



HIGHER ORDER THINKING SCHOOLS NETWORK  
strong arts arts integration democratic practice

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF HOT THINKING



Department of Economic and  
Community Development

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Office of the Arts

# Mission

## Higher Order Thinking Schools Inspire Life-Long Learning

### In, About, and Through the Arts in a Democratic Community

#### Celebrating Each Child's Unique Voice

**Higher Order Thinking (HOT) Schools** is a community of practice that networks and develops entities interested in teaching and learning in, about, and through the arts using the HOT Approach. HOT practices and strategies stimulate student curiosity, ignite their sense of wonder, empower students so they feel invested in their school and their learning, and steer students toward a journey of lifelong learning. Students who attend a HOT school enjoy numerous outlets for expression and for reinforcement of the intrinsic value of their thoughts.

The Higher Order Thinking Schools program, established in 1994, works with select Connecticut schools to promote teaching and learning in, about, and through the arts in a democratic setting. The program builds higher-order thinking skills and prepares students to be successful learners and contributors in the 21st Century through strong arts, arts integration, and democratic practice. In HOT schools, the arts are rigorous academic subjects, each with its own sequential curriculum that conveys knowledge not learned through other academic disciplines. HOT school teachers work collaboratively to structure interdisciplinary curricula that promote deep learning of subject matter, higher order thinking, creativity and teamwork by strategically linking learning in the arts to learning across the curriculum. HOT schools cultivate a democratic school culture to which all members of the school community contribute and in which individual leadership is emphasized. The Higher Order Thinking Approach to teaching and learning has emerged through a strong net-

work of HOT Schools, serving thousands of students in over 42 Connecticut public schools. It has been adopted and adapted by schools, arts organizations, individual teaching artists, local arts agencies, and state arts agencies nationwide interested in understanding school culture change, curriculum integration, and arts-infused program design.

**The HOT Approach** is an innovative delivery system that provides teachers, teaching artists, administrators, parents, and arts organization educators vital professional development, resources, tools and strategies to develop, deepen and expand effective practices in arts education, arts integration, school culture change, and leadership development.



A mathematical mural created by HOT students

## Core Components

strong arts   arts integration   democratic practice

**STRONG ARTS** Education in, about, and through the arts helps students develop critical thinking abilities, independent judgment and creative problem solving skills. The arts, as rigorous academic subjects, each with their own sequential comprehensive curricula, convey knowledge not learned through studying other academic disciplines and provide stimulating vehicles for children to communicate their ideas.

**ARTS INTEGRATION** Sequential arts learning experiences that weave ideas and/or concepts between and among arts and non-arts disciplines, effectively advancing knowledge and/or skills in an arts discipline while concurrently advancing knowledge and/or skills in other disciplines.

**DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE** HOT Schools cultivate a school culture in which purposeful activities support choice, participation, connection contribution and responsibility to celebrate the unique voice of each member of the school community.

## Professional Development

Professional development forms the core of the HOT Schools program. We engage not only teachers and arts educators in advanced educational opportunities, but administrators, teaching artists, and parents as well. HOT Schools professional development is grounded in current research and best practices in teaching and learning. HOT Schools provides multiple opportunities for both HOT School and non-HOT School educators to participate in professional development each year. Examples include:

**Annual HOT Schools Summer Institute**, the hallmark of HOTs professional development, is a nationally acclaimed, week-long residential conference packed with renowned speakers, seminars, workshops, sequential learning tracks, interactive demonstrations and performances. The Institute highlights the HOT APPROACH as a reliable keystone for employing instructional practice that cultivates critical, creative and innovative thinkers, inspires and motivates educators, and sparks the joy in teaching and learning. The Institute advances professional development, highlights the value of learning communities, fosters collaboration and provides educators skills and strategies to address learning challenges, and advance learning through differentiated instruction.

**HOT Mini-Institutue**, a 2-3 day residential conference that introduces new material or reinforces specific content from the Summer Institute.

**HOT LEADERSHOPS** are day-long workshops collaboratively designed, hosted, and conducted by a Connecticut HOT School and the HOT Schools Program Staff to share best practices, developed and tested in HOT schools over time. Leadershops illustrate the HOT Schools Approach to teaching and learning in action, and provide instructional practice for educators to implement components of the HOT Approach in their school or site, while concurrently building leadership skills in presenting teachers.

**Peer Partner Days** are day-long workshops to which teachers in a specific arts discipline invite a non-arts classroom teacher partner to attend. Mornings focus on specific skills and concepts of the arts discipline, and the afternoons are dedicated to collaborative planning of peer partners to develop a testable arts integrated lesson or unit. In addition to increasing awareness and building value for arts pedagogy, these sessions highlight arts educators as instructional leaders in their schools.



HOT Principals convene

**Convening, Focus and Discussion Sessions** bring various cohorts of educators from across the state together for a specific purpose. For example HOT School principals come together 3 times a year to discuss progress, challenges, new state or national directives or mandates, etc.; related arts teachers meet to share collegial successes/practices/initiatives in their schools; multi-grade teachers convene to investigate, develop or improve a specific concept, plan or practice such as the intersections between science and the arts.

## Strategies

HOT Strategies, each reflecting a synthesis of the HOT core components of strong arts, arts integration and democratic practice; provide structured paths to facilitate the implementation, reinforcement, and enhancement of the HOT Approach. HOT Strategies engage students in active learning, stimulate independence, and encourage students to be responsible and contributing citizens in the school community. Examples of HOT Strategies:



HOT students display their artwork

**Teaching Artist Collaborations** partner teaching artists with extraordinary skills in one particular arts discipline: dance; theater; visual arts; music or creative writing with teachers whose extraordinary skill resides in their content knowledge and understanding of certain strategies for transmitting that knowledge to students. Together, the team forges a collaborative partnership to design authentic arts-integrated learning opportunities for students through which students apply higher order thinking processes of imagining, decision-making, creating, performing, and responding.

**Town Meeting**, a whole-school gathering that develops community and provides a forum to showcase student learning. The Town Meeting

gives students the opportunity to present their learning-in-progress to the larger school community in a creative, interesting and artful way. Through Town Meetings, students gain confidence performing and presenting. HOT Schools encourage parents, community and board of education members to attend Town Meetings.

**ECHOs – Enhanced Curricular HOT Opportunities**, designated time blocks which engage the whole school (often in multi-aged groupings) in active learning. When teachers structure instruction considering students' abilities, interests, and learning styles, high-end learning takes place. ECHOs engage students in real world learning experiences in which students apply advanced content and methods to de-

**Strategies (continued)**

velop products and services that have an impact on intended audiences. ECHOS are student-driven and they facilitate higher order thinking by providing students with opportunities to apply their interests, knowledge, thinking skills, and creative ideas to self-selected problems or areas of study.

**Magic Mailbox**, reinforces literacy through providing multiple outlets for student writing. This student-generated and operated repository, initially intended for student writing, has grown to include opportunities for sharing visual art, songwriting, music composition and other work. Students self-select their best work to submit to the MM for peer review. Peer review boards critique and recommend selected work to be highlighted at Town Meetings or in other venues. The opportunity to be showcased in the larger school community encourages students to submit work, and the placement of the Mailbox in a prominent location of the school is a constant reminder to students that it is there, waiting for their best work.

**Student Boards** HOT Schools give students the opportunity to serve on peer-review boards to help develop student leadership and student voice. Students are generally selected for boards through an application process. The most common Student Boards are:

- **Literary Board:** Develops the criteria by which student writing is reviewed and reviews submissions to the Magical Mailbox. Selections might be sent to a theater or dance group for interpretation and then featured at a Town Meeting. The cycle of generation, submission, review and presentation of student writing becomes a hub of excitement and enthusiasm for learning in a HOT School.

- **Art Board:** Develops the criteria by which artwork is reviewed and reviews art submissions to the Magical Mailbox. Selected artwork may be framed, displayed or featured at the Town Meeting's Artist's Spotlight. The opportunity to be showcased in the larger school community promotes pride and encourages creativity.

**Student Senate** promotes students as leaders and decision-makers. HOT Schools believes that democracy and arts are inextricably linked. Both fundamentally involve expression. Both demand active participation in the social sphere. By demonstrating to students that they can communicate powerfully through words, images, movements, and sounds, we enhance their sense of social efficacy. HOT Schools feature strong student governments where students articulate their needs in compelling language to address real issues that bear importance in their lives and in the lives of their peers.

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