

2017 National Teacher of the Year Finalist



ATHANASIA KYRIAKAKOS

2017 Maryland State Teacher of the Year

Baltimore City Public Schools
Mergenthaler Vocational
Technical High School
Baltimore, Maryland

School Profile: Urban
District Size: 84,730
School Size: 1,650

Subject: Art Education
Grade: 9-12

Years in Teaching: 11
Years in Position: 6

Application: Kyriakakos, Athanasia | 068

Round: Main

Page: Candidate's Basic Information

| Question | Answer |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| Candidate Name | Kyriakakos, Athanasia |
| State | Maryland |

Page: Candidate's Resume Information

| Question | Answer |
|---------------|---|
| Education | The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Masters of Fine Arts in Fiber Arts. Chicago, IL |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 1998-2000 |
| Education | Central Connecticut State University. Teaching Certification, Art Education, K – 12. New Britain, CT |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 1993-1994 |
| Education | The Maryland Institute, College of Art. Bachelor of Fine Arts, General Sculptural Studies. Baltimore, MD. |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 1987-1991 |
| Certification | Maryland Advanced Professional Teaching Certificate, Art prK-12 |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 8/11 thru current |
| Certification | AP Art |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 2015 |
| Certification | |
| Dates (MM/YY) | |
| Experience | Mergenthaler Vocational Technical High School, Baltimore, MD. Art educator, grades 9-12. |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 08/2014 - present |

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| Experience | Baltimore Talent and Development High School, Baltimore, MD. Art educator, grades 9-12. |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 03/2013 - 06/ 2014 |
| Experience | Civitas High School, Baltimore, MD. Art and technology educator, grades 9-12. |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 08/ 2011 - 06/ 2013 |
| Experience | Orebro Art College. Artist in Residence, Orebro, Sweden. |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 04/ 2005 and 09/2008 |
| Leadership | State of Maryland's External Stakeholder Committee for the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 10/2016 to present |
| Leadership | Baltimore Teachers Union, Union Learning Representative at Mergenthaler Vocational Technical High School |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 07/2016 to present |
| Leadership | Stud Learning Objectives District Ambassador . I lead the PD for training new teachers and administration with the SLO process. |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 2013-present |
| Awards and Other Recognition | Maryland Art Education Association Career High School Art Educator Award for outstanding achievement and exemplary service to the art education profession. |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 2015/2016 |
| Awards and Other Recognition | 50th Venice Biennale. Representative for the country of Greece at the Greek Pavillion. Venice, Italy |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 06/2003 |
| Awards and Other Recognition | UNESCO. First Prize Award. The 4th Citenje Biennale. Citenje, Montenegro |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 2002 |
| Awards and Other Recognition | Fulbright Scholar. Research award to Greece. |
| Dates (MM/YY) | 2000/2001 |

Additional Resume Items

Please list the month and year for each additional item.

LEADERSHIP:
 07/2016 to present. Baltimore Teachers Union, Union Learning Representative at Mergenthaler Vocational Technical High School
 08/2016 to present. "BTU Buddy". New teacher mentor with the Baltimore Teachers Union's mentor ship program
 09/2016 to present. State of Maryland Arts School Portfolio Committee
 09/2015 to present. Baltimore City Schools High School Curriculum Writing Committee
 2014-2015. Cohort member of the American Federation of Teachers, Teacher Leader Program
 2014 to present. "MERVO on Display". Creator and coordinator of annual school wide exhibition of all trades and arts
 Spring 2013-2014. Baltimore Talent Development. SLO Ambassador. Lead PD on teacher training and submission for SLO process,
 ILT Team Member, Team Lead, Arts Integration Expert under Arts Everyday, 12th Grade Adviser, 12th Grade Department Head
 02/2013 to present. FYI coordination committee, in collaboration with the Baltimore City Public Schools, Baltimore County Public Schools and The Baltimore Museum of Art.

AWARDS
 2017. Maryland State Teacher of the Year
 2016/17. Baltimore City Teacher of the Year
 2016. Baltimore City Council Resolution in recognition of 2016 Baltimore City, Teacher of the Year Award.
 06/2015. MERVO High School. Award for largest impact on students and climate.
 2015 and 2016. MERVO High School. Perfect attendance awards.
 2014. Baltimore Talent Development. Outstanding Staff award
 2001. The Deste Prize. Finalist for the Deste Prize award. Athens, Greece
 1998-2000. Full Tuition Merit Scholarship. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

LECTURES
 2005. Visiting Artist. The University of Yianina, Fine Art Department. Subject: Transitory Art. Yianina, Greece
 2004. Guest Lecturer. The New School. New York, NY
 2004. Guest Lecturer. The University of the Aegean. Third Annual Festival of Greek/Turkish Friendship. Lesbos, GR
 2003. Presenter. Second International Workshop on ICTs, Arts and Cultural Heritage. Digital Art Technologies, Applications, and Policy. Foundation for The Hellenic World. Athens, Greece
 2002. Guest Lecturer. The University of Chicago. Chicago, Illinois
 2002. Visiting Artist. The Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore, MD.
 2002. Visiting Artist. The School of Fine Arts in Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece. 2002

Page: Candidate's Professional Biography

| Question | Answer |
|------------------------|--|
| Professional Biography | Athanasia Kyriakakos Passion, resilience, and perseverance are the end result of the relationships Ms. Kyriakakos |

Please complete your professional biography in 3rd person, as this will be used in promotional materials for CCSSO speaking opportunities and engagements.
Maximum 250 words.

builds with her students. Athanasia Kyriakakos earned her MFA degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2000, her teaching certification from Central Connecticut State University in 1995 and her BFA degree from The Maryland Institute, College of Art in 1991. While teaching in Baltimore and as an advocate for her colleagues, she has been a member of the Instructional Leadership Team, a Student Learning Objectives District Ambassador, a Baltimore Teachers Union mentor and Union Learning Representative, and in 2015, a member of the American Federation of Teachers, Teacher Leaders program. She serves on the State of Maryland's External Stakeholder Committee for the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act. Ms. Kyriakakos is currently the 2016/17 Baltimore City Teacher of the Year and the 2017 Maryland State Teacher of the Year. Additionally, she is on the programming committee of Arts Everyday, The State of Maryland's Arts School Portfolio Committee, and the Baltimore City Public School's High School Curriculum Writing Committee. As a world-renowned artist, Ms. Kyriakakos represented Greece in the 50th Venice Biennale; created artwork for the XXVIII Olympic Games in Athens, Greece; received a Fulbright Fellowship; and received awards from the Deste Foundation in Greece and from the UNESCO Foundation.

Page: Application Question #1

| Question | Answer |
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| <p>Question 1</p> <p>Describe a lesson that defines you as a teacher. How did you engage all students in the learning and how did that learning influence your students? How are your beliefs about teaching demonstrated in this lesson?</p> | <p>"...He always smiled—rows of braces, shining at me. There in front of the windows, facing my school, there lay my student, one of my sons So handsome, sleeping. Gold sequined vest! His skin shiny and chocolate Sleeping But his lips sealed...."</p> <p>I read quietly, my voice quivering, holding back tears.</p> <p>"Day of the Dead" is the interdisciplinary lesson that defines me as a teacher. Circulating through my stunned students, I open up my soul and allow my vulnerability to spill out as I talk about Eddie, my student lost to the streets of Baltimore. My voice breaks. I hold in nothing, and expect the same from them. One by one, my high schoolers quietly read: "I sure miss you..." and we all become one in that moment, respectfully sharing, healing in the words, expressing sadness in the loss of loved ones, lifting our burdens in the process. Some students gently snap their fingers, finding courage to continue reading. The reading unfolds to a PowerPoint discussion about South American traditional celebrations of Dia de los Muertos, cultural colonization, and appropriation of art forms. We talk about death rituals from around the world, relating the lesson to personal experiences, tapping into prior knowledge. After modeling cake-decorating techniques, my students are encouraged to design sugar skulls. Using icing, beads, foil, ribbon, they symbolically capture metaphor, in the process of honoring their loved ones. Excitedly they explore this "new" art form, devising alternative uses for 'piping tools,' while continuing to share their memories and stories in word and through creation of unique art pieces. Most importantly, they share authentic experiences, emotions and passionate words. They witness each other's deepest feelings and develop respectful understandings. In the art room, we</p> |

build community. The journey of art-making and education is paved with respect and trust. The foundation of good teaching is built on relationships developed in the classroom and the discourse that follows.

My art curriculum is informed by my students' experiences in combination with my own. Art affirms, heals, and builds focus, perseverance and resilience. In 2003, during my Fulbright years as a cultural ambassador and international artist, I was invited to exhibit in Sarajevo, a city with schools and homes riddled with bullet holes. I interviewed people who recalled times of war and bloodshed, while talking about hope for healing and rebuilding. As I drive through Baltimore neighborhoods, I encounter similar scenes of urban blight and destruction. Poverty causes its own trauma and helplessness, contributing to the achievement gap in our city schools. I believe that, for our urban communities to heal and rebuild, a new conversation needs to begin, similar to the one begun through creating art in Sarajevo.

"The Day of the Dead" lesson culminated in a school-wide multi-media presentation and installation of an "Ofrenda" altar. My students' stories of loss echo through our hallways and Eddie's smile shines again in the faces of students who found their creative voices and used them to overcome hurdles of society and life.

Page: Application Question #2

| Question | Answer |
|---|--|
| <p>Question 2</p> <p>Describe a project or initiative you have been involved in. What was your role, and how did this contribute to the overall school culture?</p> | <p>Visitors are greeted at the door by the smell of apple pie from a commercial baking student. Scissors snip at the end of the hallway, drawing the crowd to the cosmetology department, where they can receive a free haircut. A student from the culinary arts program distributes tiny savory puff pastries. Robots zip underfoot. Even the masonry department participates with a brick laying demonstration. Students take selfies in front of their favorite art. Parents pose next to their children's acrylic and charcoal self-portraits. All 21 trades offered at Mergenthaler Vocational Technical High School (MERVO) are represented at the second annual "MERVO on Display," a culminating event which I established.</p> <p>When I arrived three years ago, the school,—Baltimore's largest—was known mostly for its athletic prowess and trades. I am the only art teacher; yet, the once bare industrial walls now reflect MERVO's newly-earned identity as an art mecca. Development of the art program is only part of the transformation. What we have built, using art as a catalyst, is "community"—the foundation for developing stronger schools, everywhere.</p> <p>My role is not only as teacher, but also mediator. My responsibilities are multidimensional. They begin in the classroom, where students often experience their first taste of success. By proving to parents that their children can achieve, we break down the wall of mistrust urban families often have with the education systems. Staff and administrators become invested as they see the positive impact of art on the school's culture. Students feel affirmed, with a sense of accomplishment that is transferable to other subjects. Eventually, conversations begun in the art room, extend to the greater community. Even politicians have noticed as MERVO students participate in art shows throughout Maryland.</p> <p>My first interview in Baltimore included a warning: "Our students and their communities are without hope." That first year, I witnessed the inequities of underfunded schools and the trauma that</p> |

poverty causes in high percentages of students, I wanted to cause a revolution. Something ignited inside me. I wanted to create change that needed to come from within the institution, within the community, within the students.

Every day, I build up the students I work with in Baltimore, one student at a time. Each semester, through art, I show them how they can achieve years of growth. As they succeed, so does everyone around them. When I put their art on the walls, people can't believe that "our students did this". "I can't believe the kids are so talented!" they say. "Yes, they are." I respond. "But, what you see is also hard work, perseverance, and grit." They develop these skills in the art room. These results become possible through my relationships with students, their families and the community.

My expectations are high. My love is tough. My rewards are many.

Page: Application Question #3

| Question | Answer |
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| <p>Question 3</p> <p>How do you ensure that your students are connected to the world around them? Describe the ways in which you do this.</p> | <p>"Practicing talking to people about my artwork allowed me to talk to people about my interests in the real world. I had to speak, introduce myself. Why did I make it? What did it mean? And speaking about myself, my work, gave me a feeling of liberation," said my student Brandon Towns during an interview.</p> <p>Last year, the MERVO Artist of the Year Award went to Brandon, an engineering student. He arrived with no art experience and at first rarely attended class. Even so, I saw his potential and included him in a field trip to a multi-media arts event. Brandon's work was viewed and admired by hundreds. He was interviewed and given an opportunity to ask others about their interests. With this one event, a wall had fallen and Brandon had gone through it. He was hooked on art. Today, Brandon is organizing his own shows and bringing his peers together, exposing them to the joy of that moment of self-discovery.</p> <p>My intention as an artist — and as a teacher — has always been to bring people of different socioeconomic backgrounds together to start a conversation. In 2003, my installation in Montenegro entitled "Coffee World" gathered the local metal smith, university students, old village women, the president of UNESCO, and even the prince of Montenegro around me as I brewed Greek coffee for my visitors. Young and old communicated in multiple languages, divulging their hopes and dreams as they waited for me to tell their fortunes in the coffee grounds.</p> <p>Today in Baltimore, I take my students out of their neighborhoods, their art in hand and story in mouth, into a world few knew existed. Within the walls of the Walters Art Museum, or in a local community center, their own hopes and dreams start to change because a new way of life reveals itself. My students see themselves belonging to the broader community. They realize that they are part of it, that they have something to say, and that people are listening. This is how I ensure my students are connected to the world and find their place in it.</p> <p>The exposure is double. While the media in Baltimore has vilified its urban youth, these outings also serve as advocacy on their behalf. They show the world their potential—the sophistication and talent that can be developed given access and equity to education. When those students return to</p> |

the classroom, they bring the new world they've experienced back to school. In telling their stories to their peers, they become ambassadors to another way of life. I choose to teach in an urban school to dismantle the invisible system of exclusion and connect my students to the world around them—my tools of choice being art and exposure. Brandon told me, "Through lessons of humanity and self-sufficiency, you groomed me to be a leader."

Page: Application Question #4

| Question | Answer |
|---|---|
| <p>Question 4</p> <p>What do you consider to be a major public education issue today? Describe why this is important to you, and how you are addressing this from your classroom.</p> | <p>Equity! Equity! Equity!</p> <p>Close your eyes and picture my students: Darius, raised by his uncle, abandoned by his mother when his father was killed while incarcerated. Rajee, one of six, devastated when his grandmother, the only mother he had ever known, died. Dasia, homeless after escaping the custody of her hurtful uncle.</p> <p>These young people never considered art as a career path until 2014 when, at the end of their only semester of art education in high school, I took them to the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA).</p> <p>The MICA admissions advisor was impressed by their skills. Sadly, MICA did not admit any students that year from Baltimore City schools. Why? It is clear! Although my students were passionate and talented and had persevered through adversarial circumstances to be there that day, they did not have a body of work that would have taken years to develop.</p> <p>They are competing against the world.</p> <p>As we drove back to West Baltimore, I wept silently thinking: "Despite my efforts to empower them, I have contributed to the broken American dream they live in."</p> <p>I believe that education is a civil right and arts education is an issue of equity.</p> <p>Arts education is aligned with the Partnership for 21st Century Learning outlines. Desirable skills for tomorrow's workforce are communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. Research data suggest that the arts develop these skills. For decades, the arts have been eliminated in deference to subjects like science, mathematics, and English.</p> <p>The arts uniquely educate the whole child. Body, spirit, and mind, all need to be developed and cultivated, and the arts accomplish this in ways that other disciplines cannot.</p> <p>I taught Dasia to find the courage to paint herself beautiful, smart and strong, the way that I see her; Rajee, to express the emotions that had torn him apart quietly for years; Darius, to celebrate through painting the joy that art brings.</p> <p>Art heals and affirms and in the process builds focus, perseverance, and resilience. These are all skills from the 21st Century toolkit of success, achievable through an equitable education which includes a comprehensive arts program for every child across the nation.</p> |

The recent unrest in Baltimore created a traumatizing explosion of emotion. Until recently, my students could not express their deep, conflicted feelings. After researching and discussing the African American condition, they felt empowered to create Afrocentric self-portraits of strong women with hair defying gravity, fists rising, young men posturing, brave enough to talk about street violence, police brutality, their anger, and the helplessness they felt. Finding their voice is a positive force of art, which, if fostered, can bring about an empowered new generation, void of racism, segregation, and poverty.

Today.

Rajee serves in the United States Army in Amsterdam.

Darius is a professional jockey at Laurel, Maryland.

Dasia volunteers at her alma mater while working to become an art educator herself.

I believe that education is a civil right and art education is an issue of equity.

Page: Application Question #5

| Question | Answer |
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| <p>Question 5</p> <p>As the 2017 National Teacher of the Year, you serve as a spokesperson and representative for teachers and students. What is your message? What will you communicate to your profession and to the general public?</p> | <p>“Who are you? Where do you come from? Tell me about your family, your home, your neighborhood.” Everett read the questions on the board. I always made a big fuss about him being in class, hoping he would stay. I’d seen him five times in two months, never for more than twenty minutes. “Why do you keep missing art, Everett?” I asked him. “I’ve got to make money,” he replied. But that day, he stayed. He started writing. “I got stuff to tell you, Ms. K. I come from the real hood.”</p> <p>The class was asked to email me a selfie to be used to inform their charcoal drawings. To my surprise, Everett sent one. As I entered his grade, he stood over my shoulder, looking at the computer screen: 70, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 70, 0, 100.</p> <p>“I got a 70?!!” he asked.</p> <p>“Yes,” I answered, “you have two, and now your first 100!”</p> <p>“Can I get rid of those zeros if I come after school?”</p> <p>“Yes, honey, you can.”</p> <p>Then I read his writing, about the violent stabbing of his mother that he’d witnessed as a five year old. I looked at him. We had closed a gap. He began by coming after school. Now, Everett comes to class every day. Not as agitated as before, he focuses for longer periods of time. We are replacing those zeros one by one.</p> <p>As teachers, we are called upon to teach, but also to nurture. The success in my art room results from the relationships I build with my students and with their families. Often, as teachers in poverty-stricken communities, we step in as surrogates to help our children heal from trauma brought on by poverty. Art provides the opportunity to foster greater self-awareness and expression. With art, we can unlock the hurt and begin to overcome it. Then the real teaching can start. Now Everett feels safe in my room. He sits by my desk and works. Art heals, affirms, and in the process, builds resilience, perseverance, and focus.</p> |

As the National Teacher of the Year, my message calls for equity in education, with a strong focus on the arts and the relationships that we can build within this context. Education is power, freedom and independence, and the arts are an essential element to the education of the whole child. They not only link our students to the cultures of the present and the past, but are also a crucial ingredient in the forging of the creative, resilient citizenry that has propelled the United States to the forefront of the world stage over the last two centuries. The arts are part of the solution to closing the ever-expanding achievement gap that is devastating our nation. Education—especially arts education—is a civil right. With well-rounded education and self-knowledge, one can achieve anything. Without it, we remain stagnant within the boundaries that society has set upon us.

Today, Everett's average is an 83!

Page: Supporting Evidence

| Question | Answer |
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| Letter 1 | Download File |
| Letter 2 | Download File |
| Letter 3 | Download File |

Page: Complete

| Question | Answer |
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