

# Appomattox Regional Governor's School: Celebrating the Individual

by M. Duncan (Visual Art, 2018) and S. Gleason (Instrumental Music, 2018)



Photo Credit <http://www.kbsgc.com/project/appomattox-regional-governors-school/>

Appomattox Regional Governor's School for the Arts and Technology, more commonly referred to as ARGs, is currently in the process of selecting its newest class of students. As middle school students compete for the few seats available for the 9th grade in their county, a common question asked is, "What makes ARGs such a spectacular place?"

## The School

ARGs is a comprehensive, full time, high school program. Founded in 1999 in the historic city of Petersburg as a place for

students to combine their talents in the arts with an education that goes beyond the minimum curriculum. These meticulously selected students receive not only the best training in their core classes, but are also trained in one of the seven majors offered: theater, vocal music, instrumental music, visual art, dance, literary art, and technology. ARGs often encourages students to branch out and take courses that don't pertain to their major. The school's mission statement promises that ARGs "cultivates a supportive environment that inspires unique artistic and technological

visions, promotes cultural tolerance, nurtures community partnerships, and produces active, engaged citizens.” In its 18th year of operation, ARGGS could not be doing a better job of achieving its mission.

Appomattox also offers a wide variety of sports, including volleyball, golf, tennis, cross country, and soccer. The students are encouraged to participate in weekly club meetings, peer tutoring, and numerous other extracurriculars that build character and broaden their outlook on life.

In order to get an inside look at this unique school, we interviewed Tina Fritz, a long time teacher and department chair of science at ARGGS.

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When asked what ARGGS meant to her, she responded simply that the school is “my very own island of misfit toys, where for the first time, I fit in,” and she is not the only one who thinks the same way. Most students agree that ARGGS is a safe place to be different.

### Students and Teachers

With only 380 students at ARGGS, smaller classes allow strong communication between students and their teachers and establishes an environment that promotes curiosity. Fewer students in the school also makes ARGGS feel much more like a family.

This is a place where you are valued as an individual. During the interview with Ms. Fritz, we asked her what made the building so different. Her response was that it was the people who worked and learned within its walls. “We celebrate individuality rather than teaching you to conform. It makes me love it even more.”

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ARGGS prides itself on being diverse. Despite the small number of students, the school is rich in different races, ethnicities, backgrounds, and identities. ARGGS is a safe place for those who have never felt welcomed anywhere else. The students, teachers, staff, and administration work hard to achieve this feeling. The diversity club SPECTRUM, possibly the largest attended service club, works to educate students and staff about how to deal with diversity and how to find an individual identity for yourself. Everyone at ARGGS desires that students and teachers alike be comfortable being who they are, as they are. As Ms. Fritz puts it “we collectively as a school teach students to celebrate who you are and to be who you are, not to fit a mold, not to say things to make people happy but to really go in and be that person you want to be.”



Photo credit [http://www.richmond.com/news/local/ashland/article\\_c60188bc-a92e-5552-93e8-80609e7028e3.html?mode=image&photo=](http://www.richmond.com/news/local/ashland/article_c60188bc-a92e-5552-93e8-80609e7028e3.html?mode=image&photo=)

The opportunities for ARGs students are endless. Teachers recommend students for outside programs, both academic and artistic, pushing them to do their best. Each year, ARGs students claim numerous titles and awards for their performances in and out of their majors. Last year alone, over forty of our students earned Scholastic Writing and Art awards for their work in both fields. The school's literary magazine, ASGARD, has been nationally recognized. Our robotics team has made it to the international championship every year since its start. The prestigious dance company

Dance Interface, established in 2015, was featured in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* for their performance in the Generation Dream series soon after they were created. Pictured left is Amber Crittenden (dance, 2018), a sophomore at the time, dancing for the series. ARGs student work was also featured in an art show at the Edgar Allen Poe Museum of Richmond. Students are also showered with scholarship opportunities for college, for which the teachers and counselors prepare the students to apply. With chances at every corner to show off their talents to the community, ARGs is the perfect place to start a career either in the arts and technology, or in any other field.

Ms. Fritz had a lot to say about the people that she works with daily. When asked to describe what her coworkers were like she responded, "They are all very unique. They are all fiery in their own way. They are all great at what they do. They don't mind the oddities because they themselves are odd. We like it in one another and we celebrate one another's differences as much as their accomplishments. And I have never seen so many adults in one place who truly support each other."

She continued on to explain how she is working with "masters of what they do." She finds herself continually amazed at the artwork that fellow teacher David Bartlett, admitting that often she sits with him just to watch him paint. Also receiving compliments from her are retired piano teacher Buckner Gamby and current literary art teacher Patricia Smith, whose work she admires greatly. With ARGs being staffed by people

like that, it is no wonder that the students do so well and go on to do such great things.

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ARGS Alumni remain a part of the dragon family long after they have graduated and left the halls of the building. Our homecoming is held to insure that alumni will be able to attend the game and pep rally. Every day, at least one alumni can be found roaming the halls and stopping in to say hello to their favorite teachers. It is not uncommon that students come back and give workshops to students, teaching those techniques they may have once learned while sitting in the same classroom. Alumni never fail to go far in life. From company dancers, to web designers for *Time Magazine*, to award winning authors, many of the students graduating from ARGs have earned a prestigious reputation for the school.

The dragon family does not forget its alumni. During the interview Ms. Fritz told us how she made a surprise visit to William & Mary in order to surprise and catch up with some graduate students. She also told us how she keeps up with many of the graduated students. ARGs and its teachers refuse to turn their back on those who have moved on.

Once you visit, and talk with some of the students and staff, it is very easy to see

why everyone is making such a big deal about ARGs. It is a simple fact, from the students, to the teachers, to the alumni, there is no better place for aspiring artists to learn to celebrate themselves than at



Appomattox Regional Governor’s School.

Drawing done by Isabella Chalfant (visual art, 2018) and featured in the Edgar Allen Poe museum show

The Appomattox Regional Governor’s School. Is located in Petersburg, VA and accepts students from the following school divisions: Amelia County, Charles City County, Chesterfield County, City of Colonial Heights, Dinwiddie County, City of Franklin, City of Hopewell, City of Petersburg, Powhatan County, Prince George County, City of Richmond, Southampton County, Surry County, and Sussex County.

For more information visit:  
[www.args.us](http://www.args.us)