



Looking Forward:
Opening Act's 3 Year Strategic Plan



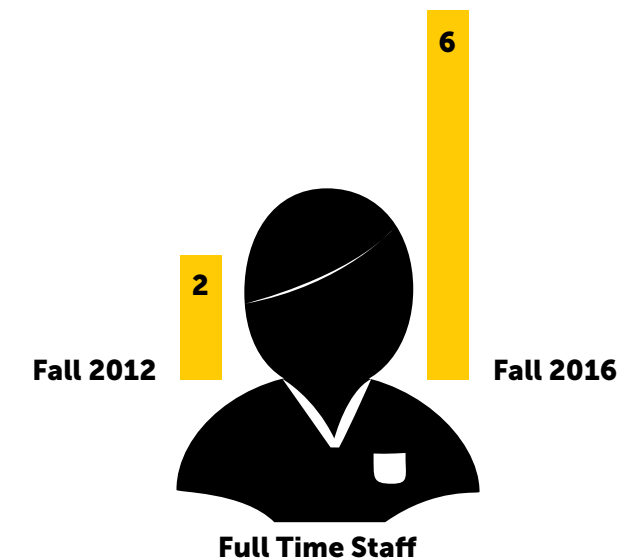
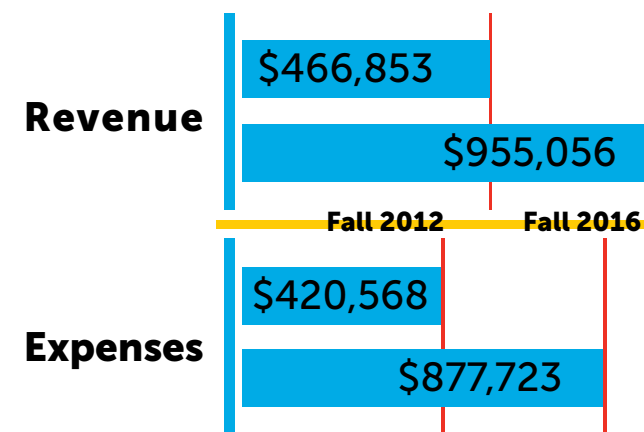
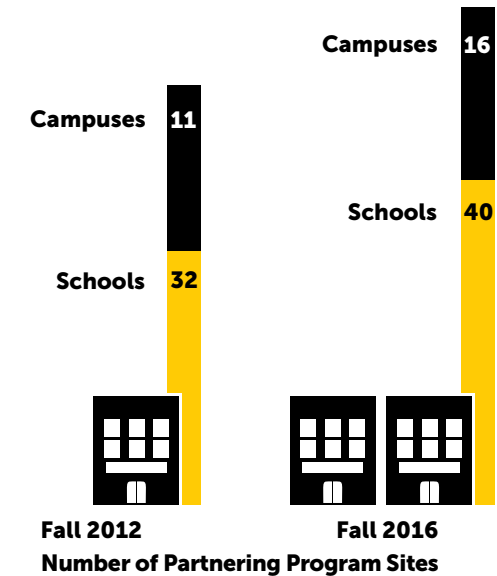
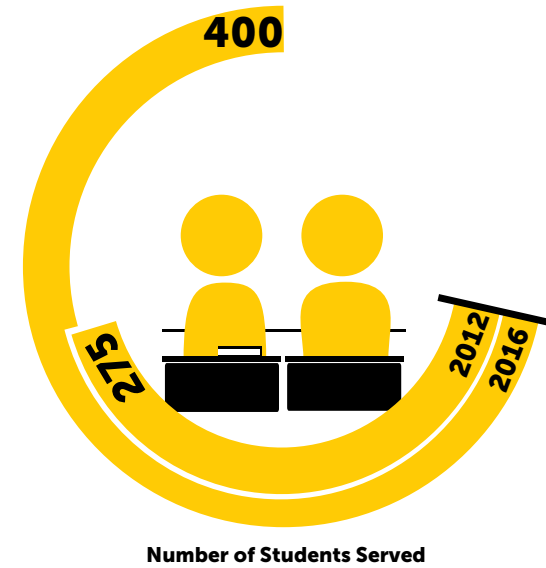
Where We've Been

Opening Act was founded in 2000 to address a clear need for teens attending some of the most under-served public high schools in New York City to feel a greater sense of empowerment and purpose in life. Our founders were actors and educators who knew they could offer students more opportunities, through theater, to develop leadership and communication skills, build self-confidence, and gain a strong sense of community. Since inception, **we have grown from a small group of teaching artists with a bold idea to one of the most respected arts education nonprofits in New York City** and we have reached over **3,000 teens** attending **49 high schools**. Today, our free, year-long, after school theater program serves 40 schools throughout NYC.

In 2012 Opening Act embarked upon our most recent strategic plan and we are thrilled to report that, while the plan was our most ambitious to date, we successfully achieved all of our goals, highlighted by a 45% increase in the number of students served and a 104% increase in program revenue since 2012. During that time we have grown our staff from 2 to 6 full-time employees, dramatically increasing our organizational capacity. **We are not only serving more students, we are serving them better and making a more significant impact on their lives, their schools, and their communities.**



BROADENING OUR REACH



DEEPENING OUR IMPACT

- Summer Arts and Leadership Conservatory —
- Student Leadership Company • Expansion Into District 79 Program
- Enhanced Program Evaluation Methods —



What We've Learned

We are UNIQUE in our ability to create IMPACT:

Opening Act provides students with **strong, caring adult mentoring relationships**.

We give students **tangible tools to succeed in life** such as critical thinking, leadership, empathy, confidence, and teamwork.

We **amplify the voices of young people** who have powerful stories to tell.

Our impact isn't just with our individual students, but with **our schools, our communities, and our families**.



We are fulfilling an UNMET NEED in the communities we serve:

As we've moved "out of the weeds" of survival mode as a small nonprofit, we've become more attuned to the structural needs of our students and schools. Our ears and eyes are open to the very real obstacles that are holding our students back both during and after high school.

We've learned this not only from research and experience, but from our students themselves, such as:

- * **Jasmine**, who lived in **7 different foster homes** during high school, when Opening Act was "her home and her family."
- * **Kareema**, who was living in shelters and battling loneliness, but "**became a leader through Opening Act.**"
- * **Melody**, whose talent, intelligence, motivation, and drive weren't enough to **navigate the bureaucracy of the college application process** on her own, and left her with no financial aid to her top choice school, despite all the obstacles she'd overcome to be accepted there.
- * **Wilson**, a young man recently **returning to his community from Rikers** who reported that "Opening Act made me a better communicator and has helped my relationship with my boss."
- * **Joshua**, who **never truly thought college was an option for him**, until his trusted Opening Act teaching artist said, "why not?"

While we are extremely proud of our program growth and the subsequent impact it has allowed us to have on the lives of our students, we know **there is more work to be done, and that Opening Act is uniquely situated to do more.**



Where We're Going



The funding of arts education remains inequitable and underfunded and too many students are denied access to opportunities to develop vital 21st century learning skills. Therefore, over the last 8 months Opening Act's Strategic Planning Task Force has engaged key stakeholders in our next 3 year strategic planning process through deep-dive discussions, research, surveys, and focus groups. We have heard from current students and alumni, teaching artists, parents, school administrators, board members, and supporters. The primary goal of the planning process was two fold: determine **the needs of our students and their school communities** and identify **Opening Act's unique assets to help address those needs**.

As a result of our strategic planning process we have identified the following top tier priorities:

A renewed commitment to serving **the most vulnerable populations of students**

A **responsive approach** to our students' and schools' needs with our core programming

A commitment to utilize Opening Act's unique assets, skills, and networks to **support our students' success as they transition out of high school** and on to their second act

Over the last 17 years we have learned many valuable lessons that have helped to shape and define this strategic plan. We have learned that every school, every community, every student is different and that while much of our core program is replicable, we cannot blindly enter a school without first understanding each specific school's needs. We have also learned that we must continue to look at how we define the 'most high need' schools and go where we can have the greatest impact. Furthermore, we have discovered how we can maximize our impact using our unique expertise, resources, and relationships. **We are confident the outlined initiatives address all three of our identified priorities and serve our mission as we help to develop the next generation of diverse storytellers, innovative thinkers, creative artists, and community leaders.**

Opening Act's District 79 Expansion

Opening Act has always been committed to bringing our programming to those students who most lack the opportunities to fully develop their capacity for success. This mission led us to develop a partnership with District 79, New York City Department of Education's Alternative High School program. **District 79 sites engage the City's most disconnected youth, many of whom have been out of traditional high school settings due to court involvement and/or incarceration.** Students attending District 79 sites are almost exclusively preparing for their High School Equivalency Exam and have no access to arts education. Opening Act is currently partnering with the Hampshire School, a Pathways 2 Graduation (P2G) site exclusively for young men and women who were formerly incarcerated. Opening Act programming is even more critical for these students as they lack opportunities to develop key 21st century learning skills including critical thinking and problem solving, empathy, creativity and innovation, and communication and collaboration. After successfully completing the pilot program at the Hampshire School last spring we were approached by the Manhattan principal for District 79 about expanding into additional program sites. Together, we identified 3 high priority sites, including a P2G site serving homeless youth at the Covenant House youth shelter. **Our goal is to expand into at least 3 additional District 79 sites by the Fall of 2020.**

Act 2: Opening Act's College and Career Readiness Program

Opening Act is developing a comprehensive and innovative College and Career Readiness Program in order to support our program participants as they navigate the transition from high school to college and the world of work. Opening Act is uniquely positioned to provide these services as we are deeply connected to our students and their school communities. One of our greatest assets is the relationship formed between our students and our teaching artists. We have witnessed over and over how the level of trust in those relationships can be a monumental force in supporting a student to take a 'next step' toward their future (i.e. applying to college, seeking out meaningful employment, etc.). **Act 2: Opening Act's College and Career Readiness Program will leverage our powerful relationships with students as well as the institutional relationships we have with New York City public high schools to fully support our students, empowering them to pursue their college and career goals.** Act 2 is a multifaceted program designed to create access to comprehensive and high quality college preparation and career planning for Opening Act students who too often lack access to these critical services. The program is comprised of 4 distinct components: Individualized College and Career Mentoring, College and Career Readiness Master Classes, Paid Summer Internships, and College Success Support.

Middle School Expansion

After years of receiving requests from middle school administrators and with the full support of the NYC DOE Borough Art Directors, Opening Act is currently developing a curriculum specifically for middle schools with the goal of increasing students' confidence both in and out of school, connecting students to a supportive and respectful community, and improving student attendance; all results which we have successfully shown in our 16 years of working with over 40 high schools. Opening Act plans to pilot the middle school program, developed from our extremely successful high school curriculum, in a feeder middle school for one of our current high school partners. **Our goal is for Opening Act to become a consistent force in students' lives for an even longer portion of their educational career, and to help students successfully navigate the transition from middle school to high school.**

Opening Act

www.openingact.org