

Waiver Request – Utah ARTS Academy



State Charter School Board Waiver from USBE Board Rule Request

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Applicant Assurances

Print this sheet, complete and sign the spaces at the bottom, scan, and attach to the electronic application.

The Board Chair must sign the following agreement prior to submitting the application package.

Should the agreement be signed by someone other than the current Board Chair, the application package will be deemed Administratively Incomplete.

School Name: Utah ARTS Academy

The Applicant certifies all information contained in this application is complete and accurate, realizing that any misrepresentation could result in disqualification from the Waiver Request process or revocation after award.

The Applicant understands that applications must be uploaded into the UCAP system no later than the third Friday of the month preceding the month of the requested SCSB meeting and that incomplete applications will not be considered.

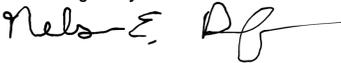
The Applicant acknowledges that all information presented in the application package, if approved, may become part of the charter to be used for accountability purposes throughout the term of the charter.

The Applicant acknowledges that the charter school governing board is subject to all Utah statutes regarding charter schools as well as all relevant federal, state and local laws, and requirements, and should comply with such.

The Applicant acknowledges that the most current academic and compliance data will be provided to the SCSB for its consideration of the application.

The applicant acknowledges that prior to inclusion on the agenda, the SCSB recommends charter school governing boards read the associated rule and information documents, as well as schedule an appointment with SCSB staff to discuss the request and provide clarification to any questions.

Nelson Hafen
Name of Board Chair

DocuSigned by:
 8/1/2022
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Signature of Board Chair /Date

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School Entity Information

Name of School: Utah ARTS Academy

Name of School Administrator: Dr. Drew Williams

Contact Information for School: dwilliams@utahartsacademy.org | 435.414.4535

Below, list the names and positions of all current Board Members (officers, members, directors, partners), and their positions. Also list any other current charters in which they act as a corporate principal or charter representative. Add rows as necessary.

Name	Position	All Charter Affiliations
Nelson Hafen	Acting Board Chair	0
Victoria Wilson	Board Chair (Health Leave of Absence)	0
Sadie Best	Secretary	0
Aubrey Johnson	Vice-Chair	Works at George Washington Academy
Bryan Watabe	Member	0
Josh Little	Member	0
Jennifer Fouche	Member	0
Greg Grajek	Member	0
Rick Scofield	Member	0

Contractual Charter Agreement Goals

List the school's contractual goals.

- Goal: Utah Arts Academy will be at or above the average performance growth of the nine (9) closest regular public high schools in Washington County.
 - As of May 2021 those schools are:
 - Desert Hills High School
 - Crimson Cliffs High School
 - Dixie High School
 - Pine View High School
 - Snow Canyon High School
 - Hurricane High School
 - St. George Academy

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- Millcreek High School
- Success Academy DSU

Required Attachments:

If the school is *not* meeting all its charter contractual agreement goals, then include the governing board's corrective action plan. (Corrective action plan limited to two pages.)

- When originally writing our charter goal, our focus (then and now) was on ACT scores. We know that these are the scores that equalize the playing field for college admission, and also, outside of GPA, the only quantifiable measure that colleges and universities use in their assessment of a student's future success. Our goal was specifically written to address the ACT scores. When looking at these metrics, we have met our goal. When addressing our statement with the Gateway scores, we have not, though it was never intended to be looked at that way. For this, we will be submitting the documentation to adjust this agreement. It is important to note that these documents were written in short order due to the nature of our unprecedented situation.
- The chart below indicates the two areas of weakness: Math and Science (according to the Data Gateway). We understand the significant impact this has on our school, and have implemented multiple strategies to improve these scores, including a test prep program, before and after school tutoring, pre/post testing as well as multiple checkpoint for learning prior to taking the test. The specifics of these updates are the following:
 - Pre-test - August 2022
 - Teachers (Math and Science) determine weak spots and areas of improvement.
 - Teaching focuses on these areas
 - Identify students who need extra support (before/after school tutoring)
 - Mid-test given at the end of Q1 to determine progress to goal
 - This helps students understand and be motivated by their progress
 - Update students needing extra support
 - Mid-test given at the end of Q2 to determining progress to goal
 - Update students needing extra support
 - Q3 Boot Camp
 - Students (9-11) participate in ACT/ASPIRE Boot camp, in order to be successful
 - focused on content and test taking strategies
 - Pre-test (ASPIRE or ACT) given at the beginning of the Boot Camp
 - focus on areas of weakness
 - Provide additional support for students with extra needs
 - Final test (ASPIRE or ACT)

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- o In addition, we are building an up-to-date science lab with all the necessary tools to make learning relevant (this will be the first time in the school's history that a science lab will be available to students). This lab will be equipped with state of the art equipment provided by Schools Land Trust support.
- o Additional PD and support throughout the school year, including PBL provided by the Buck Institute, Harvard Rounds, and McRel Classroom Instruction That Works.
- o All academic teachers (ELA, Math, Science) will have a 1:1 with the principal each month. This will be immediate feedback based on formal and informal visits in the classroom each month. This ensures that teachers receive feedback to adjust practice to support students.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	
	UAA	Snow	Desert	Crimson	Pine	Water	Enterprise	Hurricane	SGA	Dixie	Utah	
ELA	57	53	48	56	32	35	35	40	44	35	ND	
Math	19	31	47	49	30	35	45	23	32	26	ND	
Science	21	47	56	58	49	37	49	53	49	37	ND	
ACT Comp	20.7	19.6	20.6	21.1	19.1	17.8	19.1	19.9	20	19.6	19.6	
ACT Eng	21.4								18.7		18.5	
ACT Reading	20.8								20.9		20.2	
ACT Math	19								19.1		19.3	
ACT Science	20.7								20.9		19.9	
%	72%	63%	71%	75%	60%	52%	65%	68%	62%	59%	61%	
GRADUATION	95.7	91.9	94.6	ND		94	51.4	98.4	93.7	72.7	93.6	88%



Due to the impacts of COVID-19, interpret 2021 scores with extreme caution. Comparisons of 2021 scores to previous years or across student groups, schools, and districts are not advised.

Waiver Requests Require both State Charter School Board (SCSB) and Utah State Board of Education (USBE) Approval

The following request may take 2-3 months to complete.

Waivers from a Board rule are not granted if the requirement is required by or adopts criteria from a federal statute, federal regulation, or state law, would negatively affect the health, safety, or welfare of public education students, could reasonably result in discrimination or harassment of public school students or employees, would benefit one element of the public education system to the detriment of another; or when the concerns giving rise to an request could be addressed through means other than waiver of Board rules.

Waiver from Board Rule

Rule Number and Title: 277-552 (6) Charter School Timelines and Approval Processes

Describe why the waiver is necessary to meet the mission and/or purposes(s) of the school and help the governing board meet the terms and conditions of its contractual agreement.

Adam Grant explains, “Scars are more than evidence of trauma. They’re proof of resilience. What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger. Sometimes it reveals strength you didn’t realize you had. Pain is not just a teacher. It’s a relic - a reminder of your ability to withstand adversity.”

In July of 2020, Tuacahn High School for the Arts (THSA) received some troubling news - much of the student art was being required to be stripped from the school. In an effort to teach students to advocate for

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themselves, all while navigating tough conversations, we set up a meeting with the CFO, HR Director, and Production Manager of Tuacahn Center for the Arts (TCA), in conjunction with our Arts teachers and two art student representatives. In that hour-long meeting (which this board has a copy of), we witnessed the type of manipulative behavior from adults that was extremely unsettling and inappropriate in any setting, much less with student minors. They were screamed at, yelled at, put down, and ultimately gas-lit to believe they didn't have value or worth. This single meeting was a traumatic crack in what was certainly going to be a catastrophic year for all involved at THSA.

Prior to Dr. Williams arrival in 2016, THSA had incredibly low scores, both in terms of state testing, but also with our ACT scores. Amazing student artists were not able to get into the schools of their choice, due to these low ACT scores. In his first meeting, Dr. Williams remembers multiple teachers saying, "Art students are just not that smart... don't worry about those scores - this school is for the misfit toys." That started a long journey to change this perception and allow students access to the best universities in the country.

Prior to our art meeting, all schools were reeling with the destructive nature of Covid-19. Schools were shuttered, graduations canceled, and all year end activities, sporting events, and performances were canceled. Students, from Seniors to Freshman, were ripped out of caring environments, and forced into isolation - many in situations that were terrible. Leaders and teachers worked twice as hard to engage students - to help them feel part of a school community - and moved mountains in doing so. The juniors watched a year come to an abrupt stop, and tried to navigate their way through a tough summer of not knowing what was coming next. We were testing students daily, re-working performances, and trying to create a safe environment during the most historically hard educational year in history.

This "Art Meeting" added a dark cloud over the summer that moved into the school year. We were connected with TCA, who also was struggling to navigate their needs. In an instant, our space was purloined from students to navigate the profits of a regional theatre. We would walk into school, only to find that we no longer had performance space. That fall, torrential rains hit Tuacahn, flooding the school, rendering the only performance space available to us useless for 2 months. We fought our way through masks, often fighting our TCA neighbors who didn't implement the Governor's orders. We fought our way through the pandemic with teachers and students getting Covid-19 and being out for the required 10 days. It was disruptive to say the least. New freshmen and sophomores were trying to navigate our "new normal," while our seniors were just trying to make the best of a really awful senior year.

January of 2021 created a wake that is still being felt today. The tension of the relationship between TCA and THSA had come to a breaking point. Illegal activity was happening (not at the school), and though Dr. Williams worked exhaustively to mend and navigate the troubled waters (meetings, emails, phone calls, text messages, etc.) the decision was made by the executive board to remove our principal from his duties. Not even the full board knew of this decision. The last phone call that Dr. Williams had with the board chair was designed to manipulate him into thinking that if he resigned, he would be taken care of and "everything would go away." But this was absolutely not what was best for students, and the situation was immediately escalated by the board.

The students at THSA, alumni students, faculty and community members, had to sit through a public execution of their principal, of their school, and the things they held dear. Manipulative shadows were cast, teachers crushed, students battered, and all while Covid-19 was making another round of waves. Our students were in the midst of preparing for the ACT and Aspire tests, getting ready for a school-wide performance, and now they were left wondering what egregious behavior their leader had committed. Thousands of items of documentation were sent to USBE, finding multiple concerns about the THSA Board and their behavior. At not one point did any member of the board meet with teachers, with students or with parents to discuss next steps. After two exhaustive board meetings, the principal was immediately banned from campus and a new director put in place, one who had no degree nor any leadership (high school) experience. This was a final blow to a faculty that was already battered.

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Our school community was completely pulverized - much like a community looks and feels after a Class V tornado rips through the town. Only with this, all the damage was internal. Teachers were left wondering if they had jobs, wondering if the school would survive. Students were leaving, trying to find stable ground. Teachers started to protect their mental health and not show up to school. Still, THSA Board members were nowhere to be found. They dropped a bomb on children and their teachers, and walked away - with no plan to support students.

Principals in neighboring schools were telling faculty that Dr. Williams had done something egregious and that his “firing” was not only warranted, it was necessary - even alluding that Dr. Williams had “molested children.” These teachers at this school were our neighbors and the parents of our students. It was a community that was trying to pick up the pieces of a broken narrative being controlled by the power-brokers of our state and community - designed to silence any other narrative than their own.

And through all of this, many persevered. Our ACT scores, though dipped, remained on average with state and national scores. Five weeks into this epic educational failure, students had to take the Aspire Plus. They were tired and weary - mostly of dealing with adult issues, and our scores tanked. When looking at Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, it is not surprising that after a world pandemic, coupled with an emotional explosion of their safe space, that students and teachers would not be looking at scores or thinking of performing well on any test. In fact, at that time, the only workable option was that THSA was closing down for good and that nothing would replace it. How would any human, let alone 14, 15 or 16 year olds, be able to navigate a several hour academic test in these conditions. It is dehumanizing and educational malpractice.

It was through a hail-mary that Utah Arts Academy was born. We saved as many teachers as possible, and as many students as possible. Still, the powerful rhetoric was being spewn about on social media and through word of mouth. We didn’t have a space to hold school, and just a few weeks prior to school starting, we were offered a small six room building by the district. It was later revealed that some members of that board were in opposition to our use of the space because of their direct relation with the THSA board. The wake was still reverberating in our community - with adults in educational positions of power not putting students first.

We held school and we persevered. We put on *Matilda* and *Footloose* (all with very relevant and poignant meanings), and we taught students high level academics. We had no labs, no proper equipment - as that was all in trailers and garages spread across the city - and yet we continued to educate. What we failed to realize was the significance of that trauma on everyone’s lives. We failed to realize how much the words that students heard from the mouths of people they were supposed to trust, erode the mental well-being of our community. One licensed therapist indicated that the level of trauma our school community had to navigate was similar in scope and impact as coming home from an active war-zone.

Regardless of all of this, we survived and we persevered. We literally built a school at the same time we were navigating school. Our students hit 100% graduation (the first time in the school’s 23 year history), and we produced multiple Presidential Arts Scholars. We had the highest rate of students attending top artistic universities than ever before, and did all of this in spite of everyone who said it couldn’t be done. This waiver is significant. We still deal with the wake of Covid and THSA on a daily basis.

We still are navigating the trauma of those experiences. Our job is to do what is best for students, to create a space where they can thrive. This waiver is asking for just that - to do what is best for our students and school. Our current space of 9th-12th grade creates a hard transition for students in a community where high school starts at 10th grade and middle school at 8th. Students get lost in 9th grade as they transition to mid-middle school, or in 10th grade where they are artistically a year behind their peers. The addition of 8th grade mitigates this awkward transition and allows students to thrive in a school that has learned how to do that in spades. Academics remains as high a priority as it did when Dr. Williams walked into the school. We have turned those scores around before and we will do it again - by creating a safe space where students can thrive. We have the scars of trauma, but we also are building resilience to that trauma as well.