Program 3: Addressing the Diverse Needs of Students

**Theatre**

**Segment 1 Background Information**

**Stephen DiMenna**  
27 years teaching

**John Loonam**  
20 years teaching

### About the School

**Bayard Rustin High School for the Humanities**  
New York, NY

**Type:** Urban/Comprehensive

**Grades:** 9-12

**Students:** 2,400

**Low/Middle socio-economic status**

**Arts Requirement:** New York has a 1-credit art or music graduation requirement (180 minutes of instruction per week for one year)

### About the Residency Program

**Faculty:**  
2 (1 teacher and 1 teaching artist)

**Organization:** Theatre Development Fund's Residency Arts Project (RAP).

**Funding:** The residency and the actors are paid for by the Theatre Development Fund. The school matches one third of the funding.

**Institutionalization:** Since filming took place, the Creative Writing Program has expanded, with the continued participation of Stephen DiMenna. It is now a Learning Community within Bayard Rustin High School, called The Institute for Media and Writing.

### About the Featured Class

**Creative Writing Course:** Ninth-graders learn the fundamentals of playwriting through a yearlong residency involving 16 visits by a teaching artist per semester. Students work on writing a one-act play, which professional actors perform at the end of each semester.

Students focus on developing their creative and expressive talents and work on building their communication skills.

**Preparations/Prerequisites:** For this particular class, students must achieve a 3 (proficiency level) on the New York State eighth-grade ELA exam, which tests basic reading and writing skills.

**Student Motivation:** Mixed. Each student is motivated by individual concerns, but common factors include a desire to go to college, an interest in creativity, and the excitement of drama and playwriting.

**Student Level:** Mixed. Most students are novices, but there are a few who are surprisingly experienced in creative writing.

### In the Teacher's Words

**How does the residency experience introduce the concepts of playwriting?**

Stephen DiMenna: The residency uses four phases to develop students’ skills as playwrights:

1. **Unlock students' creative voices**
2. **Teach the form of playwriting**
3. **Teach the structure of playwriting**
4. **Explore content for the students’ plays**