and more parents get involved—then I know I am successful. This is where I want to be."

Other teachers echoed Faeth's perspective by acknowledging that daily planning time is at a minimum, but no one is clamoring for that to change. They prefer the extensive cooperation and flexibility that comes with this school's modus operandi. Everyone must be a co-teacher and an engaged model for his or her students. The arts faculty takes a week away from teaching each quarter to meet with teachers from every grade level, and together they prepare future lesson plans. They also meet for shorter stints each week to make sure their lessons are aligned across all classrooms. These meetings explain how the dance teacher decided to map out a grid depicting the x/y axis when teaching the latest dance movements, and why the drama teacher had students act out a key battle from the Revolutionary War.

"This type of commitment and cooperation can only happen where a culture exists free of excuses and blame." – Melissa Wengerd, counselor

In a clear response to Principal Deborah Carter's oft-repeated urging of teachers and staff to go above and beyond the norm to help students, teachers conduct their own internal review of the curriculum and teacher methodologies by visiting each other's classrooms and offering feedback to lessons. As a result, all teachers gather a trove of ideas about how to make their classroom sessions even more successful. Not many teachers are confident enough in their own abilities to open themselves up to the scrutiny of their peers on a regular basis. But at Duxberry Park, teachers believe this professional interaction makes a meaningful difference as they seek to improve student performance. Counselor Melissa Wengerd, who splits her week at Duxberry Park with another school, acknowledged that teaching at Duxberry Park was truly hard work because every second of every school day is focused on performance. She said teachers spend a tremendous amount of time thinking through minutia, such as how to conduct transitions between classes in order minimize the loss of instructional time. Wengerd believes, "this type of commitment and cooperation can only happen where a culture exists free of excuses and blame."

# "Getting Us Ready for the Real World"

The benefits of a Duxberry Park education are evident to students. As Caleb, a fifth grader, explained, the teachers at Duxberry Park are "getting us ready for the real world. The teachers take good care of us and work us hard." Other students echoed Caleb's views. They added that they liked being rewarded for good behavior and effort in classes.

*••• "The teachers take good care of us and work us hard." – Caleb, fifth grader* 

Staff at Duxberry Park use positive incentives to create an achievement-focused school culture. The school is unique in the extent to which students actually understand the connection between the school's culture and their ability to meet real achievement goals. Consider Duxberry Park's "Superhero Club," in which first- and second-grade boys learn that they can achieve all things. For those students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, it's never too early to set such high expectations and to make evident to students how academic lessons, behavioral policies, and extracurricular activities are related to achieving real goals and dreams.