

Initiative for Youth Theater in Norwood, Massachusetts

Submitted by Carolyn Ferris

On Behalf of the Norwood Backstage Boosters Program



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Norwood Backstage Boosters
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Educational Theater Foundation
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Dear Board of Trustee Members,

Please consider this letter as a part of the formal application for the Thespian Grant from the Educational Theater Foundation in support of the Norwood Backstage Boosters. The Norwood Backstage Boosters, founded in 1995, provided funding and support through a series of fundraisers and donors in support of theater in Norwood Massachusetts. The Backstage Boosters provides several programs a year for afterschool theater, as well as providing additional funding for in school theater that the state funding does not provide for, such as costumes, props, and more.

With the help of the Thespian Grant, the proposed is to create an afterschool theater program for grades K-8 in Norwood, Massachusetts. The purpose is to provide an accessible and free option for children interested in doing theater before high school, where it is more accessible. This proposal will go over the exact parameters of the proposed program, as well as exactly what the money will be going towards.

With the money provided, the Backstage Boosters would be able to kickstart the program and provided youth theater education as planned. If you have any questions after reading this proposal, please contact me at carolynferri@umass.edu. Your time and consideration are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Carolyn Ferris

Statement of Need

Many parents, guardians, and teachers believe putting their child in school alone is enough for their development and childhood experience. Although school fosters a great environment to learn, build relationships, and grow, the five day a week academic setting is simply not enough for early childhood development and enrichment. Activities such as sports are integral parts of growing up and learning life lessons and experiences. However, not every child fit into a sport or even likes any sports available. I know from my experience that I was not into sports as a child, but my parents put me in soccer because it was simply something to do. This is where youth theater comes in. According to *We the Parents*, “Children can benefit from a diverse range of learning opportunities, but the active engagement and interpersonal experiences fostered by drama and theater education can have overreaching positive effects on their academic, social, and emotional lives that simply aren’t obtainable through rote book learning.” Theater education is a hugely important part of many children’s development, happiness, and well-being. It is an activity that is nowhere near readily available but can be so inspiring and amazing for children or all ages. As the years go on, specialists have been realizing just how important a child’s experience in theater can be. Numerous researchers, websites, and teachers have agreed that “Theatre education benefits are numerous and powerful and exist across student populations, age levels and learning environments” (Arts Education Partnership).

Theater education in the Norwood Public Schools is not available until high school, and it is an elective course meaning students choose traditional academic courses over theater courses.

Furthermore, there are limited options outside of school to perform until high school as well.

There are after school programs through the high school, but these activities conflict directly

with sports schedules and other clubs, meaning students will most likely choose activities like sports or band that they have had the option to join since elementary school or earlier. Any theater groups not through the high school are expensive, hard to get to, and immensely time consuming. Any student committed to these theater activities would not have time to explore other things, which are just as important as theater. According to the Arts Education Partnership, “only 4% of all public elementary schools offered theatre instruction, and less than 50% of public secondary schools offered theatre instruction during the school day. Additional data from a 2012 Americans for the Arts report suggest that fewer schools offered theatre courses during the school day (79% sampled) than offer extracurricular theatre (95% sampled). Additionally, wealthier students are more likely to receive theatre education during the school day (41-56%) than students in schools with higher concentrations of poverty (28%).” These numbers are so drastically low for an activity that is so loved by students and children everywhere. Funding is simply not there and the priority for theater education is something thought about last in the grand scheme of early childhood education.



Statement of Request

The Norwood Backstage Booster is requesting funding in the form of the Thespian Relief Grant in the amount of \$10,000 to aid in the startup of an afterschool youth theater program in Norwood, Massachusetts. This funding will be used for personnel compensation. This includes the weekly program teachers that will work with the kids.

This program would consist of students meeting once a week after school in a reserved classroom space to learn about theater, talk with professionals and high school theater students, as well as put on their own scenes and shows. This program would be incredible for helping children with confidence, give them a safe afterschool space to be in, and get them interested in the arts.



Description of Proposed Program

The focus and purpose of this program is to get elementary and middle school aged children involved and interested in theater. As this is a low budget program, most time would be spent on acting skills. There would be no fee for students to join. Once a week, students would go to the reserved space in their own school. This way the program would be accessible as there is no travel involved. Students would take this time to work with each other and the teacher to work on scenes, acting skills, warmups and more. They would perform for each other, as well as putting on a showcase of the scenes they have been working on or a full show at the end of the year. The high school has a huge stock of plays and theater books that can be used by the program. These can be used to get the kids started.

Of course, acting is not the only aspect of theater. There would be days to learn about all the technical elements of theater as well. Students would even be able to design their own costumes for the shows, by both bringing in clothes from their own closet as well as having access to the high school costume stock. There are hundreds of costumes owned by the high school and Backstage Boosters already in all sizes that can be used. To learn about other technical elements more in depth, high school students would come to the program a few times to talk about lighting, sound, stage management, and more to show the kids what the big kids are working on. As high school students can drive, this would be less of a transportation issue. We would also like to raise money for buses to bring the program's students to the high school to see the work up close and potentially sit in on a rehearsal for the high school shows.

Overall, this program is to get students exposed and involved in theater as well as giving them a safe space to come to every week. The program would start out small and hopefully grow in the years to come.

Available Facilities

All schools involved in the program have a stage space that can easily be reserved after school hours simply through the school secretary. This comes at no cost. Furthermore, if the stage space is booked already any week, the work being done can easily be accomplished in a classroom setting that can also be reserved through the secretary. This easy booking also includes any showcase or show that is to be put on. These stage spaces can be reserved for evenings as well. Furthermore, the program would run from 3:15 – 4:15 for elementary school, and 2:05 – 3:15 for middle school. This is right after school to when the late busses arrive. This way, the program is more accessible for students who must take the bus home.



Example of one of the elementary school stage spaces

Personnel

The main personnel working with the children would be teachers already working at the school. One teacher from each school would be the main operator of the program. This could be the art teacher, the music teacher, or simply any teacher interested in the dramatic arts. There would also be special days when the high school students and drama teacher would come to the program to speak with the children and show them what they have to look forward to in high school. A long term goal is to raise funding to bring in some theater professionals to speak to the kids.



Budget

The funds from the grant will be going straight towards teacher compensation. Most school districts do not offer stipend pay for extracurricular work for teachers, so we would be paying them out of pocket to do this program. There are six schools involved in the program, which calls for six teachers and six paychecks. Each would be a \$2,000 payment for the teachers to run the program for the year. The funding from the grant only covers the first-year startup cost, as we have plans to raise money as well as advocate for government funding with the first-year success of the program. All other supplies would be provided by the Backstage Boosters, as detailed previously.

Summary

If we are granted the Thespian Relief Grant of \$10,000, we could create a wonderful program for kids to get started in their theater education in an accessible and affordable way. With this program we aim to reach children of all demographics and not let any be held back by money or transportation issues. Theater is truly for everyone, and we want to portray that message. This program would help children with all sorts of skills, but ultimately just be a bunch of fun.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read our proposal, and we hope to hear from you soon.



End Matter

Bibliography

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Image Credits

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Page 8 - @Rileyprincipal on twitter of the Cleveland Elementary School

Page 9 - The Delaware Gazette