

# Movement Arts for Peaceful, Powerful, and Creative Young People

## A Study of Artists-at-School Residency at Havenscourt



**Prepared for**  
Destiny Arts Center

**Prepared by**  
Informing Change

August 2017

INFORMING  
CHANGE 

---

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Students' Social-Emotional Well-Being &amp; Interpersonal Skills</b>	5
<b>Students' Sense of Safety, Creativity &amp; Self-Expression</b>	10
<b>Beyond Class</b>	15
<b>The Role of Adult Champions</b>	19
<b>Moving Forward</b>	22
<b>Appendices</b>	25
Appendix A: Theory of Change	A1
Appendix B: Evaluation Methods & Resources	B1
Appendix C: Survey Respondent & School Demographics	C1
Appendix D: Data on Teaching Artists	D1
Appendix E: Summary of Classroom Teacher Survey Responses	E1

---

---

# **Introduction**

---

## **About Destiny Arts & this Evaluation**

---

# About Destiny Arts Center

## Destiny Arts Center

- [Destiny Arts Center](#) provides creative youth development to young people based in movement arts, including but not limited to dance, martial arts, and other performance or movement-based art forms—both in and out of school time—throughout the Bay Area. Professional Teaching Artists (referred to in this deck as Teaching Artists) lead these programs, through which young people learn and practice community building and conflict resolution in the context of movement technique, skill building, creative exploration and collaboration, and performance.

## Artists-at-School Residency

- One of many programs at Destiny Arts Center, the Artists-at-School Residency brings creative youth development curriculum to classroom settings, where Teaching Artists convene students one to five times per week as part of their school year-long residency. This report draws on data gathered from three Artists-at-School Residency sites in the Havenscourt neighborhood of East Oakland (referred to in this deck as the Havenscourt Residency): Community United Elementary School, Roots International Academy, and Futures Elementary School.\*
- The Havenscourt neighborhood is culturally comprised of deeply rooted African American families and an ever-growing population of vibrant immigrant residents, many of whom are newcomers to the US. Young people living in this neighborhood experience high levels of social displacement stemming from factors such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, and systemic barriers to basic services. Youth in this neighborhood are disproportionately impacted by the school-to-prison pipeline, and experience high rates of suspension and chronic absences. Many have witnessed or experienced violence in their lives. Artists-at-School aims to support and ignite young people's inherent strength, resilience, protective factors,<sup>†</sup> and creativity by using a curriculum that focuses on restorative practice and social-emotional learning.

\* See Appendix C for these schools' demographic information.

† For a definition of protective factors, see <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/protectfactors/>

---

# About This Evaluation

- In 2016, Destiny Arts Center partnered with Informing Change, a strategic learning and evaluation firm, to develop a theory of change which outlines Destiny Arts Center’s target constituents, strategies, and anticipated short- and long-term outcomes as results of those strategies (Appendix A). As an entry point to testing Destiny Arts Center’s Theory of Change, this evaluation draws on data collected from students, classroom teachers, and Teaching Artists in the Artists-at-School Residency program at Havenscourt. Evaluating this program served as a pilot both for collecting and making meaning of these data, as well as for the Artists-at-School Residency model itself.
- In 2017, we developed **surveys for students** that elicit data on how they may have changed as a result of their experience with a Destiny Arts Center Teaching Artist and in a movement arts class. The survey focuses on three outcome areas for young people: how Destiny Arts influenced students’ capacities to be (1) peaceful, (2) powerful, and (3) creative.
- We also developed and administered a **brief survey of classroom teachers** in whose classes Destiny placed Teaching Artists for the 2016–2017 school year. Finally, we **interviewed two Teaching Artists** to learn more about their experiences in the schools and where they see opportunities for the program to improve.
- When assessing this report’s claims about student progress or Teaching Artists’ accomplishments, readers of this report should keep in mind that experiencing trauma or suffering early in life can negatively impact a child’s ability to empathize with others, and this may limit their desire to collaborate or their effectiveness at it when they try.\*
- Readers should also keep in mind the limits of our data collection. In this pilot year, we were field testing student survey questions, so our level of confidence in the accuracy of student responses is only moderate. Ideally, we would have held focus groups with both classroom teachers and Teaching Artists; however, logistical barriers made this impossible for the current report. Recommendations to improve future evaluations are included on page 24.

\* Li, Y., Li, H., and Decety, J. “Experiencing a Natural Disaster Alters Children’s Altruistic Giving.” *Psychological Science* 24 (2013): 1686-1695.  
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0956797613479975>

---

# Overarching Findings

**The Destiny Arts Center model shows great promise for promoting the resilience and social-emotional learning critical to a positive community.**

- Our data suggest Teaching Artists are fostering a space on campus that is different from standard classroom activities and sparks change in students' lives through dance.\*

**To Teaching Artists, positive changes in students are evident and vivid—albeit episodic—in individual students' “ah-ha” moments.**

- Less visible to Teaching Artists, and therefore not confirmed, is the extent to which students gradually change throughout the year.

**Teaching Artists and classroom teachers need to have similar expectations about their respective roles and more shared time together.**

- Data suggest that Teaching Artists and classroom teachers would both benefit from working together to transition students to and from the dance class.

**Destiny's Teaching Artists are well positioned to assist students in exercising artistic voice and taking creative risks.**

- Data show that Teaching Artists are laying vital groundwork for students to use their artistic voices and take creative risks by creating spaces in which students feel safe and learn to express themselves physically through dance.

\* The Havenscourt Residency focused only on dance curriculum.

---

# **Students' Social-Emotional Well-Being & Interpersonal Skills**

---

## **Destiny's Impact**

---

## The Destiny model can lay solid groundwork for students' social-emotional learning in the classroom.

- Research shows that healthy social-emotional development in young children paves the way for social, academic, and career success in the future.\* Additional research indicates that fostering emotional growth in schools may be difficult due to pressure from adults to prioritize academic achievement over caring for others.†
- Although the curriculum in Destiny classes focuses on teaching dance and physical movement, the nature of the Destiny model creates space for social-emotional growth as well. Confidence and self-awareness are core components of social-emotional learning, and students need to develop these abilities to grow and build healthy relationships with each other.
- In a space free from the pressure of grades and standardized tests, the Destiny dance class provides a vehicle for students to develop these critical components of personal growth. Dance provides a way into these core components: Students can practice specific skills, identify where more practice would help, and experience positive changes and improvement as a result of this practice of self-reflection.

\* Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). SEL Impact. Retrieved from <http://www.casel.org/impact/>

† Harvard Graduate School of Education. (2014). The Children We Mean To Raise: The Real Message Adults are Sending About Values, Making Caring Common Project. Retrieved from <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/files/gse-mcc/files/mcc-executive-summary.pdf>

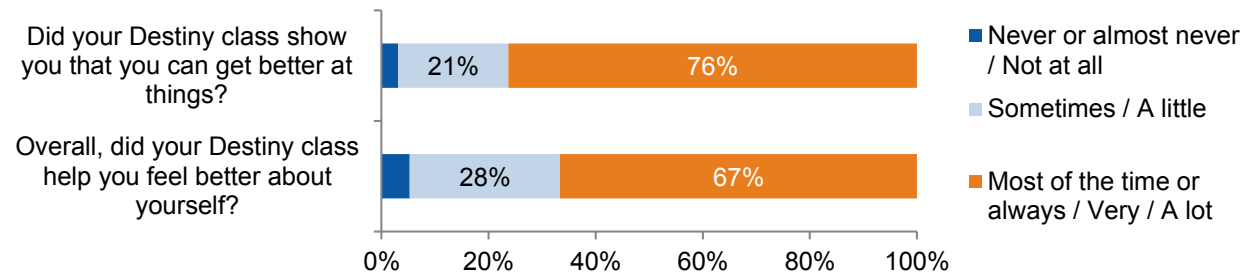


---

## Our data provide early indications that core components of social-emotional learning—confidence and self awareness—grew among students in Destiny dance classes.

- Almost all students surveyed said that their Destiny classes help them feel better about themselves. Educators echoed this finding in their survey and interview responses. Teaching Artists and classroom teachers alike described students gaining confidence and becoming more expressive, though not necessarily in a clear, linear, progressive fashion. They also observed episodes in which students evinced improvements in their social skills or self-control over the course of the school year.
- One Teaching Artist described the changes she observed in students: “This young person was shy and now they’re really expressive and have performed in front of their community and love to dance, and everything in between. Some students are—they’re not shy, but they haven’t necessarily had an opportunity to ever express themselves in a structured way before, and so they’ve taken advantage of that opportunity.”

Exhibit 1  
**Students’ Social-  
Emotional Growth**  
n=189–194



**“Students are calm and have more confidence in expressing themselves and have found new passions within the classroom. Others have stepped out of their comfort zone to participate in performances.”**

– Classroom Teacher

# School Story: Striking Changes

## From a Teaching Artist:

“I have a student who was consistently just having trouble in his classroom with behavior. I experienced some of that in the beginning, mostly in conflict with other students or trying to cause distraction or whatever when we’re trying to be orderly or do something. For the winter celebration, I told them a few weeks ahead of time, ‘This performance is contingent on your behavior. I have this behavior chart. **You are expected to respect, listen, and participate** and if you don’t do those things, you don’t get points.’ This student really wanted to be a part of the performance, but **he didn’t earn enough points**, so I said ‘I’m really sorry.’ I called his family and said ‘He wants to do it really bad, I get it. There will be other opportunities, but I was very clear about the expectations and he didn’t earn the points, and so he’s unfortunately not able to go.’ And now, at the end of the year, when I get there, **he’s one of the first students ready to go**. That was for me, probably one of the most striking changes.”

## Destiny classes create a space for personal growth, but have yet to actualize their potential for cultivating a sense of community.

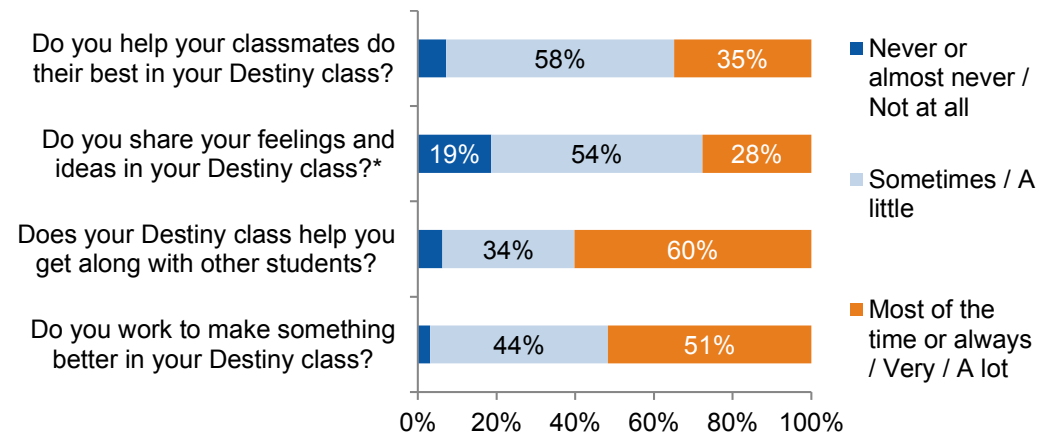
- While student survey responses indicate that their Destiny classes help them *get along with other students*, there is room for more growth in their sense of communal responsibility: Fewer students say they *help classmates do their best*. An additional indicator of community—that students *share their feelings and ideas* in class—also had lower student responses, compared to a personal growth indicator such as *making something better*.
- Interviews with Teaching Artists brought to light mixed findings about students and their relationship with others in the dance class. One Teaching Artist reported seeing some cooperation among students but was not sure how much this carried over outside of dance class. Another Teaching Artist described students working together and helping each other within a couple of months of beginning the dance class.

**“I just try to promote a lot of positive culture, like giving each other props and appreciations and being kind and respectful... But they’re also at this age in human development where it’s a very individualistic age. It’s not an age where collective responsibility really makes sense, developmentally.”**

– Teaching Artist

Exhibit 2  
Students’ Personal & Community Growth

n=188–195



\* Future research should seek to clarify how students are interpreting this question: “Do you share your feelings and ideas in your Destiny class.” It is possible that students are sharing feelings—if not ideas—through physical movement, but are not identifying this in their survey responses.

---

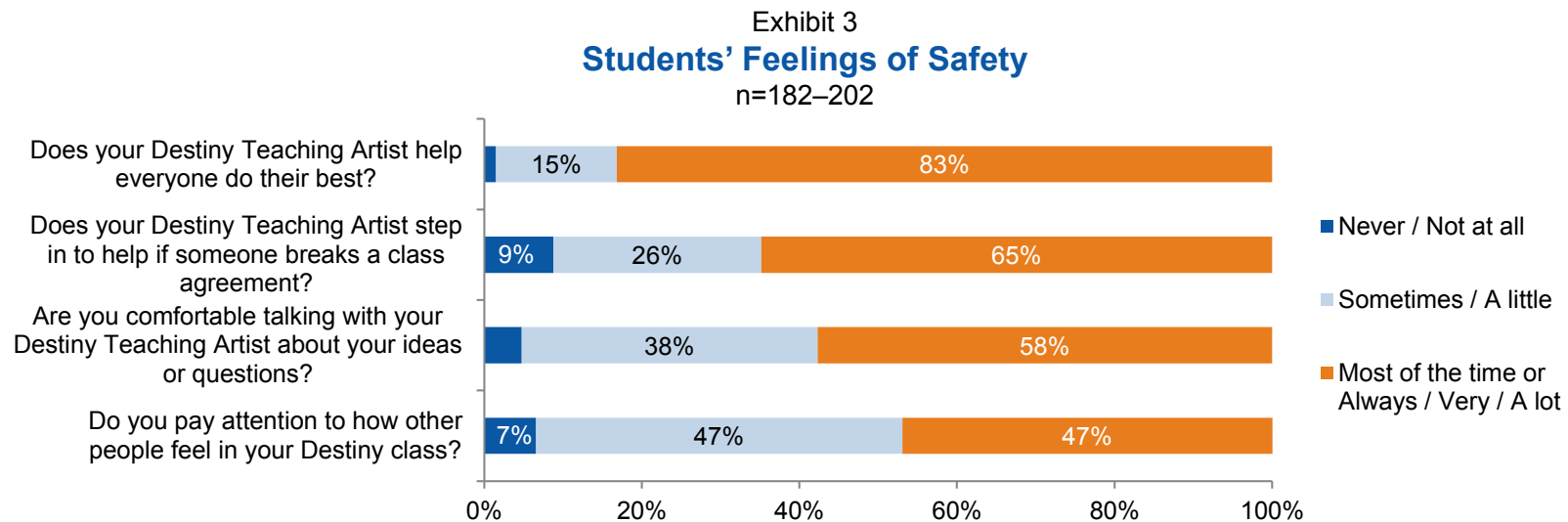
# **Students' Sense of Safety, Creativity & Self- Expression**

---

## **Destiny's Impact**

## Students feel safe in Destiny Arts classrooms, which is foundational to their ability to express themselves and create.

- Teaching Artists provide students a structured yet flexible space in the classroom, creating an atmosphere where students feel safe. Students' survey responses seem to reflect this: 91% of students report that Teaching Artists step in to help if someone is breaking class agreements.
- Students perceive Teaching Artists as caring adults who look out for their safety in the classroom, and there are early indications that this sense of safety also supports students' social-emotional learning in the classroom. Almost all (96%) of students feel comfortable sharing their ideas and questions with Teaching Artists. Students are also contributing to a safe school environment during their Destiny class by paying attention to how their classmates, classroom teachers, and Teaching Artists feel. A Teaching Artist described a student feeling safe enough in the classroom to open up about a family loss, inspiring other classmates to share their own stories of loss in support of this student.



# School Story: Safe Spaces

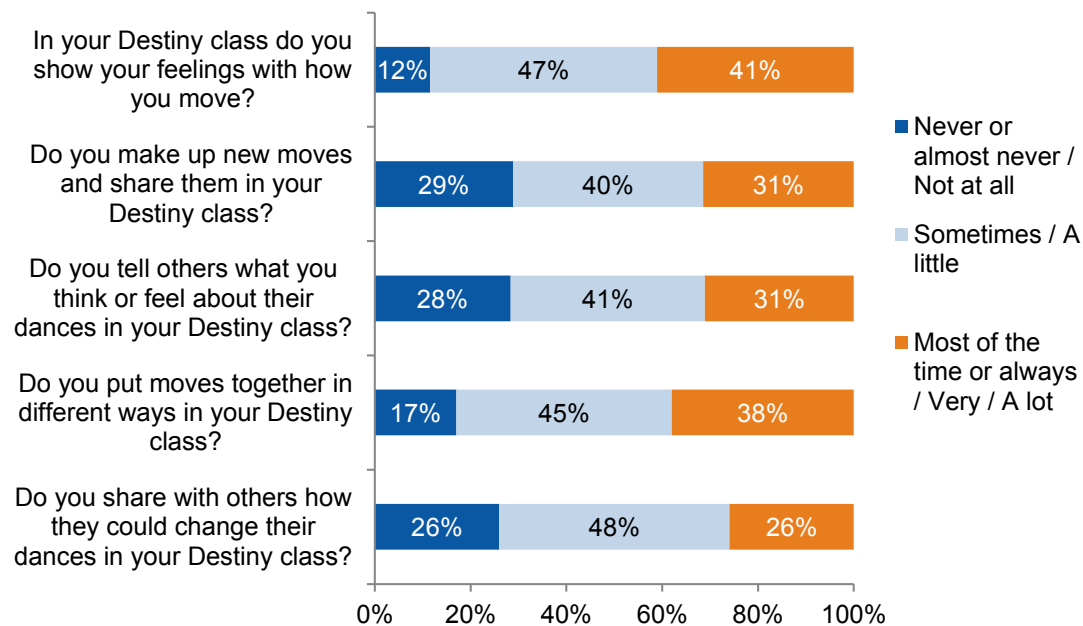
## From a Teaching Artist:

“He came with a picture of his father because we share about the day, about the weekend, and what we did over the weekend. He brought this picture to me and said, ‘I brought this picture of my father.’ So we passed the picture around and **he told the story of his father who had died** in an accident, and **everybody started sharing stories** about family members who had passed away, and I've never seen something like this. **It was like a ritual.**”

## Dance is an important tool for student’ self-expression; Destiny’s success at enabling students to exercise creative agency, however, is nascent.

- Students actively participate in class, dancing, expressing themselves, and sharing with others at least “sometimes.” However, survey responses suggest Teaching Artists can do more to support students’ sense of artistic voice and creative agency: Fewer students report that they regularly create their own dance moves, give feedback on dances, or build their own dance routines. The safe space that Destiny classrooms provide, however, indicates that Teaching Artists are beginning to create the prerequisite conditions for students to ultimately take risks that will shape their unique creative identities.

Exhibit 4  
**Students’ Self Expression**  
n=180–194



**“Destiny Arts was a positively fabulous part of the school year. The structure, strategies, implementation, and creativity of the program has given my students not only an outlet for their energy but also an enthusiastically crafted and planned education on movement, culture, music, and language. Students are more enthusiastic about class and look forward to dance days.”**

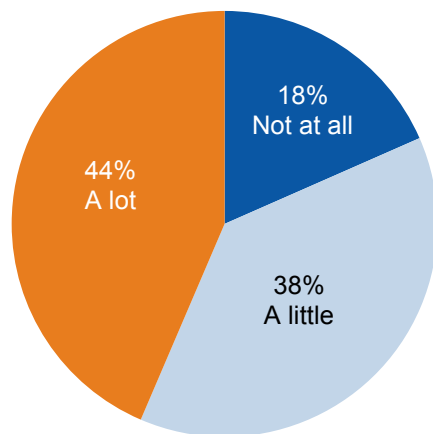
– Classroom Teacher

---

## Students are drawing on their cultural and historical roots to express themselves.

- Part of this creative identity is each student's cultural and historical roots. Almost half of the students who completed the survey report that Destiny is helping them draw connections between the dance art form and the cultural and historical contexts from which they arise. This provides examples for students to reflect on with regard to their own cultural identities. Regardless of whether and to what extent students are making historical and cultural connections, classroom teachers note that students love to dance.

Exhibit 5  
**Did you learn about the history of this art form in your Destiny class, where it came from or the people who made it?**  
n=163



**“Students really take to the art form and find an outlet, they find a way to express themselves, they find joy; they fall in love with it. Not all of them do, but culturally, it’s very appropriate because hip hop is something that has been a part of Oakland culture for a long time, and some students are experiencing versions of what we’re doing in the classroom at home. Students who are not African American are definitely steeped in an African American culture where, like all of America, this culture is cool; that’s what’s cool to them.”**

– Teaching Artist



---

# **Beyond Class**

---

## **Destiny's Impact**



# School Story: Destiny Pride

## From a Teaching Artist:

“Students **wear their Destiny t-shirts** on the days they see us and maybe other days too. We have a pretty big Yemeni-Arabic population in the Havenscourt neighborhood, and a lot of the girls wear the full length covering in public. The other day I was knocking on some doors in the neighborhood. There was a girl I had seen at school earlier; when we came to her door and she answered, she had her abaya off and she had her Destiny t-shirt on, and I was like, ‘I think **she’s been wearing that all day under her abaya.**’”

# School Story: Reaching Families

Destiny classes may indirectly influence students' caregivers—there is some indication that participating in Destiny's dance class can also have a positive impact on a student's family. Data on students' families was not directly collected in this first year, but it may be something to consider pursuing in future evaluations.

## From a Teaching Artist:

"I have one student who was coming in and not dancing, just sitting because her family goes to church and they don't let her participate in other traditional dances. She was so quiet, watching and never dancing or doing whatever we do. And then after maybe two months she came and told me **'My mom says I can dance.'** She had been telling her mom, 'I want to do it,' and her mom was saying 'No, no, no.' I said 'I always wanted you to dance. So your mom said it's okay?' She said, 'Yes.' I said, 'Are you sure?' She joined in and it was just amazing. [Crying] It's just so beautiful that **this changes their parents too.**"

---

# **The Role of Adult Champions**

**A Crucial Piece of the Model**

---

**Because a student's participation in dance class can be shaped by the experiences they have during the school day and vice versa, Teaching Artists and classroom teachers need one another's support.**

- Although the Destiny class differs in content and structure from standard classroom activities, Teaching Artists need classroom teachers' support to transition from regular school day activities to the dance class. A classroom teacher also mentioned that they would like to collaborate more with Teaching Artists.
- For the most part, Teaching Artists in the Havenscourt Residency have developed good relationships with classroom teachers. However, interviews reveal how much work it can take to establish these connections and how much power they have to affect the program's success. Teaching Artists and classroom teachers alike would benefit from more opportunities to intentionally strengthen their relationships.

**“There's a huge difference for me, when I step into a classroom, where a teacher already has rapport with their students, and systems that they regularly use. I can lean into some of the order and structure that's already happening, and into the trust that they have built with their teacher.”**

– Teaching Artist

---

## A shared understanding of Teaching Artists' and classroom teachers' roles within the program is crucial for successful program implementation.

- During interviews, Teaching Artists described the importance of building relationships with other adults who can be champions of the program both on and off school campus. Sharing information about Destiny's program with other classroom teachers and administrative staff may help create an atmosphere where staff view the dance class as part of a student's learning experience.

**“I feel like having a direct relationship has been the gateway to having successful programs with youth, and also me supporting those adults, supporting the teachers, and supporting the people who are coordinating. I want to be able to really intentionally spend more time in the classroom when I'm not teaching with the kids, and then [build] relationships with the sites.”**

– Teaching Artist

**“Teachers are very underappreciated and encouraged to be competitive with each other. I would never want to be like that because I need all of the things that they've already established in the classroom. I need them...But yeah, it's easy for them to look at us and be like, 'Whatever! They just get to come in and do fun stuff with the kids and the kids love them.' So I try to really not buy into that dynamic at all.”**

– Teaching Artist

---

# **Moving Forward**

---

## **Recommendations & Considerations for the Program & Evaluation**



---

# Program Recommendations

- Lessons learned from the Havenscourt Residency can help inform program changes as Destiny Arts moves into the second year of programming at Havenscourt and thinks about expanding the dance program to other schools.
- Strong relationships between educators, as well as a shared understanding of each other's roles within the program, are crucial for program implementation. If possible, school staff should receive a general overview of the program at the beginning of the year, and classroom teachers directly involved should meet with the Teaching Artists throughout the year. This will ensure that everyone has the same expectations of themselves and each other, and create a space for teachers and school administrators to share feedback with the Destiny Arts program.
- Teaching Artists would benefit from spending more time on campus and in the classroom. Teaching Artists could strengthen their relationship with classroom teachers if they had more time to check in with each other and build trust so that they can support student growth together.
- Survey data suggest that Teaching Artists can do more to support students' creative expression. Fewer students report that they regularly express themselves through dance, create their own dance moves, give feedback on dances, or build their own dance routines. Professional development for Teaching Artists should focus on empowering students to make creative decisions and feel comfortable enough in their knowledge of the dance styles to embody the styles in their own ways.
- The survey also shows that students need more support developing their social skills to interact with their peers. Although it is clear from the student survey and educator interviews that students are building relationships with the adult in the classroom, students do not seem to be building relationships with their peers to the same degree. A couple of classroom teachers also noted that Teaching Artists could use additional training in classroom and behavior management to make sure they are maintaining a positive environment for learning.

---

# Evaluation Recommendations

- Fine tune survey questions through pilot tests with students to ensure language is accessible and students are interpreting questions as intended. Given that Destiny Arts Center is also very interested in engaging students in the evaluation process, getting student input on the data collection tools is one way to do this.
- Collect qualitative data from students—consider conducting student focus groups or other research activities designed for young people whose native languages vary to collect stories and supplement survey data.
- Collect additional qualitative data from Teaching Artists and classroom teachers.
- Particularly with Teaching Artists and students, consider video recording interviews or focus groups. There is a visual richness to the ways both adult dancers and young people communicate that will help bring the impact of Destiny’s work to life.
- Some research indicates that social-emotional learning varies by age. Depending on what age group Destiny Arts is working with, more varied, age-appropriate curricula may be necessary to create the best environment for social emotional learning. (This said, biological age is only a proxy for student development; a more nuanced approach would identify key characteristics of classroom dynamics and tailor curricular choices that best fit these dynamics.)
- Introduce Destiny’s commitment to learning from its practice by talking with Teaching Artists and school staff about how the program will be evaluated; seek educators’ input on the best ways to assess and document Destiny’s impact. This will both strengthen evaluation activities and help build buy-in and support for them.
- Destiny Arts Center has developed a promising model for social-emotional learning through movement, and this pilot year’s evaluation data show early signs of student growth. Continue to evaluate the program to identify its most effective practices and use those learnings to evolve over the coming three to five years, after which the program will have had time to demonstrate its most powerful impacts.

---

# Appendices

---

## Working Purpose Statement

Destiny Arts Center is a catalyst for culturally relevant arts and action. We provide a safe space for youth to express themselves, advocate for social change, and build peaceful communities.

### Primary Constituents

Young people living in Oakland and the Bay Area, particularly youth of color, youth from low-income backgrounds and LGBTQ youth.



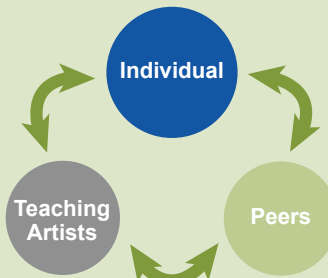
### Rationale

Cultivating creative, nonviolent, communication through movement arts transforms isolation and trauma, builds relationships and develops creativity and a strong sense of self, with each mutually reinforcing the other.

### Destiny Arts Strategies

Teach classes grounded in movement-based arts to help young people become confident, grounded and socially connected.

Support the effectiveness and sustainability of teaching artists while building a community of caring adults and mentors that value young people.



### Secondary Constituents

Caregivers, friends, extended family, alumni, teaching artists and emerging artists, Destiny's Resident Companies, Oakland and Bay Area Community.



### Outcomes

Young people who participate in Destiny Arts Center programs are powerful, peaceful and creative individuals who are active agents for social change in their communities.

Caregivers and community members view Destiny Arts Center as an important, culturally relevant local resource that provides high-quality programs and performances that benefit the community.

Professional teaching artists hone their skills and tools as artists, arts advocates, educators and mentors.



## Ultimate Impact

When we are successful, young people live meaningful, connected, creative lives and become advocates for an inclusive society. They value themselves and others, respond rather than react to situations, and practice peace and love over violence.