

Teacher, CEO Advocates Arts Education In Chicago

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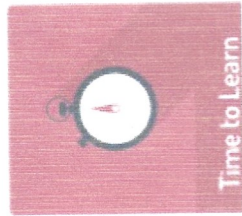
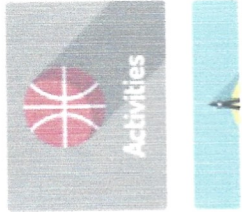
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Art teachers have been on a roller coaster ride of employment in Chicago. In 2013, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) laid off over 1,000 teachers after shutting down 50 schools, according to Think Progress, and almost 10 percent were from the arts curriculum.

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Photo Courtesy of Shakila Grigler Stewart

Arts teachers who were rescued from layoffs aren't always spread out enough for students from diverse neighborhoods to utilize, according to the [Chicago Sun Times](#). Even with 94 percent of CPS schools retaining art teachers, the majority of them are located on the north and northwest sides of the city.

Art instructor Shakila Grigler Stewart shares the bigger benefit for why all students need to be able to have an opportunity to learn through creative arts courses:

"My degree in theater and dance led to my desire to invest in the lives of children who had the gift of performance but whose parents just couldn't afford to put them in a performing arts program."

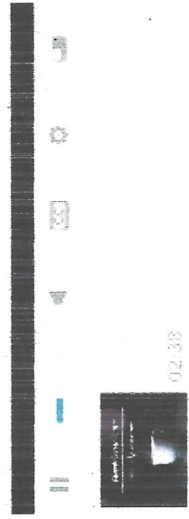
Stewart holds a bachelor's degree in theater studies, is an arts educator at Morton School of Excellence, she is the founder and CEO of [Dreamah Studios](#). Before settling into her teaching and entrepreneur fields, she was an actor and model who attended John Robert Powers Chicago Acting and Modeling School. She uses her background in her own teaching.

As a foster child who was later adopted, the instructor is adamant about teachers building children's self-confidence.

"A lot of students are having so many challenges at home in their environment and they don't have an outlet for it," said Stewart.

"When they come to school they cannot focus on learning if these emotions aren't let out in a positive way. Theater allows them to do that. Dancing allows them to be heard, and it gives them a way to express themselves in a way that maybe when they're taking a test it might not."

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Shamonte L. Vaughn is a professional journalist who has work featured in *AXS*, *Yahoo!*, *Chicago Defender* and *Chicago Tribune*. She's been an *Examiner* since 2009 and currently writes about 10 categories on Examiner.com.

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