

**101 Select 2026 TAA Evaluation Comments from
Music, Theatre, Visual Art, and Dance Participants and Faculty**

Participant Comments

I truly believe that TAA is the best professional development in any discipline - not just the arts. This year went above and beyond! I find myself renewed and excited for the opportunities and challenges this year will bring. - *Kami Horton, East TN Upper Middle/Secondary Vocal Music participant*

TAA is food for my teacher soul. It is like a family reunion every year. It is the best PD, and it is great to spend time with like-minded educators. It nurtures me; I am revived and refreshed. - *Mississippi Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

This is a wonderful, immersive experience that recharged my creativity and confidence! I feel rejuvenated and appreciated! Thank you so much for everything! - *David Goloversic, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Visual Art participant*

The Tennessee Arts Academy has helped me get out of burnout mode so many times that I have lost count. It is so rejuvenating and helps me get excited about teaching all over again. I'm ready to greet my students with a fresh smile and transfer the excitement onto them. - *Becky Gentry, East TN Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

I am so thankful for the intentionality with each class and hour of the day, from musings to lectures to performances. It is impossible not to leave inspired! - *Grace Frishcosy, East TN Upper Middle/Secondary Instrumental Music participant*

This year's TAA was fun, engaging, and filled with things that nourished an artist's soul! The TAA team is what every learning community should strive to be. - *Sara Layne, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

This year was the best yet. They keep getting better! The vision of the Tennessee Arts Academy is strong, and for this reason, I state to anyone who asks that this training opportunity is the best in the country. - *William Blanchard, West TN Arts Leadership and Administration participant*

I had a wonderful time at TAA. My core classes gave me materials and activities that I can use in my 2nd grade classroom. It is a great resource to explore new ways to bring more of the arts into my students' day-to-day learning. - *West TN Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

This was my first year attending TAA, and I was highly impressed with the quality of the entire experience. I will be begging my district to send me every year possible! - *Rachel Peebles, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Trio Track participant*

I enjoy this opportunity every time. It's a beautiful way to refresh my head and heart before the start of a new year by simply spending a week with like-minded people, ready to do what we should all be doing: continuing to learn. - *Felicia Faniola-Gregory, East TN Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

The Tennessee Arts Academy is my favorite PD I've ever been to. You can tell this has been thoughtfully planned specifically for arts teachers and their needs. I'm grateful to TAA for all they do to support teachers and specifically bring new ideas to my classroom, and for giving me the confidence to try new things. - *Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

The whole week was brilliant! My classes were excellent; the instructors were so knowledgeable and engaging. The performances were excellent and the guests for the Musings were wonderful. It was such a great week - I want to go back next year! - *Angela Salamy, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

TAA is hands down the best professional development opportunity for fine art educators. The presenters provided information that was relevant to challenges faced by arts educators. The networking created at TAA is another one of the major takeaways. - *Curtis Southerland, Middle TN Arts Leadership and Administration participant*

I love TAA because I can come and receive amazing instruction, network with others in my same discipline, share ideas (and struggles) and just be the creative person I know I am. - *Kimberly Witz, East TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

This was my first year attending, and this is exactly what I needed to get motivated for the new school year. The overall experience felt so open and inviting. The Musings were entertaining and inspiring. The instructors were knowledgeable and friendly. Amazing!! - *Mary Vacek, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Visual Art participant*

TAA is a must-not-miss ever! I am a 20-year teacher, and it is the best PD I have ever received. I will use all of this in my class, and I'm enthusiastic to get to work. - *Stephanie Winters, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

Faculty Comments

I was so very impressed with this entire event. The way that arts teachers are celebrated and recognized in this event is unprecedented. The participants were not only eager to learn, but they were excited to learn new skills to take back to their students. It is my firm belief that all states should follow the Tennessee example. – *Alan Hawkins, Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre and Dance faculty*

I have been to numerous conferences in my 20+ year teaching career, and I have never participated in one that embraces the arts. The TAA Summer Institute was truly one of the best gatherings of arts educators I have ever experienced. During my short visit, I enjoyed being surrounded by passionate and enthusiastic attendees and instructors. – *Frank Juarez, Arts Leadership and Administration faculty*

The TAA Summer Institute was truly a mountain-top experience. The organization is first class in every way! - *Scott Rush, Upper Middle/Secondary Instrumental Music faculty*

I am thoroughly impressed with the TAA Summer Institute. The organization, engagement, and celebration were beyond anything I have ever experienced, and I have been presenting at clinics and workshops for eleven years. – *Loneka Wilkinson Battiste, Elementary/Lower Middle Music faculty*

I feel so grateful to have been part of this beautiful experience. Tennessee Arts Academy, you absolutely ROCK! Congratulations on an incredible 40th anniversary celebration. Because of this week, we are all leaving as better educators, artists, and human beings. - *Terlene Terry-Todd, Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement faculty*

The people involved and community you have built are truly one of a kind! I have taught all kinds of professional development sessions around the country for over a decade, and I have never experienced something quite as magical as TAA. Every single fine arts teacher in Tennessee needs to experience this amazing opportunity! - *Erika Knapp, Elementary/Lower Middle Music faculty*

Additional Participant Comments

TAA is still the BEST place to get wonderful inspiration and tools to help me reach all my students! - Kay McCrary, East TN *Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

A great week to connect with other art teachers and to get inspired to start the new year. - Rita Myers, Middle TN *Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

I thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of the Academy and the networking opportunities. - Middle TN *Upper Middle/Secondary Visual Art participant*

TAA was an incredibly impactful week. I would recommend this experience to any and all fine arts teachers! I left the week feeling more appreciation for what I do than ever before, with friendships & connections, and ready to bring all I learned back to my classroom. - Emily Collins, West TN *Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

My week at the Tennessee Arts Academy was absolutely incredible! From the hands-on visual arts classes to the thought-provoking Musers and energizing Interludes, every single moment of the Academy was filled with inspiration and joy. - Candace Lemons, Middle TN *Upper Middle/Secondary Visual Art participant*

TAA outdid itself again! The instructors were top notch, and I learned so many useful tools for my toolbox. - Laura Whetsel, East TN *Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

The care and attention to detail that the Tennessee Arts Academy provides for its participants is second to none. Other professional development might give you materials, and they might give you instruction, but nothing combines those with the jaw-dropping performances, heartfelt Musings, and genuine feeling of support and honor that this experience provides for everyone that attends. - Jennifer Keith, Middle TN *Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

Well done - excellent facilities and outstanding faculty and staff. - Michael Aymett, Middle TN *Arts Leadership and Administration participant*

This year's Tennessee Arts Academy Summer Institute was an inspiring and rejuvenating experience. It reminded me of the incredible power of the arts to build connections, foster creativity, and create meaningful learning experiences for students. I left with fresh ideas, practical strategies, and a renewed passion for integrating the arts into education. Perhaps most valuable of all was the opportunity to learn alongside such talented educators and artists whose passion and generosity continue to inspire me. I am deeply grateful for the experience and look forward to bringing what I've learned back to my school and students. - Isormari Pozo, Middle TN *Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

I feel like TAA gets better and better every year! It always makes me look forward to next year! - Middle TN *Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

The Tennessee Arts Academy has been a magical experience I have yet to see anywhere else. - Kathleen Jenney, Colorado *Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

The classes, the instructors, the Musings, the performances...everything was INCREDIBLE!!! - Sarah Dockery, East TN *Upper Middle/Secondary Vocal Music participant*

The Tennessee Arts Academy was amazing. It was my first time, and I wasn't expecting the faculty, Musers, and other guests to be as impressive as they were. It was also so special to spend a whole week at a place where they appreciate teachers so much. - *East TN Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

This was an amazing experience, and I feel more confident in my first full year teaching! - *Bailey Broyles, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

I can't imagine beginning my school year without attending TAA. The week gives me a chance to reconnect with theatre teachers from other areas of the state and beyond. The instructors always inspire me to be better than the year before and give me new ideas to take back to my students. I am beyond grateful for the Tennessee Arts Academy and what it offers arts educators! - *Michelle Tripp, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

I had an outstanding experience! As a first-time participant, I enjoyed excellent instruction and mentorship from our session leaders. I enjoyed the well-thought-out schedule with the intermezzo breaks. I also made some great friends along the way. - *Danielle Smallwood, East TN Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

Attending TAA was an amazing experience. Being surrounded by like-minded artists and educators, learning something new each day, and gaining inspiration from the stories and experiences shared by others made this opportunity truly unforgettable. I am grateful for the creativity, connections, and growth that came from this incredible journey. - *Laura Mason, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

I attended last year for the first time, and both years I have left feeling ready to tackle the coming year. I am so appreciative of quality, content-specific professional development! - *Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Vocal Music participant*

The Tennessee Arts Academy Summer Institute was an inspiring and enriching experience. I appreciated the opportunity to learn new strategies, explore creative ideas, and connect with other arts educators who share a passion for supporting students through the arts. I returned to my classroom with renewed energy, fresh perspectives, and practical ideas that I can incorporate into my teaching and share with my students and colleagues. The experience was both professionally valuable and personally motivating. - *East TN Upper Middle/Secondary Visual Art participant*

Another great summer learning from the many great art teachers of our state as well as the outstanding instructors! - *Emily McEneely, East TN Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

It was a great experience. I've never attended a professional development conference where almost every session was catered to exactly what the attendees needed. - *Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Vocal Music participant*

It was more than I could have imagined! Thank you! - *Jennifer Allman, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Visual Art participant*

As it does each year, TAA lifts me up and prepares me to face the new year and the new challenges ahead. - *Christy Ledsinger, Middle TN Arts Leadership and Administration participant*

TAA provided me with the most practical and inspiring professional development experience I have had in my forty-year teaching career. This was exactly the summer experience I needed and hoped for to refresh, inspire, and help me prepare for the upcoming school year. Thank you! - *Walter Bitner, Virginia Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

This has perhaps been my favorite year at TAA. I feel invigorated and ready for the school year. I am glad that I went. - *Cody Langford, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

I had an AMAZING time at TAA this summer. I got to meet so many fellow middle school theatre teachers and get resources and ideas that I can take into my classroom. I had a wonderful experience, and I can't wait to go back in the coming years. - *Katherine Jewell, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

As always, the Academy was inspiring and full of wonderful arts experiences. I have never been to an Academy where I didn't take home fun and useful ideas. - *Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Visual Art participant*

The 2026 Tennessee Arts Academy was absolutely spectacular!! I loved my instructors, the facilitators, the Musers, and all the concerts this week! I am looking forward to attending next year! - *James Morris Hamby III, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

WOW! I learned so much that I am so excited to implement with my students. I have already recommended registering next year to other teachers. - *Chloe Newell, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

The entire week was spectacular! - *Kreston Smith, West TN Upper Middle/Secondary Instrumental Music participant*

As exhausted as I am, I realize it was all worth it! – *Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

The Tennessee Arts Academy has once again renewed my passion for teaching and reminded me of the power of lifelong learning and artistic collaboration. I am incredibly grateful that my fine arts colleagues and I were able to share in this transformative experience together. We return to our classrooms inspired to create meaningful opportunities for every student through one song, one theatrical performance, and one work of art, inspiring them to become the best person they can be and to strive toward that goal every single day. Through the Tennessee Arts Academy, we are reminded that, for many students, that one person is us. - *Christopher Keams, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

Art camp for teachers! Amazing and cannot wait to come again! - *Melissa Jolley, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Visual Art participant*

Being my first time to attend and also being from out-of-state, I had no clue what to expect from this. This experience, by far, was one of the most rewarding and refreshing things I have been to in my adult life. To be around so many like-minded people in the same profession was so helpful. - *Cassie Jones, Oklahoma Upper Middle/Secondary Visual Art participant*

TAA is always my enthusiastic recommendation to new and student teachers. - *Lindsey Duggin, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

The Academy continues to be one of my summer highlights! It prepares me to step back into the classroom and arms me with new ideas, new networking connections, and a positive outlook for the new school year! - *Christopher Jarrell, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Visual Art participant*

I was in awe at TAA this year. From the instruction to Musings, it was an incredible experience! - *Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Vocal Music participant*

The TN Arts Academy has become my “summer camp.” Every year, I receive quality instruction to take into my classroom, but the friendships and connections made here are what truly add value to my life. I said it once, but I’ll say it again - this year’s week was truly transformative. Can’t wait to come back! - *Nicholas Mullins, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

This year's Tennessee Arts Academy Summer Institute was such a rewarding experience. Diving into the Visual Art Elementary core classes reminded me why I fell in love with teaching art in the first place—the hands-on projects, fresh techniques, and time spent alongside other passionate educators recharged both my creativity and my teaching practice. I'm leaving with new ideas, new resources, and a renewed excitement to bring it all back to my classroom this fall. - *Sharyn Brewer-Walker, West TN Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

TAA has been a life-changing experience for me. Getting a chance to reset and be poured into before going back to my own students is really transformative. I use things that I've learned at TAA every single day. I am so grateful for this opportunity and can't wait for next year! - *Catherine Glidwell, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

The TAA Summer Institute provided me with valuable instruction ideas and methods for my classroom and additionally offered me an opportunity to collaborate with other professionals in my field. - *Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

This was top notch instruction, from the faculty to the Musings to the performances! Truly such an impactful experience. - *East TN Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

TAA was an amazing experience; it was very exciting, insightful, and informative. - *Obayana Ajanaku, East TN Arts Leadership and Administration participant*

This was my first time attending, and I was absolutely amazed at the quality of all aspects of the experience. It is such a complex event, and it ran remarkably smoothly throughout the week. The instructors, performers, and especially the Musers were fantastic. Such a privilege to have the chance to attend. - *Sarah Savage, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

This year's Tennessee Arts Academy Summer Institute was exactly what I needed. It was so refreshing to learn, create, and collaborate with other passionate arts educators. I left feeling inspired, energized, and excited to bring new ideas and activities back to my students. I'm already looking forward to next year! - *Christine Bock, East TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

The Academy was another wonderful week of beautiful learning, collaboration with other instructors and educators, and an enriching arts experience. It continues to be the best professional development offered for my specific subject area. - *Laura Parker, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

I have attended many events within my district and have never experienced this level of care for attendees. Absolutely top tier! - *Minnette Michael, West TN Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

I absolutely loved my experience at TAA! I received many valuable classroom resources and lesson ideas. They took care of us well, and it was awesome to connect with other music educators in my area. - *Dorothy Fullington, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

Attending the TN Arts Academy was exactly what I needed to start the 2026-2027 school year with refreshed energy! - *East TN Arts Leadership and Administration participant*

I didn't know what to expect coming into the conference for the first time. I was very impressed with the quality of the conference, from the excellent classes to the speakers and performances to the opportunity to interact with other teachers who are passionate about theatre. The staff and fellow participants were kind and welcoming. I enjoyed being a student again, and I left the conference inspired for the coming school year. - *Aimee Guest, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

The 40th year of the Tennessee Arts Academy was a great success! The performers, instructors, and Musers were top notch. To quote Betsy Wolfe, "Give yourselves a pat on the back!" - *Virginia Nix, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

I will definitely come back. I love how you celebrate arts teachers! - *Ashley Bugg Brown, West TN Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

The Tennessee Arts Academy has become something I look forward to every summer. The faculty and fellow teachers have become a second family. I am so thankful for the memories and quality instruction I receive from TAA. - *Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

This was an excellent, insanely wonderful Academy! You all really pulled out all the stops for the 40th!! - *Nicole Church, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Visual Art participant*

The TAA Summer Institute was a definite need for motivation this school year. The innovators, my teachers, the Musings, and Frank Bluestein and staff made the week one of the most memorable and enlightening experiences. See you next year! - *Deborah Walker, West TN Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

This was one of my favorite years at TAA. From instructors to Musers and everything in between, I loved it! - *Lori Wortman, East TN Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

This experience was wonderful and informative. I received a lot of useful information. The faculty was top tier. I am so looking forward to next year and years to come. Thank you for this wonderful experience - *Ayona Reeves, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Vocal Music participant*

I LOVED this experience. Such a close group of people and excellent teachers! As a first-year attendee, I was blown away and definitely intend to come back. There was not a single moment that didn't impress me! - *Rebekah Spresser, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

Sharing space with such impactful artists during each Musing was meaningful, and it was especially powerful to see them uplift and honor arts educators, recognizing the essential role they play in nurturing creativity and shaping future generations. - *Laurie Allen, East TN Arts Leadership and Administration participant*

TAA was such an amazing experience. It was the breath of fresh air that I needed as I go back to the classroom in a couple of weeks. I feel energized and ready to make music with my students using tools I gained from TAA. - *Jessica Scruggs, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

In my 5th year of teaching, TAA reenergized, renewed, and revamped my teaching style and spirit. Each year after, for the past 20 years, it has continued to do so, leaving me armed and ready with new ideas and energy to continue teaching. - *Stella McKnight, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Vocal Music participant*

I find it so valuable to have the opportunity to learn from some of the most outstanding teachers in the nation, to create and collaborate with fellow music teachers, and to interact with artists from other disciplines. Attending TAA always leaves me feeling so deeply inspired and encouraged that I'm often in tears by the end of the week. - *Rachel Petty, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

This year was fabulous as always. I love everything about it. - *Tanya Pafford, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

The TAA Summer Institute provided me with valuable instruction ideas and methods for my classroom and additionally offered me an opportunity to collaborate with other professionals in my field. I really enjoyed the Musings each day, as well. - *Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

I always come away feeling connected to other art educators and inspired - *David Hall, West TN Upper Middle/Secondary Visual Art participant*

This was by far my favorite year attending TAA. The Elementary Music track faculty were phenomenal, the Musers were inspiring, and the performers were so impressive. What an amazing year! - *Haley Keeton, East TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

After attending last year's Arts Academy, I was left with the wonderful feeling of being a part of a much-needed community. I knew that I wanted to return and be fed and inspired once again. - *Hershel Horner, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

I personally enjoyed everything that I experienced at TAA. I gained so much knowledge and had opportunities to experience so many amazing artistic performances, events, and exhibits. I also met so many amazing people and gained so many connections. - *Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*

I've recommended TAA to every educator I've come in contact with and begged my district coordinator to arrange a budget to let us go again next year! - *Regan Aycock, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

This was one of the best years yet! From our Musers to our performances to our content targeted instruction, everything was inspiring, thought-provoking, helpful, and rejuvenating. - *Elizabeth Schenck, Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Vocal Music participant*

I came back to school this week and recommended that every single one of our teachers in the art department attend TAA at least once. I told them of all the things that we did and had the opportunity to do, and I think they are very much considering attending in the future. - *Hailey Gentry Tapley, East TN Upper Middle/Secondary Visual Art participant*

This year's Tennessee Arts Academy Summer Institute felt like a reset and a reminder of why this work matters. Being surrounded by educators who care deeply about young people, their community, and creative expression gave me new energy for the year ahead. I left with practical ideas I can bring back to *YEAH!* and a renewed commitment to making sure our students and teaching artists feel supported, inspired, and seen. The Academy experience helped me reconnect to the bigger picture of arts education in Tennessee and strengthen my belief in the role *YEAH!* plays in that landscape. - *Mariela Moscoso, Middle TN Arts Leadership and Administration participant*

Our TAA instructor's goal was clear - to help us remember the why and how of what we do as educators, while providing us with meaningful information that would allow us to improve as musicians and educators. - *Middle TN Upper Middle/Secondary Instrumental Music participant*

The instruction in Elementary Theatre gave me new ideas to implement in the library. I am excited to start using the ideas on the first day of school! - *Michelle Howell, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Theatre Arts Integration, Creative Drama & Movement participant*

My 2026 TAA experience was amazing. In the Elementary Visual Art track, I was able to gain several new ideas and approaches to use in the classroom. Amazing! I learned so many new approaches and techniques! Who knew that an old dog with 19 years of teaching could learn new tricks, but I certainly did! - *Erin Prindle, East TN Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

The Musers were so incredible and so connected to the purpose of inspiring and encouraging educators. It was great. - *West TN Upper Middle/Secondary Theatre & Dance participant*

This year at TAA, I received incredible instruction not only related to leadership but also with the finesse only arts education can offer. I increased my capacity as an administrator in the arts and have a pool of resources to increase my effectiveness as a leader. I will be suggesting this conference to all our district's administrators. - *Bethany McKee, Middle TN Arts Leadership and Administration participant*

I really enjoyed the wide variety of Musers and performers offered throughout the week. I love that they had at least one session that leaned into each discipline. And even though I teach visual arts, I thoroughly enjoyed experiencing each Musing and each performance that widened my cultural base. - *Amie Duff, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Visual Art participant*

Each year, I look forward to attending the Tennessee Arts Academy because I know that the materials learned will be immediately applicable in the classroom. - *Amanda Holla, Middle TN Elementary/Lower Middle Music participant*