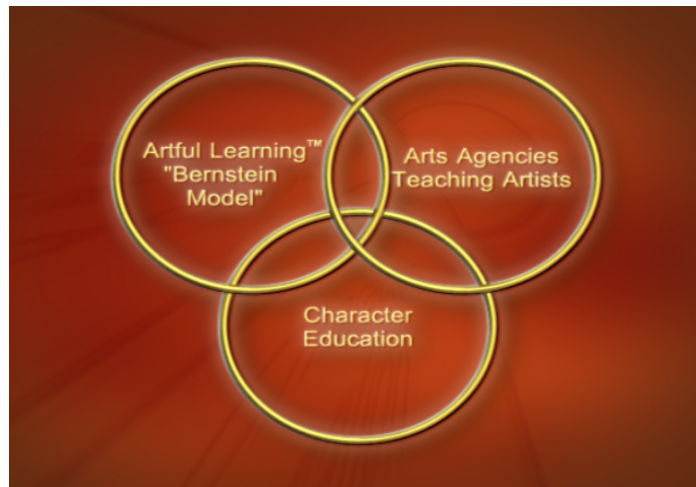




Character Through The Arts is a U. S. Department of Education (*Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools*) research grant with nine pilot schools and eight comparison schools across the state of Georgia. Public and private schools in urban, suburban and rural settings are represented.

The fiscal agent for the grant is **Pioneer RESA** in Cleveland, Georgia, and the **Center for Service, Outreach & Partnerships at Kennesaw State University** is a grant partner along with the **Leonard Bernstein Center for Learning** in Gettysburg, PA.

The purpose of **Character Through The Arts** (CTTA) is to integrate arts agencies/teaching artists and the **Artful Learning™** education reform model with proven character education strategies to determine the impact this integration has on moral character and academic achievement. The integration of the **three key components** of the grant is depicted in the illustration below:



CTTA-trained teachers and artists work together to prepare instructional units that address and teach core-curriculum and are grounded in character-based concepts and arts-based strategies. As teachers become more and more confident using the CTTA model, the confluence of the three components takes on a life of its own and becomes embedded in their teaching and their students' learning.

When the three components of this grant – Character Education, Teaching Artists, and the Artful Learning™ instructional model – are successfully integrated, the magic created extends beyond the classroom to parents and members of the community. Students share their excitement about learning with their families and friends, and teachers' passion for their work is renewed.

One of the important aspects of the CTTA model is its flexibility and adaptability to different school environments. Teachers and administrators tell us they feel empowered to take what they have learned in CTTA training and adapt it to the needs of their individual schools... a trait that is lacking in so many "cookie cutter" education reform models. CTTA is not designed to be a "canned" program, but rather, takes on unique characteristics at each of our pilot schools.

The Character Education component includes Georgia's Character QCC Standards, but is grounded in the research and materials compiled by the **Character Education Partnership** in Washington, DC. **CEP's** framework is based on Tom Lickona's highly successful **Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education**. Each pilot school develops its own character education program based on character words that all stakeholders decide on and have ownership in. For example:

- At Gadsden Elementary in Savannah, the theme is **"Good Character is Contagious: Help Us Start an Epidemic!"** A different character word is embedded into the curriculum every month. Local businesses display posters with the school character words, and local ministers plan their sermons around when those words are studied. Last year, students wrote poems that their parents converted to songs. The songs were recorded and distributed on CDs to raise money for the school.
- At Harmony Leland Elementary, Core Values of **"Integrity, Respect, and Responsibility"** were adopted and a **Code of Ethics** was established defining those values. Graphics were developed, and Core Values posters were printed and proudly displayed in Mableton, GA businesses. A billboard on prominent Veterans' Memorial Highway was donated by a local business person for the first month of the character campaign. A larger version of the Core Values poster, the billboard reminded thousands of people a day to "Be a role model for our students!"
- Gainesville Middle School's **Best Foot Forward** campaign lasted the entire school year. Students interviewed older members of their community, wrote about the character traits displayed by those people, and staged a musical based on their writings complete with original songs and dance routines. All of the writings were published in a book of the same title available at amazon.com.

The **Character Education Partnership** has a national conference each year in October. CTTA teachers and administrators presented at the conference in 2005 to share our success with other attendees. Two of our schools, **Centennial Elementary** and **Gainesville Middle School**, are among an exclusive group of 100 schools selected nationally to receive a **Promising Practices Award**. These two schools were also invited to make separate presentations at the 2005 national conference.

As we "go to press" with this web-based article, we learned that a Gainesville, Ga. CTTA school, Centennial Elementary, was just named one of only ten **National Schools of Character** for 2006 by the **Character Education Partnership**. The award will be presented at the 2006 CEP Annual Conference in Washington, DC. Gainesville High School received a **2006 CEP Promising Practices Award** for their CTTA Outdoor Learning Center Project. For more information on these two accomplishments, go to www.characterthroughthearts.org and read the May 2006 newsletter.

The CTTA instructional component, Leonard Bernstein's **Artful Learning™** model, uses high levels of engagement to create an atmosphere in which students are in charge of their own learning. Teachers become facilitators in a student-led learning environment that creates lifelong learners.



CTTA-trained teaching artists experience the same renewal and excitement that is shared by CTTA-trained teachers. In the CTTA model, teachers and artists become partners in planning and delivering character-based **Artful Learning™** units that engage students in learning the core curriculum.

According to several CTTA teachers, the framework of this model is aligned perfectly with the new **Georgia Performance Standards**. When the standards began to be unpacked, CTTA teachers were making comments like “we are already doing this.”

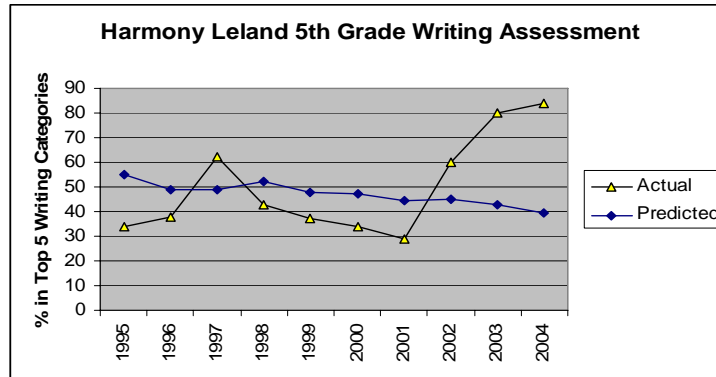
**SIMILARITIES IN UNIT LANGUAGE
GPS AND CTTA
(for Georgia Teachers)**

TERMS/WORDS	CTTA	GPS (UBD)*
Masterwork	Yes	No
Content Standards	Yes	Yes
Concept/ Enduring Understanding	Focus Statement	Enduring Understanding
Students Will Understand	Significant Question	Essential Question
Students Will Know	Skills in Inquiry Centers	Knowledge or Skills
Performance	Original Creation	Performance Tasks
Other Evidence/Assessments	Deepening Questions & Assessments	Other Evidence & Assessments
Activities	Inquiry	Learning Activity
Resource List	Yes	Yes

* *Understanding By Design*

The data being collected will be evaluated, not only in terms of moral behavior and school climate, but also in terms of academic achievement. Our demonstration school, Harmony Leland, where the Artful Learning™ reform model was implemented five years ago, has experienced unprecedented academic growth. Six years ago, only 20% of the students at this Title One School were meeting standards: now, 82% of their students are meeting standards, in spite of the fact that their Free and Reduced Lunch percentage has increased to 69%.

This improvement is also reflected in the fifth grade writing assessment.



Their actual performance from 2002 through 2004 considerably outstripped what was predicted based on the increasing proportion of students receiving free or reduced price lunches.

It should be noted that Harmony Leland was an **Artful Learning™** school for three years prior to becoming a CTTA school; therefore, the staff and the students were already using engaging learning methods that were previously unknown to our other project schools. Adding the character element and the teaching artist element to the already engaging curriculum was a natural fit, and the results speak for themselves.

Other CTTA schools are reporting fewer discipline referrals, improvement in school climate, and an atmosphere that reflects a genuine desire to learn. The level of **Artful Learning™** implementation is different at each school; however, with the advent of the new, highly compatible **Georgia Performance Standards**, academic growth at other pilot schools has the potential to mirror that of Harmony Leland.

The evidence that character education increases academic performance is growing. (See **What Works in Character Education, a Research-Driven Guide for Educators** by Marvin W. Berkowitz, Ph. D., and Melinda C. Bier, Ph. D. at www.character.org.)

The evidence that the arts are a powerful engagement tool for ALL students, regardless of socio-economic level, is conclusive. (See **Gifts of the Muse, Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts**, www.rand.org a report commissioned by The Wallace Foundation in cooperation with the Rand Corporation, a nonprofit research organization.)

Character Through The Arts is, indeed, a **No Child Left Behind** success story that can be replicated at other K-12 schools.

For additional information, please visit www.characterthroughthearts.org. Exemplary K – 12 **CTTA Units** that are aligned with the **Georgia Performance Standards** are located in the Teacher Section of the CTTA website.