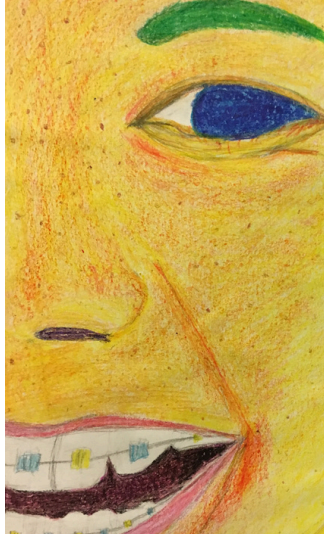
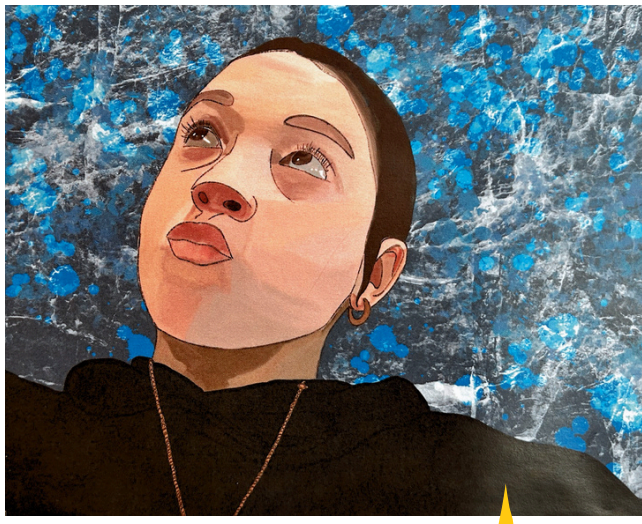










Annual Report

2025–2026

SALT LAKE ARTS ACADEMY

2025-2026 Annual Report

SALT LAKE ARTS ACADEMY

Mission

The mission of the Salt Lake Arts Academy is to prepare students to become confident and creative builders of their future, equipped through the arts and academics to take responsibility for shaping their communities.

Vision

We envision all students excelling through the middle school years, with confidence, passion and engagement.

Our Core Values

R.I.I.S.E.
Respect
Integrity
Inclusion
Safety
Empathy

Be Bold.
Be Creative.
Be YOU!



A Message from our Principal



It is with deep gratitude that I reflect on the 2025–26 school year and the opportunity to continue serving this remarkable community. This past year, SLArts was fortunate to remain fully enrolled, with wait lists in several grades, despite the continued decline in the student population across the valley.

We also have much to celebrate in the generosity and engagement of our community. The success of our fundraising efforts is allowing us to transform our outdoor spaces, creating welcoming places where students can learn, connect, and play.

In response to feedback and the unique needs of our students, we partnered with Blind Mule Behavioral Services to strengthen how we support behavior across our school. This provided staff valuable training and coaching, and is helping us build classrooms that are safe, positive, and supportive for all students.

Looking ahead, we welcomed two new teachers to our 5th/6th Humanities team and continued to strengthen our academic programming.

We began the new school year with literary projects, developed by Markell McCubbin, Director of Academic Engagement, that have provided students with meaningful opportunities to connect, reflect, and engage with one another from the very beginning of the year. These projects grew out of the lessons and conversations of the previous school year, building community and setting a positive foundation for the year ahead.

We will continue listening to our community, strengthening our programs, supporting our staff, investing in our learning spaces, and finding new ways to help every student feel valued and capable of success.

Deborah S Candler

With gratitude,
Deborah Candler
Principal/CAO

Thank you for your continued partnership and belief in SLArts.

Our Community

My fondest memory of SLArts is the people I've met. I joined the school shortly after moving from a country with a completely different culture and language. The welcoming and friendly community at SLArts is something I will never forget."
– Flavia Asenjo, '24 alum

41
Zip Codes Represented

25%
Racially/Ethnically Diverse Students

409
Total Students

17:1
Student/Teacher Ratio

17%
Economically Disadvantaged



90+%
Student Retention Rate

#2
Best Public Middle School in Utah
(Source: Niche, 2026)

#2
Best Public Middle School **Teachers** in Utah
(Source: Niche, 2026)

Our Initiatives

Strengthening Student Behavior Supports

Following a 2025 school community survey, SLArts identified an opportunity to strengthen how we support student behavior and meet the needs of all learners. In response, we partnered with Blind Mule Behavioral Services during the 2025-26 school year to build stronger school-wide systems and provide staff with hands-on training and coaching. This work is helping make our classrooms even safer, more positive, and more supportive. We're working to build the kind of community where every student can thrive. **We'll continue the partnership this year**, deepening this support as we grow alongside our students' needs.

Outdoor Improvement Project

Thanks to the generosity of our community and the success of our fundraising efforts, our bold vision for a connected, inspiring outdoor campus is coming to life. This year, our four new outdoor classrooms — versatile, covered spaces for year-round learning and gathering — are nearing completion, joining the colorful courts and hammock garden already transforming our outdoor area. Looking ahead, we're turning our attention to the final phase of the project: An elevated outdoor stage that will transform our turf into an open-air venue for performances, concerts, and school-wide events. **Our 2026–27 Annual Campaign kicks off in November**, and will be key to getting us across the finish line on this bold vision for SLArts.



The Launch of PEAK Projects

This school year, we're excited to launch the PEAK Project — Passion, Exploration, Action, Knowledge — a new initiative we began planning in 2025-26. PEAK gives students at every grade level the opportunity to pursue a personal passion project, guided by a mentor of their choosing (teacher, relative, other adult), with the freedom to make it as extensive and creative as they'd like. **It's an optional stretch opportunity for learners ready to take on more rigor, complexity, or personalization in their learning.** Along the way, students build self-direction and executive function skills while diving into a topic that truly excites them. Projects will be celebrated through a showcase at the end of each semester, so students can share what they've learned with parents/guardians and our school community.

Arts Every Day

The arts are foundational to how SLArts students learn. Through daily arts experiences, students develop creative thinking skills that strengthen their work across every subject, growing as artists and learners alike.

Their creativity took shape throughout the year in performances, showcases, and finished works:



Dance

Students produced two full-length concerts of original choreography, collaborated with Drama on a joint performance, performed in Repertory Dance Theatre's Heritage Project Showcase at the Mid-Valley Performing Arts Center, and surprised audiences with dance flash mobs at Halloween and SLArts Fest.



Digital Arts

Students explored graphic design and illustration — creating artwork for performances, producing individual works of art, competing in the school's first-ever sticker contest, and designing the school yearbook.

Drama

Drama students wrote and staged six plays throughout the year, including collaborations with Music and Dance. Drama also hosted award-winning playwright Laura King for a three-day residency through the American Alliance for Theatre and Education's Playwrights in Our Schools program, giving students the chance to learn the craft of playwriting from a working professional.





Music

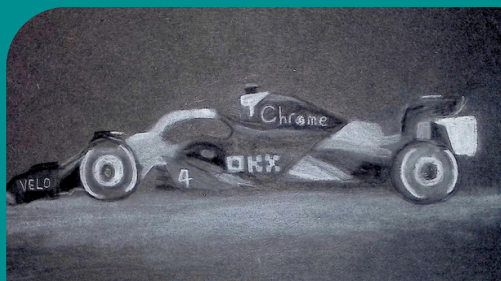
Our music students carried on tradition with the 22nd Annual Holiday Concert and spring Pop and Jazz Concert, plus a SLArts Fest showcase featuring students of all grades. In November, advanced music students enjoyed a visit and practice session with bluegrass/Americana band, The Brothers Comatose.

Visual Art

As every year, student work filled our hallways with rotating displays each month. Students contributed to the Great Salt Lake Bird Festival Student Art Contest, including 7th grader Allie Badger, who won a top prize for her watercolor of a Black-necked Stilt. Our 7th and 8th grade Visual Arts students also displayed work at The City Library's Teen Space, with a meet-and-greet reception.







Student *Achievement*

In May, students took the state-mandated **RISE Assessments in Math, Science, and English Language Arts.** SLArts students typically scored above the Utah averages. The numbers below show the percentage of students achieving **a score of 3 (Proficient) or 4 (Above Proficient)**.

SLArts / Utah average

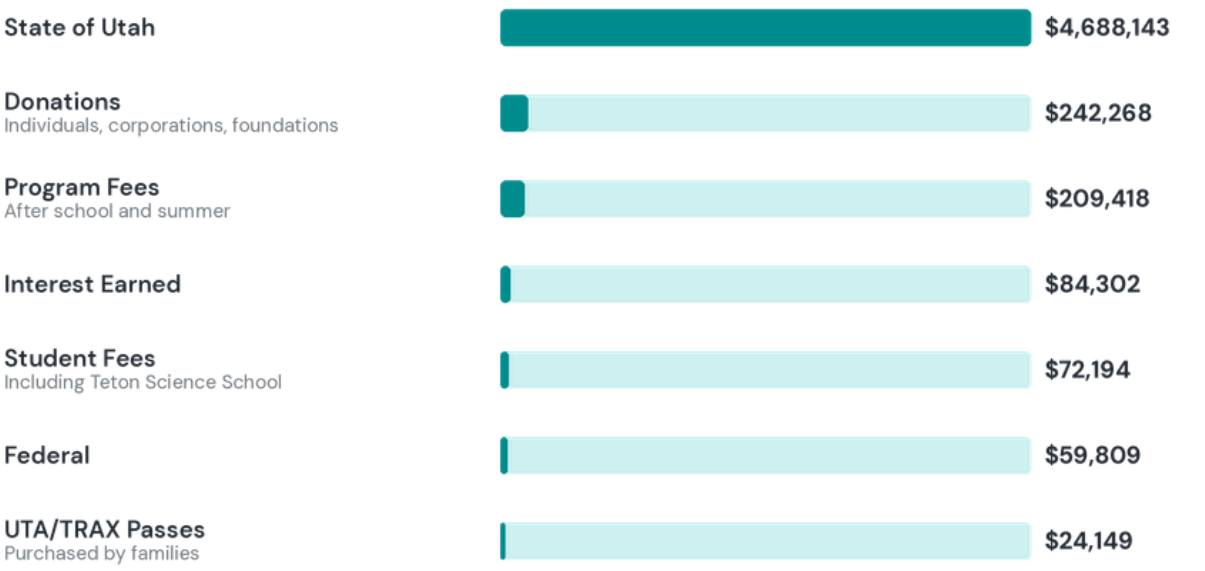
	5th	6th	7th	8th
SPRING 2023				
ELA	**58** / 49	**62** / 42	**63** / 41	**64** / 42
Math	**47** / 45	**43** / 35	**61** / 46	**74** / 39
Science	**68** / 51	**62** / 55	**66** / 45	**70** / 48
SPRING 2024				
ELA	**67** / 48	**59** / 47	**63** / 42	**60** / 42
Math	**49** / 44	**35** / 35	**46** / 46	**62** / 41
Science	**68** / 52	**66** / 56	**65** / 45	**58** / 49
SPRING 2025				
ELA	**61** / 43	**52** / 42	**57** / 42	**65** / 42
Math	**46** / 44	**33** / 36	**51** / 46	**49** / 40
Science	**65** / 50	**65** / 56	**62** / 46	**58** / 49
SPRING 2026				
ELA	**60** / 46	**61** / 44	**64** / 44	**69** / 46
Math	**45** / 45	**33** / 37	**55** / 46	**61** / 39
Science	**63** / 52	**67** / 58	**62** / 48	**67** / 51



Financial Report

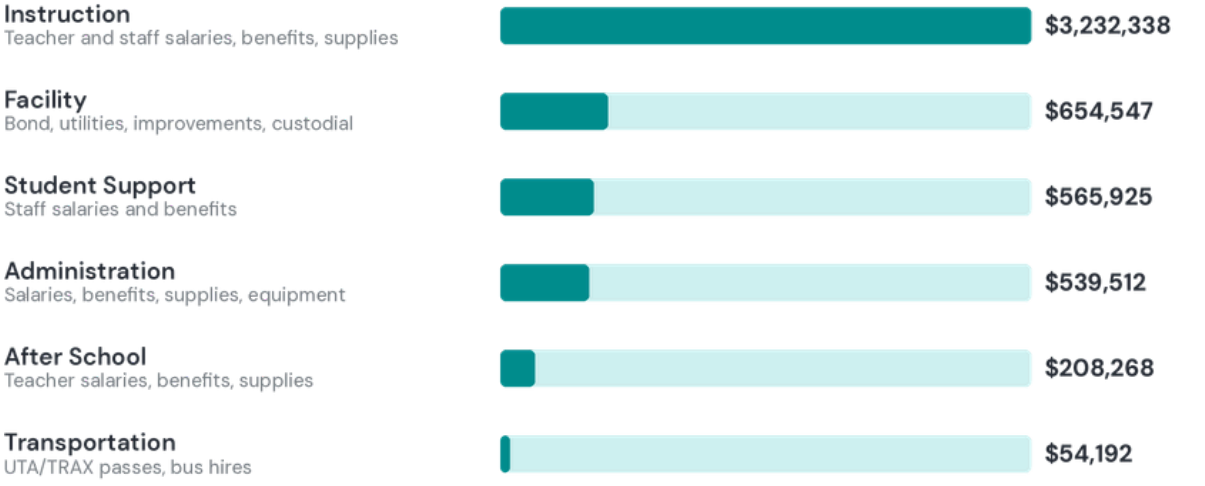
Salt Lake Arts Academy undergoes an independent audit each year. To see detailed financial statements, visit our website at www.slarts.org.

REVENUE - Fiscal Year 2026



Total Revenue **$5,380,282**

EXPENSES - Fiscal Year 2026



Total Expenses **$5,254,782**

Annual Giving

$242,268

Total Raised from Individuals, Corporations, and Foundations

262
Individual Donations

12
States Represented by Our Donors

41%
Of Our Total Raised Came from Matching Funds & Challenge Grants



Your Generosity *Helps Support*

Daily Arts Experiences for over 400 students in Dance, Drama, Music, Visual Arts, and Digital Arts

Classroom tech and supplies for students & teachers

Full or partial school fees for families receiving waivers

The 2025-2027 Outdoor Improvement Project

Scholarships for the 8th Grade Teton Science School trip

$17,500

In full and partial **scholarships** helped send **35** 8th graders on the **Teton Science School trip.**

"SLArts taught me how to learn in ways that aren't always typical, and to embrace them."

– Fern Anderson, '23 alum

Donors, Thank You!

Your support means the *world to us.*

The following individuals and foundations generously supported Salt Lake Arts Academy through grants and donations during the 2025-26 school year.

Katie & Scott Amundsen
Danielle Anderson
Emily Andrews
Katy Andrews
Rhea Bagby
Alison Barrington & Brandon Patterson
Ashley Barrington
John Barrington
Michael Beck
Erin Beeghly
Marjorie & Charles Behrens
Katharine Biele & The Howze Family Fund
BK5K Youth Fund of the Winona Community Foundation
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John Young
Amy Yuda
& Leandru Schiau
John Yuda



SLArts taught me to value the arts in the world around me, especially in a field that requires an eye for that sort of thing."
– Kuper Dyke, SLArts alum, now studying architecture at the University of Utah

***Donors not listed chose to remain anonymous**. Please contact Whitney Childers, Advancement Director, whitneyc@slarts.org, if an error has been made.*

Ready for what's next
high school & ... beyond

Preparing students for the next step means more than academics. It means growing curious, brave, and caring young people.

Engaged every day

Daily arts give students a reason to love coming to school, and that energy carries into every subject.

Ready to take risks

Performing, creating, and sharing their work teaches students to try new things and learn from mistakes.

Character counts

We teach integrity, empathy, and respect alongside math, science, and humanities.

Beyond the Classroom

Democracy in Dialogue

In 2025-26, Humanities teacher Karin Fenn connected her 8th graders with peers in New Jersey through the Smithsonian's Democracy in Dialogue program to explore community and identity. Students turned their research into original quilts and presentation boards, later displayed at Coffee Garden in Salt Lake City.

One Book, One Community

Building on lessons and conversations from 2025–26, every student read a shared book at the beginning of the 2026–27 school year: "The Wild Robot" in grades 5–6 and "Accountable" in grades 7–8. Led by Director of Academic Engagement Markell McCubbin, the project asks a powerful question: **What does it mean to be part of a community?** Students are exploring trust, empathy, and how to help rebuild relationships when things go wrong.

Teton Science School - A Capstone Experience

Every fall, our 8th grade class spends five cell phone-free days in Jackson, WY, bringing together everything they've learned since 5th grade through hiking, journaling, observation, and field ecology. Made possible by our science team, staff, parent volunteers, and donor-funded scholarships, this life-changing trip builds friendships that last well beyond middle school.



> *SLArts prepared me for many things, but mostly how to work with people and take care of myself."*
>
> – Abigail Van Blarcom, SLArts alum, now attending the University of Michigan

Investment for Today & Tomorrow

Reflecting on the 2025-2026 school year, I keep returning to a theme: investment. Investments made by the Salt Lake Arts Academy community, students, parents, teachers, and administrators are creating returns today while laying the foundation for future success.



This year, SLArts invested in spaces where students learn, create, and connect. Phase 1 of the Outdoor Improvement Project is nearing completion, with outdoor classrooms, enhanced play spaces, and additional student seating already making an impact. Infrastructure upgrades, including a new lighting control board for the indoor performance stage and improvements to the school's temperature control systems, provide reliability for years to come. These projects position the school to move forward with Phase 2, development of an outdoor performance stage.

SLArts also invested in the people and systems that support student achievement. Ongoing work with policies, professional development, and student support has strengthened the school's ability to provide consistent expectations, productive classrooms, and effective responses to student needs, creating the environment where students and educators can thrive.

Most importantly, we continue to invest in our students and our mission. The middle school years are a time of growth, discovery, and transformation. By choosing SLArts, families invest in an educational experience that develops confident, creative, and compassionate young people. Through rigorous academics and meaningful arts integration, students gain the skills and resilience needed to shape their futures and contribute to their communities.

Together, we are creating opportunities that enrich students' lives today while building a stronger, brighter future.

On behalf of the Governing Board, thank you for your trust, partnership, and continued investment in Salt Lake Arts Academy.

Reid Prentice
2026-27 Governing Board Chair
Salt Lake Arts Academy



The teachers at SLArts are the lifeblood of the school. They gave me opportunities to build powerful friendships and a beautiful relationship with learning."

– Henry Baldwin, '24 SLArts alum

Salt Lake Arts Academy Governing Board 2025-2026

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Salt Lake Arts Academy Leadership 2025-2026

Deborah Candler, Principal / CAO
Nicole Laird, Business Manager
Markell McCubbin, Director of Academic Engagement
Dan Rose, Dean of Students
Whitney Childers, Advancement Director
Jen Guillory, Office Manager, Registrar

Salt Lake Arts Academy
844 S. 200 East
Salt Lake City, UT 84111
801-531-1173
info@slarts.org
www.slarts.org

Help us Kick Off our 2026-27 Annual Giving Campaign!

Please support our 2026-27 Annual Campaign by donating online at https://bit.ly/annual-giving-campaign or by scanning the QR code.

Cover and back page art: self-portraits by SLArts Visual Arts students over the years.








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