

February 1, 2021

Dear parent,

We are contacting you regarding a research study called “Instruments of Culture and Agents of Change: Performing Arts Training as a Vehicle for Empowerment and Wellbeing among Alabama Youth” that will take place at Central High School this year. We would like to invite your child to be a part of it if you and your child are willing.

Our names are Courtney Helfrecht, Stephanie McClure, Alexis Davis-Hazell, and Alvon Reed. We are all assistant professors at the University of Alabama. Courtney and Stephanie are in the Department of Anthropology, Alexis is the School of Music, and Alvon is the Department of Theatre & Dance. We are interested in investigating how participation in an anthropology and performing arts training program can be empowering for adolescents. Specifically, we believe that the participation will improve physical and psychological wellbeing while decreasing stress. This has been shown among adults but has not been well-studied among adolescents.

We have designed an experience that will be student-led and guided by professionals to investigate how participation may be associated with empowerment, and which is explicitly focused on the assets of participants. Students who choose to participate in this project will receive 4 weeks of anthropology training and 8 weeks of performing arts (voice and dance) training, culminating in a cabaret performance and gallery presentation. Instruction will take a variety of formats, including both in person and virtual instruction. There will always be at least one team member present in person even if instruction is virtual. We hope to enroll 20 students from Central High School between the ages of 14 and 18. We will be offering this experience after school (4-5:30pm) Monday through Thursday on Central High School’s campus this spring. There is no charge for participation, and we will provide snacks as well as any materials required for participation. You are receiving this letter because we have obtained permission from the Dr. Daria, Superintendent of Tuscaloosa City Schools, and Dr. Jones-Hamilton, Principal of Central High School.

In the first part of the study, we will collect basic information about your child as well as take some measurements of physical and psychological states. Your child will be asked to fill in a survey that asks for basic information about them and who they live with. We will collect their height, weight, waist and hip circumferences, and blood pressure. We will also collect their saliva to look at two hormones associated with stress. Your child will be asked to fill in three short surveys that measure wellbeing, stress, and self-concept. As part of the anthropology training, we will ask your child to participate in and aid in the analysis of group interviews, creation of a TikTok video, and/or completion of a photovoice project. Interviews may be recorded for later analysis. These activities will be used to identify the themes in their lives that they think are important, which will be used in the performing arts training.

The second part of the study involves voice and dance training. Your child will learn about tracing the lineages of song and dance, the Africanist aesthetic, vocal and dance composition, choreography, and improvisation, as well as work individually with our professional performers/educators. During this part, your child will improve their vocal and dance skills in addition to learning about the history of performing artists in our area. We will make two field trips during this time to nearby areas important to music and dance. We will make recordings of your child talking, singing, and dancing in order to evaluate changes to their body posture and confidence. We believe that we will see significant and measurable improvement.

At the end of the performing arts training, we will have a performance and gallery presentation at the University of Alabama for your family and community to showcase your child's work. About a week after the performance, we will ask your child to again complete the surveys on wellbeing, stress, and self-confidence. We will also ask for a second saliva sample and collect the physical measurements outlined above. Approximately 3 months after the performance, we will schedule a single follow-up visit with your child to collect these again. This is because we would like to see if any changes persist long-term. We think that participation in the performing arts is a pathway to empowerment and that such an experience will have enduring positive effects on your child.

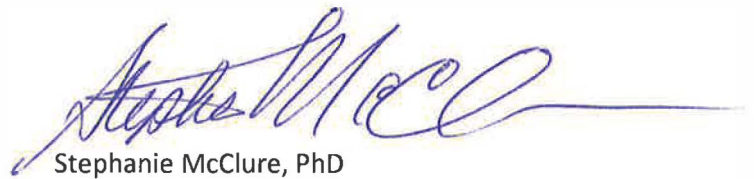
We hope you will consider permitting your child to participate in this project and that they are willing to participate. If you and your child are interested, we have enclosed copies of the project consent and assent forms to provide you more information on the project and your child's rights as a research participant. If, after reviewing these, you and your child decide she can participate, please sign and return the forms to the front office of Central High School or to your child's homeroom teacher. You can also reach Courtney at 205-348-7293 if you have any questions.

If you would like to meet with us and discuss the project in person, we are happy to schedule a consent appointment at your convenience. You can reach Courtney at the phone number provided above.

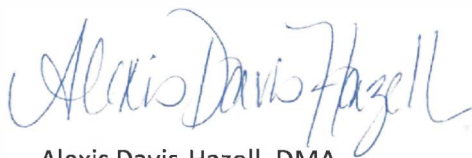
Thank you for your time!



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