

# Telluride R-1 School District

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## **Background**

### **CTE Operations**

The Perkins Field Council selected this Local Plan as a best practice because of the community partnerships; the inclusion of mentors; and because of well-written action steps. Career and Technical Education at Telluride High School was previously oriented around Business Education. Theater classes were taught in the district, but they were not part of an approved CTE program. Because there was strong interest in expanding the arts program, the teacher went through the process to become CTE credentialed and the program became an approved Theatre Technologies Program. The district also has two other approved CTE programs: Digital Media Technologies and Graphic Design/Photography.

### **Community Influences**

Telluride, Colorado is the site of the world-famous Telluride Film Festival, as well as the Mountain Film Festival, and many other smaller festivals during the year. These festivals bring in world-class talent and technology, and results in a growing demand for skilled workers to operate the equipment and run the festivals. In addition, Hollywood has “discovered” Telluride as a great locale for on-location scenes. Quentin Tarrantino was in the area with a film crew during the visit of the Perkins Field Council volunteer! Students in the Theater and Film classes can find work if they have the skills to operate lights, sound, backdrops, curtains, and projectors; or if they can help with makeup, costumes, and sets.

The arts are strongly supported in Telluride. There is a well-funded Arts Foundation which promotes live theater as well as film. The Palm Theater, built adjacent to the high school in 2008, provides a fully-equipped professional stage and auditorium for productions where students can practice their craft in a real-world setting. The theater is managed by the school district, but used by the Film Festivals as well as other groups year round. The cost of building the Palm was shared by private donors, the Film Festival, and the School District.

### **Factors Influencing the Use of the Perkins Funds**

With world-class talent in Telluride, either year-round or for one of the festivals, tapping into that talent pool to enhance the classroom experiences of students was a brilliant strategy that benefits both school and industry. Heather Rosen, CTE Director for Telluride

School District, related that there are many Telluride residents with expertise in some aspect of the entertainment industry who are eager to share their skills with students.

### **Challenges**

- Enrollment has doubled in the last 10 years.
- Enrollment has grown quickly over the last decade, prompting the passage of a bond issue which will expand the school.
- Telluride is in a remote location, with no nearby community college or large city.
- The Film Festivals generate needs for temporary employees to support them while employees is challenging. Many who work there do not live in town, but rather live at some distance. In the winter, travel can be hazardous or impossible, and avalanches do sometimes close the road.

### **Students Served**

Students served by Telluride High School are approximately 25% from wealthy families, 50% middle class, and 25% lower income level. Twenty-seven percent of the students are Latino. Many of the students work full-time to help support their families. The Theatre Technologies Program has a relatively large group of students with special needs Individual Education Plans (IEPs) who tend to do well with the small class size and the hands-on focus of the program. A large number of students come from outside the district and commute long distances. Many of those who work in Telluride cannot afford to live there.

### **Perkins Funded Purchases**

While it is a rather small amount of funding, the district gets a good return on their Perkins investment. Some travel expense was covered for teachers who took a group of students to Denver to visit potential internship sites in the creative arts industry. A professional light box and a sound system were purchased for the Film students so they could learn to use equipment used by the industry. The bulk of the funding, however, went to the “Academic Cohorts”. . .real life extensions of the coursework that is taking place in the classroom designed in a “mentorship” format. The cohorts are groups of students who have a passion for a particular domain, be that multimedia presentation, film, videography through all production phases, or theater support that ranges from sound and lighting to rigging design. These cohorts extend the learning beyond the classroom with industry professionals in the various fields. Direct exposure to working professionals in the film and theater industries gives students an outstanding “all aspects of the industry” experience.

## **Key Innovations**

- The District has added new classes determined by student interest and/or need. This encourages students to continue in the program and increases the number of completers. Support from administration for creating new, related, advanced curriculum, as students express an interest in it, allows the program to grow and change to support the current enrollees. Also, excellent cooperation between the district and the community is allowing this program to thrive. It is a mutually supportive relationship.
- A unique feature at Telluride is the space donated to the local television station. This is a fantastic, synergistic arrangement for both the school and the TV station. The station has a free space to use, and the students have a working TV station on site where they can observe and assist. Also, the TV station provides video of the school's events, such as plays and commencement. The station provides local coverage of the film festivals and sporting events and provides students a direct connection to those events.
- Working with professionals in the field, working with state of the art equipment and facilities, and having opportunities to do internships and work in the industry while in school all contribute to making students career-ready when they leave the program. Ninety percent of students in the program graduate, and 80% of those go on to CU Boulder, Colorado Mesa University, or Ft. Lewis College.

With help from Perkins funds, students are using state of the art technology daily in their classes. They see the application of what they are learning, not just the theory. Efforts are being made to recruit more females to the Film classes.

## **Key Factors to Implementation**

- No special training was needed for the teachers. However, teachers learn from industry professionals alongside students. Teachers must be willing to give up class time to those professionals, and they must be flexible enough to let students follow their special interests while maintaining their curriculum. Students have year-round access to events at the Palm Theater.
- Strong support from Administration, the Arts Foundation, the Palm Theater, the local television station and the Film Festivals all work together to make these programs successful. General fund dollars and Colorado Career and Technical Act (CTA) funds are the main sources of funds for these programs.

## **Results**

As described earlier, 90% of students in the program do graduate and 80% go on to college. A few have made it to Hollywood! Ms. Rosen recounted that she knows of two graduates who are traveling around the world with their friend, a local skier, filming his experiences on the slopes.

Working professionals supplement teacher expertise to give a real-world emphasis to the programs. Students are attracted to the programs and encouraged to complete and continue on in the field by the accomplishments and employability of prior students. Plus, the “cachet” of Hollywood attached to the Film Festivals adds considerable attraction. In addition, state of the art equipment allows students to work with professional technology and be ready to move from class to workplace with ease.

While Telluride is in a unique position to benefit from the Technical Theater program, Ms. Rosen stressed that other districts/programs could apply the same principles to improve their enrollment and success. Showing local business and industry that the school is integrated to their growth and success, and offering space and facilities within the school to a business that can give back to students in some way, are the two ways that a mutually-beneficial relationship can be fostered.