



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: _____

Program Title: _____

Program Category: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Title: _____

Department: _____

Telephone: _____ Website: _____

Email: _____

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Disney Theatre Partnership
(Regional Collaboration Category)

Executive Summary:

In November of 2022, a collaborative partnership began between the The Disney Musicals in Schools program, Virginia Repertory Theatre, Chesterfield County Public Schools and Chesterfield County Government. With an aim to provide all students sustained, equitable access to musical theater and arts, Title I elementary schools were invited to apply for the pilot year. Reams Road, Crestwood, Harrogate, and Bensley Elementary Schools applied, were chosen and participated in the inaugural year of the program. Its purpose is twofold: to expose students to the arts and develop critical awareness while fostering community engagement. Through weekly rehearsals and comprehensive support from school faculty and professional staff, students in grades three through five acquired a wide spectrum of skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal communication. The program culminated in performances at both the school and the Virginia Repertory Theatre. This program fostered positive relationships among students, families, staff, and the wider community. As a result, the program not only enhanced students' artistic abilities but also cultivated a supportive and collaborative school environment.

Problem or need addressed by the program:

The Disney Musicals in Schools program effectively addresses the lack of exposure to the arts among financially disadvantaged students twofold. By providing resources, training, and support to staff at Title I elementary schools such as the ones who participated in the pilot year, the program builds capacity among staff and helps create sustainable structures for ongoing performances while ensuring that students who may not otherwise have access to such opportunities such as musical theater. This initiative helps bridge the gap in arts education, offering a holistic experience that develops critical skills and fosters creativity while fostering positive relationships within the community. By engaging students

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in the arts, the program contributes to their overall academic success and personal growth, empowering them to thrive both in and outside the classroom.

Program Description:

During the summer of 2022, staff from Virginia Repertory Theatre, Chesterfield County Public Schools and Chesterfield County Government began work on the first year of an exciting partnership with Disney Musical in Schools (DMiS). Originated in 2009 in New York City, Disney Musicals in Schools sole focus is to create access and opportunity for students focusing on musical theater and arts. Over the last 14 years, the organization has scaled to support thousands of students throughout the country. This partnership is the first partnership in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Goals of the program:

- Create sustainable musical theater programs in public elementary schools.
- Provide school faculty with the training and tools necessary to support student performance and production, and to empower them to do so.
- Develop a critical awareness and appreciation of the arts within schools.
- Develop a strong community including cultural organizations, students, parents, faculty, staff, and neighbors.
- Expose students and school teachers to the wide spectrum of skills that are developed when producing a piece of musical theater, including: critical thinking, problem solving, ensemble building, communication, self-confidence, and interpersonal skills.

Participating schools receive:

- A free performance license to a Disney KIDS musical of their choice as well as the accompanying ShowKit materials.

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- Free, in-school support from a team of two Teaching Artists over the course of 17 weeks.
- The opportunity to perform a selection from their musical on the local professional stage as part of the Student Share Celebration.
- Scaled support over the course of three years to set the school up for a sustainable program for years to come.

Timeframe for Development and Implementation:

The development and implementation of the Disney Musicals in Schools program in Chesterfield County span multiple stages over a period of several years, with the intention of increasing the number of schools served.

In October of 2022 schools were invited to submit an application. School-based staff, in partnership with staff from Virginia Repertory Theatre vetted the applications and selected sites to participate in the final phase of the application process, the site visits. During the site visits, staff from Disney and Virginia Repertory Theatre have the opportunity to meet with school-based staff and leadership to gain a deeper sense of each school community and why they are interested in bringing the program to their school.

Once selected, participating schools embarked on a journey of training and preparation. Each school was asked to identify a School Team comprising at least three teachers and staff members. These individuals along with the Teaching Artists from Virginia Repertory Theatre participated in a one-day workshop in December of 2022.

After the initial orientation for school-based staff, schools engaged their students to choose from a list of musicals. Interested students were then invited to a general overview of musical theater activity prior

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to the auditions. This gave all students an understanding of the many roles that contribute to musical theater production. School-based staff were coached in making the selection process special and inclusive for all students.

The Teaching Artists worked with the school team through both the production management (developing a rehearsal schedule, running auditions and addressing technical and physical production requirements) and the creative execution of the show (direction, choreography, acting and design). They will also advise the School Team on school and community engagement opportunities.

Once the musical was cast, school-based staff partnered with the Virginia Repertory Theatre's Teaching Artists and oversaw and managed the program from beginning to end. The selected School Team received on-site support from a team of two Virginia Repertory Theatre Teaching Artists who visited the school each week for 17 weeks. Two 90-minute rehearsals were held each week, one led by the Teaching Artists and the other led by the School Team.

These rehearsals culminated in performances of selected Disney Kids musicals at both the school and larger community venues. Schools held between one and two performances based on their venue's capacity. Schools throughout the production time engaged members of the community to provide support by donating supplies and resources for stage sets and costumes as well as financial donations to provide meals during the production for students.

Lastly, the selected schools will participate in a culminating Disney Musicals in Schools Student Share Celebration. At this event, each school will share selections from its production at Virginia Repertory Theatre.

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Chesterfield County Public Schools in partnership with Chesterfield County Government played a pivotal role in implementing the Disney Musicals in Schools program, serving as the primary facilitator and coordinator of the initiative. The school division oversaw the application process for schools interested in participating in the program ensuring fairness and transparency in the selection process. Division-level staff facilitated communication and coordination between participating schools, Virginia Repertory Theatre, Disney Musicals in Schools and other stakeholders.

Contribution of Partners:

The success of the Disney Musicals in Schools program in Chesterfield County is made possible through the invaluable contributions of partners, including Virginia Repertory Theater and Disney Musicals in Schools:

Virginia Repertory Theatre - As the local nonprofit theater partner, Virginia Repertory Theater played a crucial role in providing support and expertise to participating schools. The theater's contributions included training, guidance, and artistic direction for school performances, as well as logistical support for venue arrangements and community engagement activities. They served as the financial agent for the grant, covering the costs associated with Teaching Artists as well as provided resources for the stage performance.

Disney Musicals in Schools provided essential resources and support to Virginia Reporter and participating schools, including free performance licenses, show kit materials, and training for school faculty and staff. The organization's expertise in musical theater education and its commitment to expanding access to the arts enriches the program's impact and sustainability.

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In conclusion, the Disney Musicals in Schools program in Chesterfield County exemplifies a collaborative effort to enrich communities through the transformative power of musical theater. By fostering sustainable programs, promoting critical awareness of the arts, building community connections, and developing essential skills among students, faculty, and staff, the program creates a lasting legacy of creativity, inclusion, and artistic excellence in Chesterfield County Public Schools.

Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:

The Disney Musicals in Schools program effectively addresses the lack of exposure to the arts among financially disadvantaged students twofold. By providing resources, training, and support to staff at Title I elementary schools such as the ones who participated in the pilot year, the program builds capacity among staff and helps create sustainable structures for ongoing performances while ensuring that students who may not otherwise have access to such opportunities such as musical theater. This initiative helps bridge the gap in arts education, offering a holistic experience that develops critical skills and fosters creativity while fostering positive relationships within the community. By engaging students in the arts, the program contributes to their overall academic success and personal growth, empowering them to thrive both in and outside the classroom.

Program Cost:

Disney Musicals in Schools through their grant to Virginia Repertory Theater covered all costs associated with the licensing and show kits. The grant funds also provided for the training of both VA Rep staff and school division staff.

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Virginia Repertory Theatre provided funding outside of the grant to provide stipends at \$1,600.00 per teacher to compensate for work they did outside of their teacher contract. They also reimbursed the school division or the costs associated with bus transportation to the student show.

Schools collaborated with other staff, families and community partners to create scenery and costumes. Because the sole focus of this is increasing the accessibility to the arts for all students, the musicals are designed to be produced inexpensively, and have been successfully mounted within a budget of \$300-\$1,500. Virginia Repertory Theatre Teaching Artists worked to maximize the school's production budget by using reclaimed and existing materials, such as cardboard boxes and t-shirts brought from home.

Program Results/Success:

The Disney Musicals in Schools partnership with Chesterfield County Public Schools yielded significant positive outcomes and results, benefiting both the participating students and the broader school communities. Across the four elementary schools involved, approximately fifty students per school actively participated in the production, either as members of the cast or as part of the stage crew, gaining valuable experience and skills in musical theater production. The inclusivity of the program extended beyond the direct participants, as students from other elementary schools had the opportunity to witness their peers' involvement in the productions, fostering a sense of inspiration and possibility among their own classmates. The cultivating performances, attended by 200 to 300 community members per school, not only showcased the students but served a platform for community engagement and cultural enrichment. Throughout this program, students not only honed their artistic abilities but also developed crucial life skills such as teamwork, communication and self-confidence. Additionally, the program contributed to building a more vibrant and connected school community where all students feel empowered to explore their potential and pursue their passions. Overall, the

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partnership with Virginia Repertory Theatre, Disney Musicals in Schools and Chesterfield County exemplifies the transformative power of arts education in fostering personal growth, community engagement and cultural enrichment.

Worthiness of an award:

The Disney Musicals in Schools program partnership with Chesterfield County Public Schools exemplifies an innovative initiative that significantly enhances access, opportunity, and connections within the community. By bringing together educational institutions, cultural organizations, and local government, this program creates a transformative platform for underserved elementary school students to experience the arts, develop essential skills, and foster community engagement. Through sustained support and collaboration, the program not only enriches the educational experience of students but also strengthens community ties, promotes inclusivity, and fosters a culture of creativity and belonging. Recognizing the program's profound impact on residents' lives, the partnership between Disney Musicals in Schools and Chesterfield County Public Schools is truly deserving of the NACo award. It serves as a shining example of how innovative programs within county governments can create meaningful opportunities and connections that positively impact the lives of residents and contribute to the overall well-being of the community.

Supplemental Materials:

- Event video link, article with pictures (enclosed)

Supplemental Materials:

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfQVkJyOJy4>

'IT REALLY LETS KIDS SHINE'



MARGO WAGNER, TIMES-DISPATCH

Members of the cast of "Aladdin KIDS" lead themselves in a warmup exercise adapted from the song "Singing in the Rain" on Tuesday at Reams Road Elementary School.

Adding magic touch to 'Aladdin'

Reams Road students take theater stage with big assist from Disney

THAD GREEN
Richmond Times-Dispatch

For a Chesterfield school, one of their wishes was granted by Alad-

din, literally.

Students at Reams Road Elementary this week presented their first public performance of "Aladdin KIDS," showing off their newfound skills as singers, actors and producers.

"I'm tired now, but I'm just so happy," Reams fifth-grader Cooper Rogers said following his per-

formance as the titular Aladdin. "The most fun part was getting to be with my friends."

The school received the opportunity through Disney Musicals in Schools, an initiative created to develop sustainable theater programs in under-resourced

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WATCH: Danielle Conflitti gives the cast of "Aladdin KIDS" words of encouragement before their performance at Reams Road Elementary. Point your cellphone camera at the QR code and click the link. [NEWSVU](#)



MARGO WAGNER, TIMES-DISPATCH

Approximately 80 third- through fifth-grade students participated in onstage and backstage roles for "Aladdin KIDS" on Tuesday at Reams Road Elementary. Reams was one of four Title I schools in Chesterfield selected to participate in the cost-free musical theater residency.

Disney

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elementary schools. Chesterfield County's participation represented the first time Disney included schools in Virginia.

Approximately 80 third-through fifth-grade students participated in onstage and backstage roles, taking part in classic Aladdin numbers such as "Arabian Nights," "Prince Ali" and "A Whole New World."

"It felt good," fifth-grader Desaray Stevenson said about playing Jasmine. "I feel like I'm more confident in what I do."

Reams was one of four Title I schools in Chesterfield selected to participate in the cost-free

musical theater residency. The schools received performance rights and show materials to perform 30-minute "KIDS" musicals that are tailored for elementary school students.

The Virginia Repertory Theatre was awarded a grant from Disney to bring the program to Chesterfield County Public Schools. Additional funding was provided by the Cameron Foundation and the Nunnally Foundation.

"It really lets kids shine, kids that I never thought would come out of their shell," said Reams music teacher and show director Danielle Conflitti. "They brought the magic and they put the magic on the stage, and that's all we asked them to do."

Bensley Elementary ("The Lion

King KIDS"), Crestwood Elementary ("The Jungle Book KIDS") and Harrowgate Elementary ("The Lion King KIDS") were announced as program participants in November along with Reams.

Each school spent 17 weeks rehearsing their shows. Virginia Rep teaching artists who were trained by the Disney Theatrical Group provided instruction to the students.

"We just wanted to make sure that they didn't feel overwhelmed, and we wanted to make sure that they knew it was partly their responsibility to go home and make sure they were learning their lines and learning their songs," said Sarah White Pruden, one of the Virginia Rep teaching artists.

When a couple of unplanned hiccups popped up during the performance, the students showed poise in improvising and keeping the performance on track, resulting in applause and even some laughter from the audience.

"They did a great job of cooperating and focusing and making sure that they all had each other's backs on stage," Bri Allen, another Virginia Rep teaching artist, said. "They all picked up each other where they needed to."

Isabella Ellis-Johnson, a fourth-grader who played Jafar, said remembering her lines was the hardest part and that she felt nervous on the stage.

"Yeah, a lot," she said.

But Isabella also said it was good seeing family and friends

in the crowd supporting her, and that she'd like to play Jafar again in another show.

While no plans for future productions have been set, Dorothy Heffron, Clover Hill representative of the Chesterfield County School Board, said she will advocate for more after watching the students' growth on display, and seeing how performance arts can bring communities together.

"The kids absolutely blew it out of the water," Heffron said. "I was really impressed with not just the talent, but also their enthusiasm. I can definitely see that they've developed skills along the way."

Thad Green (804) 649-6023
tgreen@timesdispatch.com
@thadgreen on Twitter