

## Requirements to Participate in Extra-Curricular Theatre Productions

Roosevelt School of the Arts (RSA) puts on an annual play, usually in the fall, an annual musical, usually in the spring, and between 1 – 8 Senior One Act Plays (depending on how many seniors are enrolled in the course, *Showcase Directing*). We are extremely proud of our long theatre tradition of putting on many various types of shows from small to large, tragedies to comedies, and that we, as an arts magnet, have been able to put forward more shows that are not usually produced by high schools (think *Something Rotten*).

Theatre productions are different. If your student has been a part of any theatrical productions (here or elsewhere), you know the very long (not just in hours per rehearsal, but that it can take several weeks to months to put on a show) and arduous process of ensuring a show is stage-ready. In a high school setting, it is also different from any other arts discipline as far as being extra-curricular, let me explain: if a student is in choir and there is a concert coming up, there will be a few after school rehearsals. However, much of the “rehearsal” process can take place during class time. This is also the case with any instrumental music concerts, and dance concerts. In looking at the RSA working master calendar (which is an internal document we use to schedule rehearsals and rehearsal spaces as well as scheduling shows and renters), it is obvious that it is only the theatrical productions that must occur outside of regular class hours. That is not to say that the drama classes are not working on the current show, but they cannot rehearse the show during class time because the students who audition for the show are not all in the same class, and in many instances, they are not students who take a drama course at all. This creates a situation whereby in order to make a theatrical production come to fruition, only after-school hours work to have everyone involved there at the same time working together as a whole, from actors to crew members.

As a Theatre Company, we have noticed that we are experiencing issues on more than one front. First, we need to address attendance. I have seen a pattern emerging over the last couple of school years, one that I tried to avoid during *Steel Magnolias*. However, it is at a point now where I must put in a more specific expectation in order to ensure that students who wish to be a part of a theatrical production are first ensuring their “student” responsibilities are their priority. We are seeing abysmal attendance in several of our would-be production participants. The poor attendance is happening in two ways, 1. Tardies, and 2. Absences. Generally speaking (not 100%), those who have poor attendance seem to also be struggling with their grades in some way.

RTC uses the following school-wide and FUSD criteria for participation in extra-curricular activities:

- Minimum 2.0 GPA
- No more than one “F” in any given semester
- 95% daily attendance rate or higher
- Good behavior (this is usually decided on a case-by-case basis with admin input)

As I have reviewed the statistics from the cast/crew from *Cinderella*, and most recently *Steel Magnolias*, I have decided we need a more specific attendance policy for the purposes of our theatrical productions, particularly. This is due to the fact that, in all other disciplines, performance rehearsals are able to occur during the school day in class, whereas this is not the case specifically with a theatrical production.

For the purposes of *She Loves Me*, I will be enforcing the following attendance requirements:

- 95% Daily Attendance Rate (this is FUSD standard)
- 90% Daily Attendance Rate (DAR) IF absences are cleared by parent; note, this is NOT FUSD sanctioned. We are allowing this as a kindness
- If student has >90% DAR, ultimately, the student needs to be giving more attention to their student responsibilities, including being in class every day and getting their work done – much like an adult job, we cannot expect to stay on if we are chronically absent
- 20% or less for number of tardies. Example: As of November 12<sup>th</sup>, there had been 58 school days. If a student was tardy to any one class period for 12 or LESS of those days, they would be at a 20% tardy rate. If the student was tardy 13 or more times to any one class, they would not be eligible to be a part of the show.

These attendance requirements are not meant to be punitive. We are seeing a large negative correlation between both grades as well as rehearsal attendance for students who have poor daytime class attendance. Students who are involved with such a long (weeks to months) and lengthy (hours per rehearsal) extracurricular activity need to ensure they are meeting expectations in more than just the show. If your student falls under one of these requirements, I hope you, the parent, can understand that having students not fulfilling their day-time responsibilities makes it very difficult on the adult advisors in running a show without extra issues regarding GPA and attendance. Please remember that being involved with something like a theatrical production takes a lot of time, effort, and extra responsibility, but it is also a privilege.

The other issue we have been battling is poor interpersonal behavior. As you may recall, during the rehearsal process of *Steel Magnolias*, there were so many rumors, in-fighting, negative social media posts, and sarcasm between the show participants it required me to cancel two consecutive days of rehearsal in order for everyone to take a breath. I'm not sure why, but it does seem, based on my experience, that it is the theatre participants who, every year, need to be spoken to about their interpersonal relationships and behaviors.

This becomes a very trying and time-wasting endeavor for all the adult advisors. It requires discussions between individual students, friend-groups of students, and often trying to find a truce between factions of students who seem to be self-pitted against each other. Now, "some" of these behaviors are normal, high school/teenager issues that happen. However, the behaviors within this group, the actors and crews, are now beyond what I see on a normal day in the normal high school setting. What I have experienced the last few shows, I would say likely beginning with

*Something Rotten* and getting worse and worse with every show, including Senior One Acts, is something we simply will not continue to work with.

These behaviors are creating a very toxic situation within our productions. It is also creating an exorbitant amount of stress on the adult advisors, me included, that trying to even get the production stage-ready is taking a backseat to managing unkindness. I am now in a situation wherein I must come to the aid of my adult advisors. They do not have the time nor the energy to attempt to even keep things calm within the Company to complete a show, never mind an attempt to keep students civil to each other. I'm not sure if anyone has actually added up the hours the adult advisors work (often with no pay), but it is not enough to deal with the poor behavior we have experienced lately.

Therefore, we are implementing a much more rigorous behavior expectation: participants will get one behavior warning and parents will be called immediately. If a second behavior occurs, there will be no second warning, the student will simply be dismissed. If you know me, you know one of my sayings is, "I don't do 'star quarterbacks'", meaning, no one is so good that they get to behave however they want without consequences.

This creates the potential for cancelling a show altogether. Simply put, if there are not enough actors and/or crew members to cover for those who may be dismissed, we will simply cancel the show. Yes. We are this serious. The adult advisors, me included, are unwilling to put in the number of hours that are required to put on a theatrical production if students are unable to remain civil to each other. As we have told the students on many occasions, we do not all have to be friends with everyone, but we do have to remain civil. I would ask parents to view this as job-preparation for their child. Anyone who has worked in the world as an adult knows there are absolute behavior expectations. We are not permitted to verbally attack others, spread rumors, cyber-bully, etc. without being referred to HR, and worse, being fired.

As Mrs. Hibler has said to me on many, many occasions, "I just want to do theatre!". The point of this type of extra-curricular activity is to have fun, not all the time, of course. There is a lot of work that goes alongside putting on a show. But, students take part in these types of activities because they love them. However, no one is having any fun when there is so much strife and vitriol being hurled at others.

As always, I remain at your disposal. My cell phone number is 806-759-0220 and my email address is, [brooke.archer@fresnounified.org](mailto:brooke.archer@fresnounified.org). My hope is that including you, the parents, from the beginning and throughout the process we may be able to use these issues as teachable moments. We must complete work first (showing up to school, not being tardy) and we must be, at minimum, civil to each other (just like adults in the adult work world). I am open to discussion, suggestions, and any input any of you may like to impart.

Yours respectfully,

Brooke Archer

Manager II, Roosevelt School of the Arts