

OVERTURE  
**ACES**  
ARTS CAREER EXPLORATION SPOTLIGHT



**2024 REPORT**

## Overture Center's Equity and Innovation Statement

Overture Center for the Arts is committed to social and racial justice through a focus on access, equity, diversity and inclusion. We aspire to break down the social constructs that have served to divide us by race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion and range of abilities.

We support an arts community that engages and uplifts people of diverse backgrounds, especially those who have historically been marginalized and left on the periphery of traditional arts organizations. We aim to ensure members of our diverse community are represented and included in all facets of Overture Center, creating an environment where everyone is welcome and feels a sense of belonging.

As we embark on this important journey, we will continually strive to build a strong organization dedicated to the advancement of the arts by engaging our diverse community in all we do. Equity through innovation positions us to have a profound impact on those we serve today, tomorrow and into the future.



### LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Acknowledging Ho-Chunk Nation's ancestral lands, Overture Center for the Arts celebrates the rich traditions, heritage and culture that thrived long before our arrival.

Overture respectfully recognizes this Ho-Chunk land and affirms that we are better when we stand together.







Experiences related to the arts has never been more important for young people of color in the Madison area. The release of the update to Dane County's Race to Equity report after 10 years still shows major disparities for Black and other communities of color related to health, education and economics. And in 2024, Wisconsin ranked last among all states in arts funding. National conversations related to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion continue to be highlighted and connected to quality-of-life experiences and opportunities. As a result, Overture Center's commitments to this work are stronger than ever.

In support of this important reality, we continue to offer free and low-cost programming and work with community partners that serve schools and non-profits. As part of those efforts, we are thrilled to offer the Arts Career Exploration Spotlight (ACES) program.

After a hiatus from its inaugural year in summer 2019 due to COVID-19, the program re-launched with much anticipation and excitement in summer 2024. Over the course of two months, two cohorts engaged in three-week-long experiences, with most participants appreciating the opportunity to "get outside their comfort zone." This program seeks to impact youth holistically through learning, hands-on experiences and a focus on health and wellness. As we continue to refine and grow the program, we look forward to engaging more youth and families with arts experiences and encourage youth to be at their learning edge related to arts careers.

With support from community partners and sponsors, Overture leadership, staff and the hiring of the Equity & Innovation Program Manager, ACES was a smashing success! We are so thankful for all the support and, most importantly, grateful for the ACES students, families and staff—you made this program exemplary!

We look forward to welcoming new ACES cohorts in summer 2025. If you would like to learn more about how to support the ACES program or know students who should apply, please visit [overture.org/aces](https://overture.org/aces) or contact us at [aces@overture.org](mailto:aces@overture.org).

With gratitude,

Dr. Ida Balderrama-Trudell  
*Director of Equity & Innovation*

Allison Ward, M.A.  
*Equity & Innovation Program Manager*

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Overture's Arts Career Exploration Spotlight (ACES) program empowers Madison-area middle and high school students of color to explore local arts organizations and career possibilities through hands-on experiences.

As the anchor of downtown Madison's cultural arts district and the largest nonprofit arts organization in Wisconsin, Overture is committed to creating new opportunities for Madison-area young people who have been systemically left out of the arts.

ACES offers tailored activities that match students' interests and abilities, with exposure to a wide range of arts careers—from administration to technical roles and artistic creation. Students also engage in diverse art forms, such as painting, drawing, music, dance and theater, gaining valuable career insights along the way.

Middle school students who are rising seventh graders through recent high school seniors are welcome to apply. Students who complete the entire three-week program receive a stipend dependent on attendance and program participation.

Our focus areas align with academic and social and emotional learning competencies for the State of Wisconsin: Arts Career Exploration, Financial Literacy, Health, Literacy – Written and Verbal Communication and Social and Emotional Well-being.

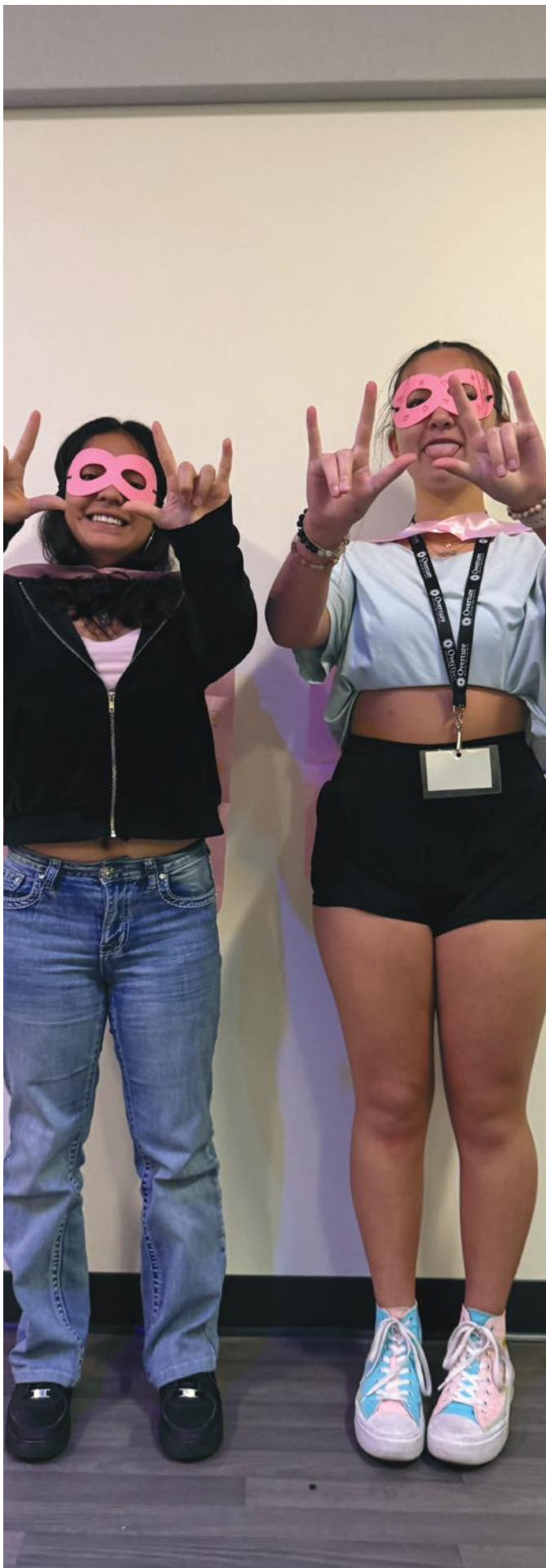
## HISTORY

The ACES program was piloted in 2019 by former Chief Equity & Innovation Officer Dr. Ed Holmes. This summer program initiative from Overture's Equity and Innovation Department offered 36 Madison-area middle and high school students a new pathway to exploring local arts organizations and arts career possibilities through a series of immersive hands-on learning experiences. The eight-week ACES program created a bridge for Madison-area young people who have been systemically left out of the arts.

ACES offered activities customized to the needs, interests and abilities of participating students. Overture and partner arts organizations throughout the community and beyond offered various perspectives on working in an expansive range of visual and performing arts. Students were encouraged to engage in various arts forms, from visual arts and writing poetry to music, dance and theater. They gained knowledge and an introduction to varied arts careers, from administration to the work of practicing artists and technical careers.

Racial disparities in Dane County and in arts administration careers persist and thus makes the ACES initiative a critical priority for Overture. Overture intends for this program to be an essential step in changing the narrative of racial injustice and inequity in the arts in the Madison area. The pilot year was a good first step in helping Overture set the standard for change. We used the summer 2019 experience as the foundation for the development of a program that will have a significant impact in the arts community. With this program and partnership with Goodman Community Center, Overture continues to establish itself as an organization at the forefront of Madison and the region in making a significant impact in the arts for equity, diversity and inclusion.

Overture is excited to have a true community-based program that reflects a commitment to broadening our reach and scope into diverse communities. The Goodman Community Center was a perfect site for the first year of the program. Goodman facilitated easy access to the young people of diverse backgrounds that we are trying to reach. The center served as a great means of connecting the community to Overture. Partnering with the Goodman Center created a natural access point to connect with more neighborhoods and communities in Madison. Through this pilot program and with this partnership, Overture has begun to open its doors to young people in a way that makes them feel as if Overture—along with the arts community—has embraced them, sending a clear message that the arts are truly for all of Madison's residents.



## 2024 PROGRAM ELEMENTS

### Tours

- Overture Center for the Arts
- American Players Theatre
- UW-Madison Theatre Department
- Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra (WYSO)

### Workshops

- Dance Workshops
  - KLJ Movement
  - Madison Ballet
  - Hip Hop – Papa-Kobina
- Visual Arts
  - Spray Paint Workshop – Kiba Freeman Art
  - Overture Gallery Walk Through
  - Overture Galleries Discussion – Stephanie Barenz and Megan Landon
  - UW-Madison Chazen Museum Scavenger Hunt
- Performing Arts
  - Watch Load In of Broadway Shows
  - Improvisation Workshop – UW-Madison Theatre Department
  - Tech Talk/Sound Demonstration with Michael Allison, Overture Center technical associate
  - Panel Discussion with Overture staff from Programming, Guest Services, Events and Development teams
- Literacy
  - Financial Literacy – Park Bank
  - Spoken Word/Poetry Workshop
  - Dream Mapping/Goal Writing
- Mental Health Workshop
  - Seein' Is Believin' – Mind Superhero

### Shows Attended

- “Tina: The Tina Turner Musical” at Overture Center for the Arts
- “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” at American Players Theatre



## SAMPLE CALENDAR

**Monday – Thursday 9am – 1pm, three weeks for each cohort**

**Week 1** – Get to know you/ice breakers, introductions to careers, dream mapping, show load-in, mental health workshop, movement workshop, attend show

**Week 2** – Overture tour, technical workshop, dance workshops, Chazen scavenger hunt, spoken word/poetry workshop

**Week 3** – American Players Theatre tour, UW-Madison Department of Theatre tour and workshops, Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra (WYSO) tour/Music Makers presentation, financial literacy workshop, student gratitudes, program evaluations

Each day starts with breakfast and a check-in, overview of the day and expectations.

Each day ends with lunch, a check out, reminders and verbal or written reflection.

## DATA SNAPSHOTS

- 20 student participants with 19 completed
- 9 middle school students
- 11 high school students
- 4 school districts represented by 10 schools
- 50% of students participate in Free and Reduced Lunch
- 95% were students of color
- 20 community partners
- Student stipend: \$300 to middle school students, \$600 to high school students



## STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

### Madison Metropolitan School District

- James Wright Middle School – 5 students
- O’Keefe Middle School – 1 student
- Blackhawk Middle School – 1 student
- Sherman Middle School – 1 student
- Whitehorse Middle School – 1 student
- Madison East High School – 1 student

### Sun Prairie Area School District

- Sun Prairie East High School – 1 student
- Sun Prairie West High School – 1 student

### Stoughton Area School District

- Stoughton High School – 2 students

### Verona Area School District

- Verona Area High School – 6 students

### Free and Reduced Lunch

- 11 of the 20 ACES students participate in Free and Reduced Lunch

### Would recommend to a friend

- 13/16 would recommend the program to a friend

### Counselor connection to student

- 14/16 agreed to feeling connected to at least one counselor

### Workshops students found most interesting

- Dream mapping at DreamBank
- Kiba Freeman Art (spray paint workshop)
- UW–Madison Chazen Museum scavenger hunt
- Watching Broadway load-in with John Penisten – “Moulin Rouge” and “Tina: The Tina Turner Musical”
- Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra (WYSO) tour

### Workshops students found most beneficial to a career in the arts

- Seein’ is Believin’ – Mind Superhero Workshop
- Kiba Freeman Art
- Backstage tour of Overture Center

### Racial Demographic Breakdown<sup>1</sup>

- 10 Black or African American (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- 1 Asian (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- 8 Hispanic or Latino
- 1 White (Not Hispanic or Latino)

## QUANTITATIVE DATA - STUDENTS

16/20 students responded

All questions were scored on a five point Likert Scale:

1= Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Neutral

4= Agree

5= Strongly Agree

The ACES program influenced my thoughts about deciding to pursue a career in the arts.	3.3
I gained a clearer understanding of what careers in the arts are as a result of the ACES program.	4.1
The counselors were helpful in guiding me through the ACES program.	4.4
I gained valuable advice from ACES counselors.	4.1
I felt connected to at least one counselor or staff member during ACES.	4.3
I gained valuable information from ACES presenters.	3.9
I have grown personally as a result of participating in the ACES program.	3.5
The ACES program helped me develop specific personal and/or professional skills.	3.3
I would recommend the ACES program to other students interested in the arts.	4.1
How would you describe your overall experience in ACES?	4.1
I found aspects of the ACES program to be difficult.	2.6

## SURVEY RESPONSES - STUDENTS

### What were the most enjoyable aspects of the program for you?

- *Being able to experience new things.*
- *Taking field trips (tour at Overture).*
- *The food!*
- *Being able to get a chance to have a tour of Overture, every time I would come for shows I was always curious about how things worked and it was a good experience to see all of the things.*
- *You guys!*

### What new skills or knowledge did you gain during the program?

- *To be more open and give things a try.*
- *It was hard to get out of my comfort zone and being able to try new things that got me out of my comfort zone helped a bit. Also being able to engage with new people.*
- *All of the opportunities and fun you can have in the arts.*
- *How to work in the arts.*

### Please share in what ways you have grown personally by participating in the ACES program.

- *Speaking up in front of a decent amount of people.*
- *Being out of my comfort zone.*
- *Speaking up and trying to ask more questions.*
- *I've gained a larger interest in the arts.*

### What skills, if any, did the ACES program help develop?

- *Being able to talk with new people.*
- *Comfort zone and participating in new things.*
- *Hip-hop dance.*
- *Talking more.*
- *Singing and kindness.*
- *Understanding about working in the arts.*





**Please share what aspects of the ACES program you found difficult, if any.**

- *Nothing.*
- *Stepping out of my comfort zone.*
- *The dancing.*
- *I didn't find anything difficult.*

**Please share how the ACES program can be improved to better meet the needs of students like you.**

- *Maybe having kids from different places talk and meet each other.*
- *Being more active and less talking.*
- *Keep being more hands on activities related to the art.*
- *Ask students what they feel comfortable with and getting opinions at the beginning of the program.*
- *Nothing really.*

**Why or why not would you recommend the ACES program to other students?**

- *I would because it can help people get to know different people while having fun.*
- *Because they could learn about a lot of art that they never knew was art, and try a lot of different crazy things go places they never been do things they never thought they would try.*
- *Because it would be a good opportunity for anyone trying to explore the arts.*
- *Because they would get to experience/learn about the arts and they could be connected with other people and things in the arts community.*
- *Learning experience.*
- *Because it goes through simple and diverse topics in the arts.*

**What advice would you give students participating in the this program in the future?**

- *Maybe don't be shy and try to do things and participate.*
- *To be more open minded about things and that there will be times where you would really need to get out of your comfort zone for it to be fun. Also being open-minded about meeting new people and being able to talk to them.*
- *Keep an open mind and just do it!*
- *Do it and enjoy while you're here.*

**What else would you like to share?**

- *It makes me want to go to more plays.*
- *I love the staff, they are very nice and fun.*
- *It was great.*
- *I enjoyed it more than I thought.*
- *It was really different from others because you get to do and see more things.*

## QUANTITATIVE DATA - COUNSELORS

5/5 Staff responded

All questions were scored on a five point Likert Scale:

1= Strongly Disagree

2= Disagree

3= Neutral

4= Agree

5= Strongly Agree

The ACES program influenced my thoughts about deciding to pursue a career in the arts.	4.2
I gained a clearer understanding of what careers in the arts are as a result of the ACES program.	4.4
Overture Staff were helpful in guiding me through the ACES program.	4.6
I gained valuable advice from Overture Staff.	4.4
I felt connected to at least one Overture Staff member or counselor during ACES.	4
I gained valuable information from ACES presenters.	4.6
I have grown personally as a result of working for the ACES program.	5
Being an ACES program counselor helped me develop specific personal and/or professional skills.	4.4
I would recommend working for the ACES program to other people interested in the arts.	4.6
How would you describe your overall experience in ACES?	4.8
I found aspects of the ACES program to be difficult.	3.4

## SURVEY RESPONSES - COUNSELORS

### What were the most enjoyable aspects of the program for you?

- I really enjoyed having the opportunity to learn more about the different careers that exist within the arts, and being able to gain experience working with youth!*
- Being able to engage with students and see them grow was wonderful. I also really loved getting to know the other counselors.*
- The most enjoyable aspect of the program was the opportunity to interact with the students and expand their opportunities within the arts. Seeing their growth and development throughout the program, gaining confidence not only in their artistic abilities but also in themselves.*

### What new skills or knowledge did you gain during the program?

- I gained different forms of communication skills by working with such a diverse staff and student body, and I think that I gained more confidence in myself professionally as a result of being a part of the ACES program.*
- Learning to work with students who may not have been the most excited to be there was a great learning experience for me. To navigate that sort of situation while still engaging the students is so valuable to have in your toolbox as an educator, I am happy that I got to flex those muscles under guidance from the leadership team.*
- ACES continued to enhance my communication skills and also learning to convey complex artistic concepts in ways that are both engaging and comprehensible for the variety of age groups that we had in the program. Working with students from varied backgrounds increased my awareness of inclusivity and cultural sensitivity, allowing me to foster a supportive and welcoming environment. Overall, the experience has significantly enhanced my leadership, mentorship abilities, and my capacity to facilitate a dynamic and inclusive learning environment for young people.*

### Please share in what ways you have grown personally by working for the ACES program.

- I have gained confidence in myself as a young professional, learned important lessons around working with youth and met some very special people.*
- I have grown as an educator from participating in this program. I have learned to be in situations where participation does not always happen and I know I will carry these valuable lessons with me as I enter higher education teaching.*
- I've learned more about arts and let myself be inspired*
- I have been able to enjoy a wonderful experience that also has helped further me in my academic world and career world.*
- Working for the ACES program has profoundly impacted my personal growth. I've refined my communication skills, learning to articulate artistic concepts clearly to diverse youth. My empathy and cultural sensitivity have deepened, enhancing my ability to connect with and support students from various backgrounds. Facilitating workshops and managing projects have strengthened my organizational and leadership skills. Additionally, I've gained adaptability, a broader artistic perspective, and a more substantial commitment to fostering creativity and personal growth in others.*



### What skills, if any, did being an ACES program counselor help develop?

- *My professional communication skills, flexibility and open-mindedness have all been developed as a result of being an ACES program counselor.*
- *It helped me better understand how to navigate tough situations, like disagreements at meetings. I have learned that I am the type of person who just needs a little bit of time to clear my mind which is valuable information to have moving forward.*
- *Being part of the ACES team helped me develop critical problem-solving techniques and innovative thinking. Additionally, I enhanced my skills in mentoring, building rapport with students and adapting to dynamic group needs.*

### Please share what aspects of the ACES program you found difficult, if any.

- *There were a few times in which the day felt longer than others, and it can be super difficult and unpredictable when you are working with kids, and so I think that a couple of moments of struggle definitely came up during moments of frustrations with the kids, but it was all for the better in the end!*
- *Navigating how to make sure the students stayed on track while also making it fun and engaging*
- *One challenging aspect was addressing students' varying levels of prior experience and artistic ability, which required tailored approaches to ensure inclusive and effective instruction. Ensuring continuous engagement and enthusiasm from participants while balancing the program's diverse components presented its own set of difficulties.*

### Please share how the ACES program can be improved to better meet the needs of staff like you.

- *I think that the ACES program has done a good job in supporting me as an individual, but I also think that everything can and should continue to evolve in innovative, forward-thinking ways.*
- *One area that could improve the program is having a balance of leaders/counselors who know how to work with students of different cultural backgrounds who are not musically inclined. Not only would it help enhance the program, but the response that will be received from the students.*

### Why or why not would you recommend working for the ACES program to other people interested in the arts?

- *I really enjoyed my experience as an ACES counselor and would love to even return myself in the future if possible! I think that depending on the personality and artistic interest, I would not hesitate to recommend this position to someone interested in the arts!*
- *The leadership team/fellow counselors/kids are amazing. When everything comes together, it is a truly touching experience watching the students grow throughout the program*
- *It's a great experience! Knowing that you're helping students explore a side of themselves that they haven't been able to explore before is so fulfilling.*
- *I highly recommend working for the ACES program to anyone passionate about advocating for students and the arts. It offers a unique opportunity to develop valuable skills in communication, leadership and creative facilitation while working with diverse, enthusiastic youth. The experience fosters personal growth, enhances artistic perspectives and provides a rewarding chance to inspire and support the next generation of artists.*

### What advice would you give to people considering becoming an ACES counselor for this program in the future?

- *I advise them to get used to practicing a lot of patience, with yourself, other staff and the students throughout the duration of the program, and to always try to bring your best and most authentic self to the space.*
- *I would say that patience, authenticity, and a general cheery demeanor are very important traits to have.*
- *Try it out! It's going to change your career path!*
- *Be receptive to constructive criticism, because at the end of the day we are all just trying to create the best experience for the students that we can.*
- *My advice is to embrace flexibility and adaptability for those considering becoming an ACES counselor. Be prepared to manage diverse needs and expectations with patience and creativity. Cultivate strong communication skills and stay organized to handle the dynamic nature of the role. Engage deeply with the students, fostering a supportive environment that encourages artistic or non-artistic growth. Lastly, prepare for a rewarding experience to challenge and enhance your skills.*

### What else would you like to share?

- *I just want to thank the Overture Center for this amazing opportunity and experience!*
- *I am so glad that it's back and that I was able to be a part of it!*
- *My experience in the ACES program was incredibly fulfilling and eye-opening. Beyond the professional skills I developed, I was deeply inspired by the creativity and enthusiasm of the students. The program's emphasis on diverse artistic expressions and collaborative projects provided a vibrant and dynamic atmosphere that made every day exciting. Witnessing the growth and confidence of the students was particularly rewarding, and the connections I formed with both students and fellow counselors have been invaluable. Overall, I had a fantastic time between both cohorts.*





## RACIAL DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF STAFF<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Black or African American (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- 1 Asian (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- 2 Hispanic or Latino
- 1 Multiracial
- 1 White (Not Hispanic or Latino)

### <sup>1</sup>Racial Demographic Definitions:

- Black or African American (Not Hispanic or Latino): A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.
- Asian (Not Hispanic or Latino): A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia or the Indian Subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand and Vietnam.
- Hispanic or Latino: A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (Not Hispanic or Latino): A person having origins in any of the peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa or other Pacific Islands.
- Multiracial: A person of two or more races.
- White (Not Hispanic or Latino): A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe.

## FINANCIALS

Total cost for 2024: \$52,360.17

Stipends for students: \$9,600

Development funds received: \$42,550

## SUPPORTERS

- Brian Butler & Carolyn Lazar Butler
- Evjue Foundation
- Exact Sciences
- Jeff & Tiffany Mack
- Nelnet
- Old National Bank

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- American Family Dream Bank
- American Players Theatre
- Hitterz Collective
- Ian's Pizza
- Kiba Freeman Art
- Madison Ballet
- Madison Concourse Hotel
- Madison Youth Arts (MYArts)
- Park Bank
- Seein' is Believin'
- UW-Madison Chazen Museum
- UW-Madison Department of Theatre and Drama
- UW-Madison Division of the Arts
- Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra (WYSO)

