

Kids

EXCEL™

gazette

Tiny Tots Join the Fun

Expanding our partnership with La Fe Community Development Co., Kids Excel instituted its Tiny Tots Program this year at La Fe Preparatory School, a charter school for underserved children in South El Paso. Sixty precocious Kinder and 1st Graders participate in bi-weekly dance classes where they learn listening skills, how to follow directions, positive learning behaviors, and explore creative expression. Next year, our Tiny Tots Program will serve over 90 children from La Fe Prep and include dance, music, art projects, and a school-wide performance at the end of the year. Look for La Fe Tots to steal the show when we perform *It's All Relative* at the Philanthropy Theatre in May. ■



PHOTO BY LEONEL MONROY

Jacques d'Amboise works with 4th grade students at Lamar Elementary.

Jacques d'Amboise Visits Kids Excel

What do you get when you mix genius with passion? Boundless energy, inspired intellect, charming expression, and heartfelt compassion—Jacques d'Amboise! On February 4th, New York City Ballet celebrity and world-renowned dancer and educator, Jacques d'Amboise honored Kids Excel El Paso by visiting our program. Jacques is the founder of the National Dance Institute, the arts education model followed by Kids Excel.

Jacques' event-filled day began with 30 Tiny Tots at La Fe Prep who were mesmerized by his unabashed expressions and enchanting stories of bunnies at a campfire. The Tots' eyes never

strayed from his charismatic face as he playfully took them through several activities, all the while challenging them to meet his exacting standards for excellence. As he said goodbye to the smiling 5-6 year olds, real tears sprang to his eyes, demonstrating the depth of his connection to children everywhere.

Fourth grade dancers at Lamar Elementary were the next lucky recipients of Jacques' exuberance. Kids Excel teaching staff scrambled to keep up with his fast-paced and impromptu directions. Even the principal, Bertha Martinez, was enlisted to join the fun.

The day culminated at the Philanthropy Theatre, where 40 dancers from

Kids Excel's Super Wonderful Advanced Team (SWAT) worked with Jacques onstage in front of 150 guests from the community. "An Encounter with Dance" was attended by philanthropists, community leaders, and many of El Paso's dance legends—all of whom were swept up by the genius and charm that is Jacques d'Amboise.

The children who interacted with Jacques had the opportunity to use their imaginations to expand beyond their scope of experience and be touched by something larger than any one person... by the magic and beauty of the arts and the impact that they can have on a person's life. ■

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE AT WWW.KIDS-EXCEL.ORG

HOW YOU CAN HELP!

Kids Excel El Paso is a 501(c)(3) organization that relies upon the generosity of our annual donors to support our work in the public schools. All Kids Excel El Paso classes are free to children and their families. If you would like to help by sponsoring a child, a class or a school, or by making a contribution of any size, please contact:
 Gemtria St Clair • P.O. Box 920144 • El Paso, TX 79902 • 915.351.6999 • gemtria@kids-excel.org

ART = Smart

In this age of benchmarks, standardized testing, and pressure on schools to demonstrate improved scores in math, reading, and science, it can be challenging to find a way to integrate arts education as an essential part of the curriculum.

Dedicated principals and teachers are conducting tutoring before, during and after school hours to help their students prepare for tests that are anxiously anticipated from the first day of school.

However, as mounting research demonstrates the impact that the arts have on learning, scientists and educators are coming to understand that art is an essential piece of a child's education, not just an enjoyable activity.

Studies show that children's participation in the performing arts increases their motivation and attention, as well as their memory retrieval in academic subjects. Art-making involves risk-taking, self-critique, perseverance, self-discipline, confidence, and pride in the finished product. It establishes a strong work ethic that can carry over to the classroom and inspire the focus and hard work needed to overcome challenging academic obstacles.

“The arts teach young people how to learn by giving them the first step: the desire to learn.”

RICHARD RILEY
 SECRETARY, DEPT OF EDUCATION

Champions of Change—The Impact of the Arts on Learning cites critical research, finding that learning in and through the arts can help “level the playing field” for youngsters from disadvantaged circumstances, often

making a more significant difference to students from low-income backgrounds than for their counterparts. These children are often marginalized in terms of societal expectations, opportunities and support and are not typically exposed to the rigors of formal dance and other

arts experiences in an academic setting.

“Youth who are engaged in ongoing arts programs show improvement in attitudes toward school, self-respect, self-efficacy, positive peer associations, and resistance to peer pressure.”

SHIRLEY BRICE HEATH
 STANFORD UNIVERSITY

By bringing its programs directly into the low-income neighborhood schools as part of the curriculum, Kids Excel makes arts education available to children who might not otherwise have the opportunity to participate in an extra-curricular arts education program. Children learn to work hard, never give up, and do their personal best - lessons that can be applied to every endeavor! ■

2007-2008 Kids Excel Programs at a Glance

In-School Program

- 12 EPISD schools
- 1000 children participating
- 64 classroom teachers served
- Over 9000 audience members
- 30 weekly classes/child
- 2 school-wide performances

SWAT Team

- 40 Dancers from 10 different schools
- Weekly extra-curricular sessions
- Performance opportunities
- Busing donated by EPISD

Tiny Tots Program

- La Fe Preparatory School
- 60 children participating
- 4 classroom teachers served
- Bi-weekly classes throughout the school year

Teacher Training

- 100 children participating
- 500 audience members
- 5 apprentices in training
- 3 instructors
- 3 pianists

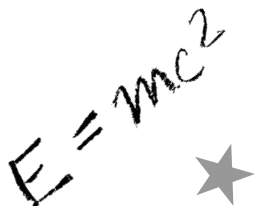
Banner Project

- 2 community artists
- 245 children participating
- 5 new banners

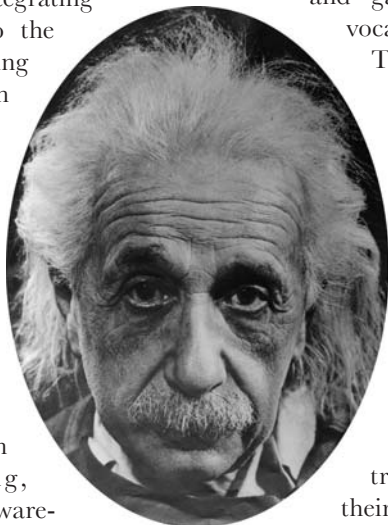


Zavala's banner created with the help of Adrian Lopez from Creative Kids

Albert Einstein and Dance?



Responding to requests for academic support from our classroom teachers, Kids Excel's teaching artists now work with a curriculum theme throughout the year, integrating academic learning into the dance class and supporting our classroom teachers in their goal to educate, empower, and inspire their students. Children explore math and science concepts with physical movement and space, thereby discovering new and creative ways to learn. Critical thinking, problem solving, sequencing, memorization, spatial awareness, and teamwork are at the heart of every Kids Excel dance class. Music education is embedded in the curriculum.



The 2007-2008 Kids Excel curriculum theme is Physical Science

and aligns with the 4th grade science curriculum set by the Texas Education Agency. Children explore mass, matter, volume, density, solids, liquids, and gases and other science vocabulary with their bodies.

They become vibrating particles and pack themselves tightly into solids.

They open up the space between the particles of a liquid, slipping and sliding while taking the shape of their container. They quickly move around the whole room as particles of gas, always trying to expand beyond their container.

In line with our curriculum theme for the year, the End-of-the-Year Event, *It's All Relative*, celebrates the genius of Albert Einstein and showcases many of his scientific concepts explored throughout the year. ■

From the Artistic Director

This has been an exciting year for Kids Excel El Paso. We have 1,100 children dancing each week at 13 schools in low-income neighborhoods. We started a waiting list of principals and schools requesting our programs. We expanded our SWAT after school program and began our Tiny Tots Program. Our first Teacher Training identified five new and promising apprentices, who have continued their training in the classroom this school year.

For me, however, the most exciting thing to happen this year was the stamp of approval Kids Excel received from NDI founder and mentor, Jacques d'Amboise. His visit was important for so many reasons, not the least of which was to solidify Kids Excel's position as an official affiliate of NDI—a title only awarded to organizations who meet the criteria of following the NDI mission and the model. But even more than receiving Jacques' endorsement, I wanted my teachers and pianists to be touched at a core level, as I have been, by the man behind the model. I wanted them to be able to directly connect to the original inspiration for the work that we do—to know that this vision is bigger even than the impact we have here in El Paso.

I truly believe that we can change the world with small, but meaningful, actions. Jacques' work has given me my vocation and a powerful vehicle for changing children's lives. Ten years of experience has shown me that, without a doubt, we can and do make a difference by expecting the best, not only from the children we serve, but also from ourselves.

Thank you, Jacques!

Yours in teaching children excellence,



Gemma



PHOTO BY ROBERT FEUILLE

4th Graders from Aoy Elementary perform in last year's "Wild West Show" at the Philanthropy Theatre

SAVE THE DATE!
End-of-the-Year Event
Albert Einstein:
It's All Relative
 Kids Excel El Paso
 takes **96** children from
Lamar School
 to perform at the new
PHILANTHROPY THEATRE
PLAZA ANNEX
MAY 30, 2008

OUR MISSION:

The arts have a unique power to engage and motivate children.

The mission of Kids Excel El Paso is to use its distinctive dance programs to help children develop discipline, a standard of excellence, and self-confidence that will positively impact their education and all aspects of their lives—one dance step at a time.

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Teacher Training Apprenticeship Program

Kids Excel's growth in El Paso is dependent upon dance instructors and pianists trained in the award-winning NDI methodology originally created by Jacques d'Amboise over 30 years ago. These award-winning NDI teaching techniques have been codified and are both demanding and systematic.

Kids Excel held its first Teacher Training Introductory Workshop last September. All current instructors and pianists, as well as 5 dancers from the community interested in working for Kids Excel, attended this two-week intensive. Teaching artists from NDI in NYC co-conducted the training, along with Gemtria St Clair, Kids Excel's Artistic Director.

Each morning, participants met with 100 students from Douglass Elementary to gain hands-on experience in the classroom. Afternoons were spent at Kids Excel headquarters practicing teaching techniques, learning classroom management skills, studying teaching manuals, and exploring successful choreography for children. Promising new participants were hired for a full year of apprenticeship

under the direct supervision of Gemtria St Clair.

Auditions for candidates for the 2008 Teacher Training will be conducted in August. Suitable applicants are dancers and musicians with strong artistic and performance backgrounds, who are passionate about working with children in an arts education setting. Local artists interested in training and working for Kids Excel should submit their résumés to gemtria@kids-excel.org. ■



PHOTO BY G. A. DAVIS

Kids Excel instructors, apprentices and musicians trained for two weeks at Douglass Elementary.