

Act One widening the world for Title I students

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For the third year running, Act One has received a grant from APS that will help finance ticket and transportation costs for its signature field-trip program so it may continue to provide arts experiences in Title I schools.

Since 2011, Act One has sent more than 157,000 underprivileged students on educational arts field trips around Arizona.

“APS’ support really helps us sustain our programs and grow and strengthen them so we can serve more students,” says Geri Wright, executive director at Act One.

Countless studies show at-risk students who are exposed to the arts are more engaged in class, have increased attendance and are more likely to graduate from high school.

For the half a million Arizona students who do not have the chance to see a live artistic performance as part of their education, the opportunity offered by Act One exposes them to enriching experiences.

“A lot of times, it’s the experience of going on a field trip that really matters,” Wright says. “These kids are not getting out of their neighborhoods to experience the world.”

Nicole Brokaw, a fourth-grade teacher at Four Peaks Elementary in Apache Junction, recalls when a bus full of rowdy students went silent as they crested onto the freeway.

Brokaw, concerned, turned around to see her students staring, transfixed, out the window.

Most had lived their entire life just a few miles down the road, but for the first time they were seeing the skyscrapers of downtown Phoenix.

She later wrote to Wright describing how the biggest hit at the Phoenix Art Museum for her students had not been the priceless exhibits, but the elevator — none of them had ever had the chance to ride one.

Act One operates specifically in Title I schools, schools where 40 percent of students receive free or reduced lunch. In fact, in the schools that Act One

serves, 76 percent of the student population is enrolled in one of these programs.

Act One fills a gap in underprivileged schools, where funding for arts education is often at the back of the line. This helps level the playing field with schools with well-funded arts programs.

Although there are other Valley groups that may give away free tickets to the arts, transportation is often the chief obstacle for most schools. Act One takes care of this concern.

“What is so meaningful about the field-trip program is the transportation component and the one-stop shopping,” Wright says. “Participating schools look on our website, pick a field trip and submit their application. We approve it, and boom-boom-boom, they’re good to go.”

Act One provides tickets and transportation, as well as teaching guides and in some cases museum- and theater-etiquette guidelines to help students feel comfortable in these new environments.

Word is getting out. When registration opened for 2017 on Aug. 7, Act One received 26,000 seat requests in that one day alone.

Simply exposing young people to the arts plants the seeds that could one day sprout great writers, actors and artists.

Act One field trips encompass a range of artistic experiences.

Students can experience live music at the Phoenix Symphony; performances at Ballet Arizona, the Southwest Shakespeare Company and the Arizona Opera; or the world-renowned exhibits at the Phoenix Art Museum and Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art.

Those are just a few of the over 70 trips that Act One offers.

The number of students Act One reaches has grown significantly. What began with 6,000 students in 2012 is projected to reach over 37,000 this year, with a goal of breaking 45,000 next year.

“Macbeth” may be a masterwork of tragedy that all should see, but some things just can’t compare to your first ride on an elevator.