



Arts Educator Award

Nominee Jordan Harris
Artist Type Music Industry
Organization/Business George McDougall High School



Photo

Nomination(s)

As a high school student, finding something to be a part of is important. It is also important that the individual in charge of this “something” is someone to look up to, someone inspiring and someone who creates a friendly and fun atmosphere. After four years of high school, I have found my home in the band room. Jordan Harris (or “Harris”, as we like to call him) is an outstanding teacher because he is all of these things and more. He always puts the band and students first and creates an inviting and wonderful classroom environment, yet can still make everyone laugh with a bad joke. He creates a home for students, including myself. We work hard in band class, but not nearly as hard as Mr. Harris works for us. Seeing him smile at the end of an important concert is what the whole band strives to do. We try our best not only to sound good, but to make Harris proud. My favorite saying of his is “Do your best, do your best and when in doubt, do your best.” He pushes us to do our best, but never stresses it or pushes too hard, which is what a great teacher should do. He is a phenomenal teacher, instructor and person, and I believe without a doubt that he deserves this award.

K Bell
Student

Questions

Impact

How do you feel arts educators impact their students' lives and why is it important for them to impart their knowledge and experience to others?

Like any teacher, arts educators impact the lives of their students in many different ways. In my classroom from the moment students enter they play a pivotal role in the success of the day's events. In a core subject such as math, 2 +2 is always 4. That's just the way it is. In a band class, however, we are open to endless possibilities. It is up to us to take the information on the page and decipher it in the “best way” possible, creating a world based not only on



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technical skill but also one of imagination. It is up to us as a team to create a striking balance between the two and bring them to fruition. Being in the band classroom permits me to not only instruct and teach a concept, but to allow students to create their own interpretations of the music. Being in a room of so many students allows for hugely diverse conversations, which often spark a sense of engagement that spreads like wildfire. It is through these moments of heightened engagement that much of our learning happens, because it is these moments that students truly listen to one another and share their reflections and thoughts on the music. Keeping our mouths closed and our ears, minds, and hearts open allow for a huge wealth of knowledge to be gained. As an arts educator, I teach kids to not just think but also to both feel and listen.

Above & Beyond

How do you feel (or can you give examples) of how you've personally gone above & beyond in connecting with your students and helping to nurture their artistic skills?

Being in a school of Grade 9 to Grade 12 students and being able to teach them from their first day to their last day as a high school student, has huge benefits. From day one, I make it my mission to learn each individual's name and find out at least one interesting thing that "makes them tick." Over the course of the next four years, we continue to build upon our relationships daily, and in the end as they walk across the stage, it often feels like it's my own kids that are graduating. From day one in my class, they are a "somebody;" they are an "important somebody."

Being a teacher, I feel that the skills and knowledge that my students receive correspond closely with that of many other skilled individuals, however, it is through the moments shared that are not "written on a page" that we find our true purpose and connection. Despite being the "dinosaur" that it is, the arts are SO MUCH MORE than just "hot air," sketch books, and monologues that will have no value upon a student's graduation. Emotion, hard work, courage, dedication, teamwork, friendship, leadership, time management, learning strategies, kindness, breathing, peace of mind, and stress management, are but a FEW of the countless life skills and attributes that the 200+ kids in my program receive and learn on a daily basis. They are the qualities that we learn together...experience together. I don't teach with the intent that every student will go on to become a musician or a band teacher or recording tech., but so that people can find love, respect, and value in all that they do and experience. Whether a student finds passion or purpose through a piece written 100 years ago by "someone famous," or whether they've written it themselves with the hopes of "being famous," the bottom line is that VALUE IS PRESENT in what they feel and do. We are there for each other, we have common goals and purpose, we share a sense of belonging; band is our "break in the day." This is our SOUNDTRACK.

Challenges

Can you please provide an example of one of your greatest teaching challenges? Ex) A student that struggled but ultimately succeeded, implementation of a new program, mastering a new skill or trend, etc.

My first year of teaching, I really felt that I had huge shoes to fill. I was taking over the job that my jr. and sr. high school teacher had held for 25 years. My whole goal was a cross between trying to be the cool teacher and ensuring that we didn't backtrack in skills. This was my toughest year. The kids got away with more than they should have and, although they worked hard and I feel we achieved our goal, the passion that I always had for music wasn't there like it should have. As soon as I realized that it wasn't about anyone else but "us" in the band room, our passion returned. We gained a further respect for one another and learned to work for and with one another, creating the dynamic TEAM that we are today. When you see my kids on stage today, you FEEL the passion and happiness in what they're doing. It's a wonderful sight.



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Over a decade later, I'm still not pleasing everyone but in our band room we move as a well-oiled machine, happily humming along and creating a stronger product with each new day. This is not just MY program, but OUR program and as such together we choose our every move. From fundraising to the music we play and the tours and concerts we perform and take part in, we decide together. Everyone has an equal voice, having pride and taking ownership in our learning and the outcomes of our choices. We are proud of what we do and share in our success and failures alike, learning with each new decision. In essence, we're one big family.

Motivation

How do you feel (or can you provide an example) you challenge students to push the boundaries in exploring their artistic fields? Ex) New teaching techniques, student challenges/goals, collaborations, etc.

The first thing I tell every student is to quit comparing themselves against others. If they really want to see success, they need to look in the mirror and use themselves as their guide to success. In looking at themselves, they need to look at their point A and point B and see what helped motivate them, engage them, and allow them to move forward. In order to envision the end, one must always remember their beginning. Seeing where they started allows a chance to see their individual growth. Once their confidence grows and they see their peers doing the same, they realize that despite being on different levels at times, they are all on the same path to success. From there, they draw on the strengths of each to improve the group as a whole.

One of the ways that we promote this in our class is through mentorship. This past year, we created a youtube channel in order to share the skills we mastered with one another. Some individuals took on large tasks and others smaller, but the common thread was mastery. Big or small, they worked to gain the skills and confidence to share their lessons with one another. Not only did this allow skill development, but we were able to dip out of our comfort zones and learn more about audio visual technology and the importance behind learning from watching ourselves in motion. It was interesting to note how much we took for granted in our everyday skills. Often, we need to expand our explanations when teaching someone else our skills. This single point allowed us to really hone in on specifics within our skill sets. I really enjoyed seeing the different teaching styles, as well, and loved the humour and self that many put into their work. Relying on humour as a motivator myself, it was great to see the same being done by the kids.

Lessons Learned

What one thing would you like to share with/teach others? Ex) A motivating quote, a life strategy, a person you admire, etc.

I'm a band teacher...it's what I do. I love it...I love the kids, I love the music, and I love the difference we make in each other's lives. If you were to talk to any kid that I've ever taught and asked them to tell you about "Mr. Harris," there'd be a lot of different responses but I think that there would be a common thread. I have always promoted the idea that "you don't have to be the best, but you always have to do your best." My line, they would say, is "do your best, do your best, and when in doubt, do your best." That's all anyone can ask of you. I may be a dinosaur but I will continue to make it my life mission to give my all to every kid that walks through my band room doors. Always...



2019 AMNA Nomination

Prepared By: Owner

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<http://www.airdriecityview.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20120524/ACV0302/305249967/gmhs-band-students-take-trip-to-disneyland>

<http://mcdougall.rockyview.ab.ca/Members/jdharris>