

# CITY, SCHOOLS PARTNERING WITH KENNEDY CENTER

## Program To Focus On Arts Education

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**HARRISONBURG** — Harrisonburg's focus on the arts in and outside of the classroom will continue to strengthen during the next several months, as it's been chosen as the most recent of just a handful of cities to partner with The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

The Kennedy Center, based in Washington, D.C., announced Harrisonburg's induction into the Any Given Child program on Tuesday morning during a press conference at Clementine Cafe. It's the 15th city to become part of the program, which connects resources at the Kennedy Center with school divisions around the country to make arts education opportunities available for children across the board.

Often, the educational process focuses more on the analytic side of learning than the creative side, said J.R. Snow, arts coordinator for Harrisonburg City Public Schools. But emphasizing the need for schools to offer artistic opportunities for all students — not just those who are wealthy or particularly gifted — is vital to teaching students how to innovate later in life, he said.

“For me, it's about creativity,” Snow said. “The performance element, the creation of art, that all comes out of creativity. So those things are great, and I want them, but I also want to make sure the child's mind is being opened up to be creative.”

Any Given Child will work with existing resources and programs at HCPS, James Madison University and other arts organizations in the Valley to bring more comprehensive arts education to Harrisonburg students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

HCPS already has shown a commitment to increasing the availability of arts programs to its students: Harrisonburg High School is now in the second year of its fine arts academy, and Stone Spring Elementary School will start a new arts immersion program this fall.

The community must raise \$25,000 to participate in the program for the first four years, which will be matched by \$125,000 from the Kennedy Center. Representatives from the Kennedy Center will visit Harrisonburg at least eight times during the next nine months, when they will draft plans with the city and school division and provide training for existing staff members.

Darrell Ayers, vice president of education at the Kennedy Center, said the organization is excited to expand the program to its own “backyard.”

Baltimore and Harrisonburg are the only participating cities within relative commutable distance to the Kennedy Center. The other 13 cities are scattered across the country and mostly in the Southwest and along the West Coast.

Ayers said the Kennedy Center will merely guide Harrisonburg into building the arts programs it wants. It's not a cookie-cutter program that already has set resources and goals.

Instead, Any Given Child works with all of a community's resources to engage school divisions with the arts communities surrounding them.

Harrisonburg Mayor Ted Byrd had to sign off on the school division's application and provide a letter of recommendation. At Tuesday's press conference, Byrd said he was excited for what the program would have to offer to his city's children.

"When a child wakes up in the morning, they should come to school thinking it's going to be the most exciting, interesting and, honestly, fun, place to be," said HCPS Superintendent Scott Kizner. "And I hope there's a day, and I think in Harrisonburg the day has really come, where we talk about the arts as much as we talk about the SOL standards [standardized testing], that having paint brushes and drumsticks is as important as mastering the tools in math and science and social studies."

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