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## ***StudentsFirst: Arts Education / Arts Learning Programs***

Our robust arts education department, led by Roxanna Conner, provides new and meaningful learning through arts experiences. This program gives our young citizens a deeper appreciation of theater as a living, breathing art form, a platform to create dialogue towards societal change, and the opportunity to use their voices to tell their own stories.

Victory Gardens’ arts education programs engage nearly 1,200 Chicago Public Schools 7th to 12th grade students, annually. The overarching goals of VG’s arts education programs are to encourage students to (1) appreciate theater as a living, changing art form and (2) learn to use their own voices to tell their own authentic stories. These goals align with VG’s commitment to new voices and new work and its mission of creating “vital, contemporary American theater that is accessible and relevant to all people.” We place a strong emphasis on the students finding deep, emotional connection to the plays they read in class and especially those they see on our stage, and on their thinking about the stories they need to tell that are not being told. We show students that everyone is a storyteller.

Grounded in the discipline of playwriting, VG’s education programs are particularly suited to enhance students’ English language skills through an immersive, in-depth arts integration model. Each of its component programs combines exposure to theatrical literature with skills building in writing, public speaking, and collaborative learning.

Three core components comprise the programs:

- **Drama-in-the-Schools** is a year-long immersive artist residency program that advances reading and writing literacy and the dramatic arts through progressive standards-based curricula tailored to address classroom learning goals. VG teaching artists are currently in residence at eight CPS partner schools; engaging more than 750 students and logging almost 1,000 classroom hours over the academic year.
- **The Scholarship Subscription Series** provides up to 1,000 free tickets for CPS students and discounted tickets for parents attending designated matinee performance of at least two main stage productions. CPS partner schools receive preferential ticketing, as well as advance copies of the scripts. All schools participate in in-school preparatory and optional post-show exploratory workshops around each visit to the theater, along with show-specific study guides that greatly enhance the experience of seeing live theater that speaks to the social issues at the center of life in Chicago.
- **The Teen Arts Council** is a year-round mentorship and leadership development program for 20-30 teens motivated to learn about the skills involved in producing professional theater in this city. Members have access to our artists as well as opportunities to immerse themselves in the artistic process, from participating in writing workshops to attending plays and hosting events to engage their peers.

Victory Gardens seeks out underserved communities for partnerships with a strong focus on the south side and northwest neighborhoods. Nearly 80% of the students who participate in Drama in the Schools identify as African American and/or Hispanic/Latinx and come from low-income neighborhoods.

