



SND
SHAKESPEARE IN DETROIT

SUMMER STEAM
YOUTH
CONSERVATORY

REPORT

2025



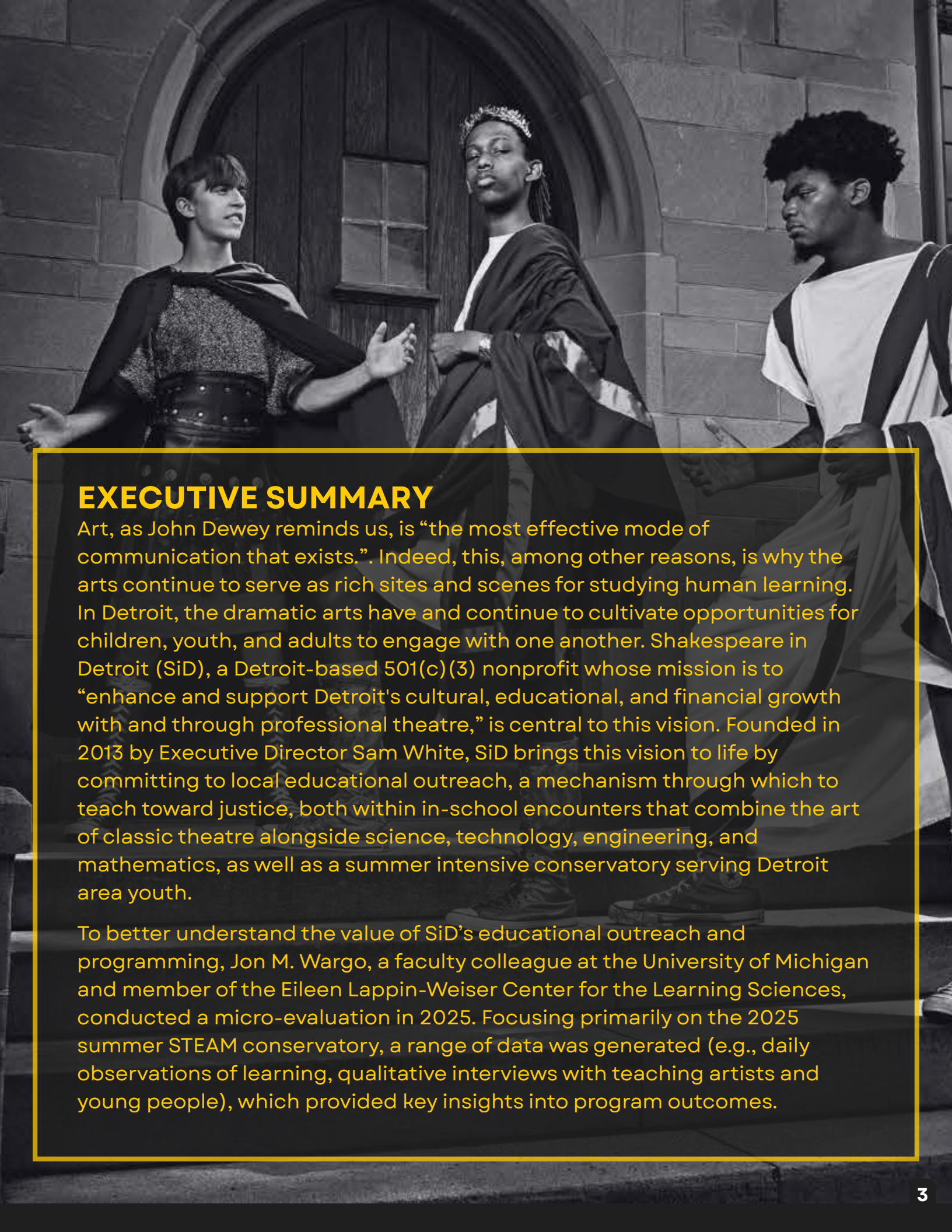
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Program Background	4
STEAM	5
Unique About SiD	8
Structure of Report	9
Section 1. Evaluation	
Design + Methods	10
Section 2. SiD: A	
Summative Review	14
Section 3. Findings	18
Recommendations	26



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

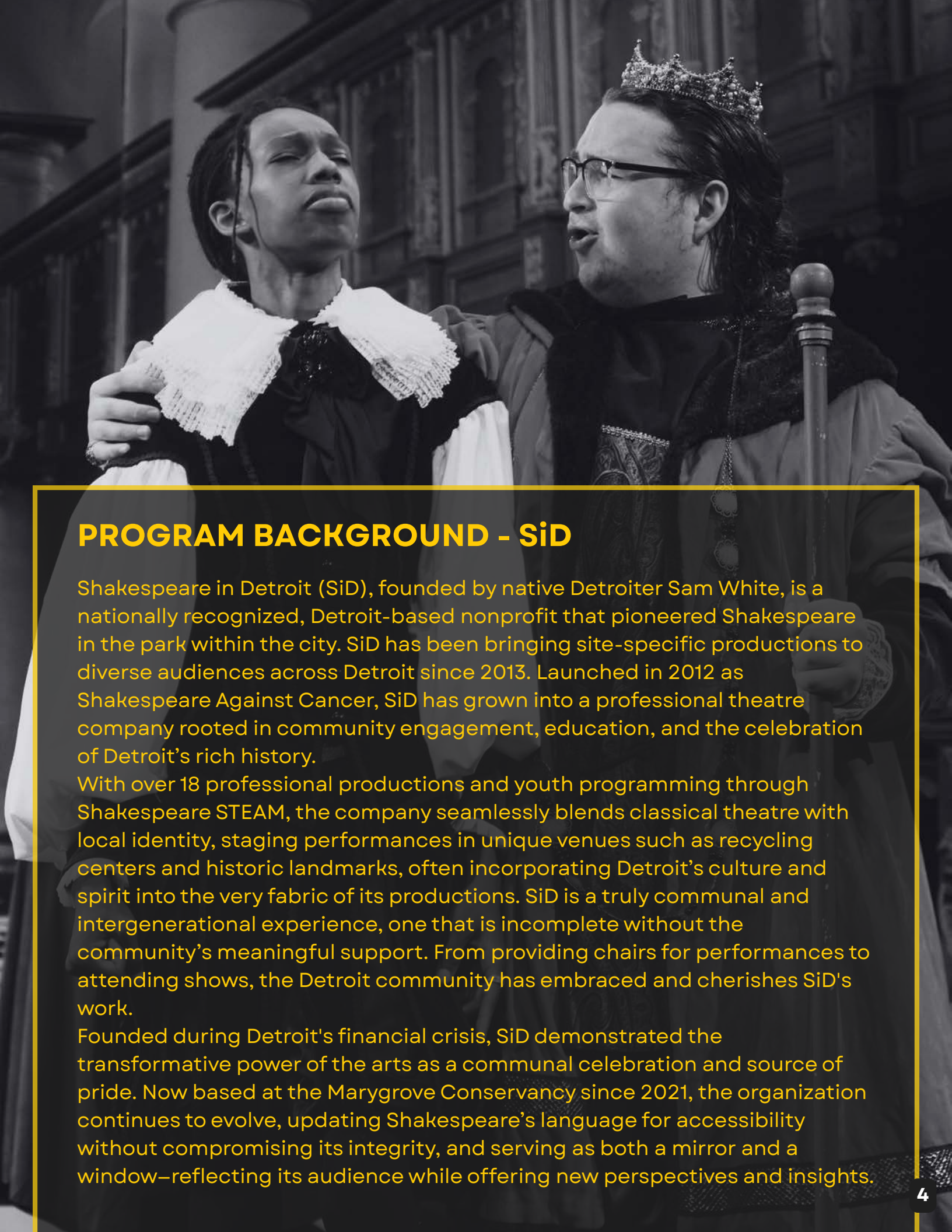
Dr. Jon M. Wargo, Principal Investigator of the project, presented the results and reported on the data generated through the evaluation process. Sara Batool, a PhD student at the Marsal Family School of Education at the University of Michigan, contributed to the project by synthesizing and reporting on annual review documents and assisted with question formulation for the survey. Luca Guerrera, a MA student at the Marsal Family School of Education at the University of Michigan, assisted with graphic design and final presentation.

A black and white photograph of three young people in theatrical costumes standing in front of a stone archway. The person on the left is a young man with short dark hair, wearing a dark cape over a patterned tunic and a wide belt. The person in the center is a young woman with a crown, wearing a dark robe with a white sash. The person on the right is a young man with curly hair, wearing a white tunic with a dark sash. They are all looking towards the left.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Art, as John Dewey reminds us, is “the most effective mode of communication that exists.”. Indeed, this, among other reasons, is why the arts continue to serve as rich sites and scenes for studying human learning. In Detroit, the dramatic arts have and continue to cultivate opportunities for children, youth, and adults to engage with one another. Shakespeare in Detroit (SiD), a Detroit-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit whose mission is to “enhance and support Detroit's cultural, educational, and financial growth with and through professional theatre,” is central to this vision. Founded in 2013 by Executive Director Sam White, SiD brings this vision to life by committing to local educational outreach, a mechanism through which to teach toward justice, both within in-school encounters that combine the art of classic theatre alongside science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, as well as a summer intensive conservatory serving Detroit area youth.

To better understand the value of SiD's educational outreach and programming, Jon M. Wargo, a faculty colleague at the University of Michigan and member of the Eileen Lappin-Weiser Center for the Learning Sciences, conducted a micro-evaluation in 2025. Focusing primarily on the 2025 summer STEAM conservatory, a range of data was generated (e.g., daily observations of learning, qualitative interviews with teaching artists and young people), which provided key insights into program outcomes.

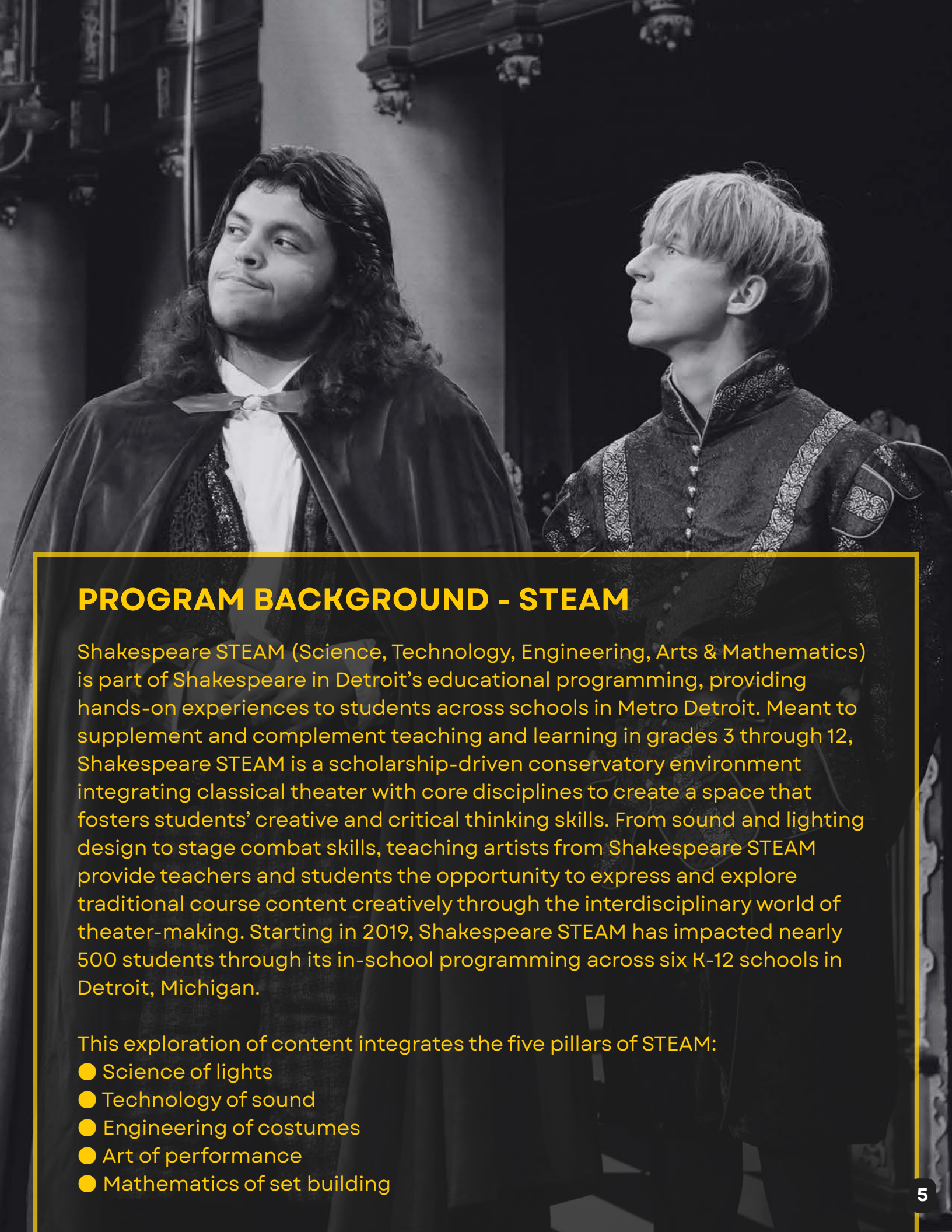


PROGRAM BACKGROUND - SiD

Shakespeare in Detroit (SiD), founded by native Detroiter Sam White, is a nationally recognized, Detroit-based nonprofit that pioneered Shakespeare in the park within the city. SiD has been bringing site-specific productions to diverse audiences across Detroit since 2013. Launched in 2012 as Shakespeare Against Cancer, SiD has grown into a professional theatre company rooted in community engagement, education, and the celebration of Detroit's rich history.

With over 18 professional productions and youth programming through Shakespeare STEAM, the company seamlessly blends classical theatre with local identity, staging performances in unique venues such as recycling centers and historic landmarks, often incorporating Detroit's culture and spirit into the very fabric of its productions. SiD is a truly communal and intergenerational experience, one that is incomplete without the community's meaningful support. From providing chairs for performances to attending shows, the Detroit community has embraced and cherishes SiD's work.

Founded during Detroit's financial crisis, SiD demonstrated the transformative power of the arts as a communal celebration and source of pride. Now based at the Marygrove Conservancy since 2021, the organization continues to evolve, updating Shakespeare's language for accessibility without compromising its integrity, and serving as both a mirror and a window—reflecting its audience while offering new perspectives and insights.



PROGRAM BACKGROUND - STEAM

Shakespeare STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Mathematics) is part of Shakespeare in Detroit's educational programming, providing hands-on experiences to students across schools in Metro Detroit. Meant to supplement and complement teaching and learning in grades 3 through 12, Shakespeare STEAM is a scholarship-driven conservatory environment integrating classical theater with core disciplines to create a space that fosters students' creative and critical thinking skills. From sound and lighting design to stage combat skills, teaching artists from Shakespeare STEAM provide teachers and students the opportunity to express and explore traditional course content creatively through the interdisciplinary world of theater-making. Starting in 2019, Shakespeare STEAM has impacted nearly 500 students through its in-school programming across six K-12 schools in Detroit, Michigan.

This exploration of content integrates the five pillars of STEAM:

- Science of lights
- Technology of sound
- Engineering of costumes
- Art of performance
- Mathematics of set building

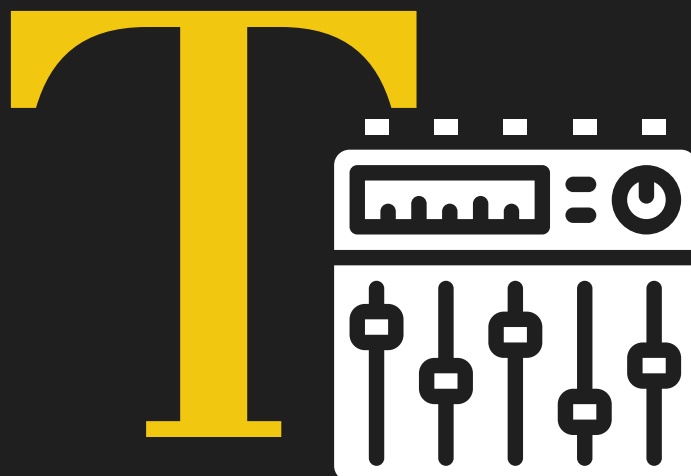


SCIENCE OF LIGHT

Students were introduced to the science of lighting for staged theater productions. Lighting 101 and the Advanced Lighting Workshop were designed to help students develop an understanding of the role that light and color play in performance art. The curriculum was designed to build upon students' knowledge and increase in complexity as the classes progressed. In addition to the class, student production assistants designed and presented a 'Light Plot' for the show.

Students also learned about the technology behind and the fundamentals of sound as used in theatrical productions.

This included activities that focused on teaching students how to listen and capture the mood of a scene through sound and light design. Additionally, students with a particular interest in this STEAM pillar were encouraged to assist with the show's operating board, supervised by the Sound Designer.



TECHNOLOGY OF SOUND



ENGINEERING OF COSTUMES

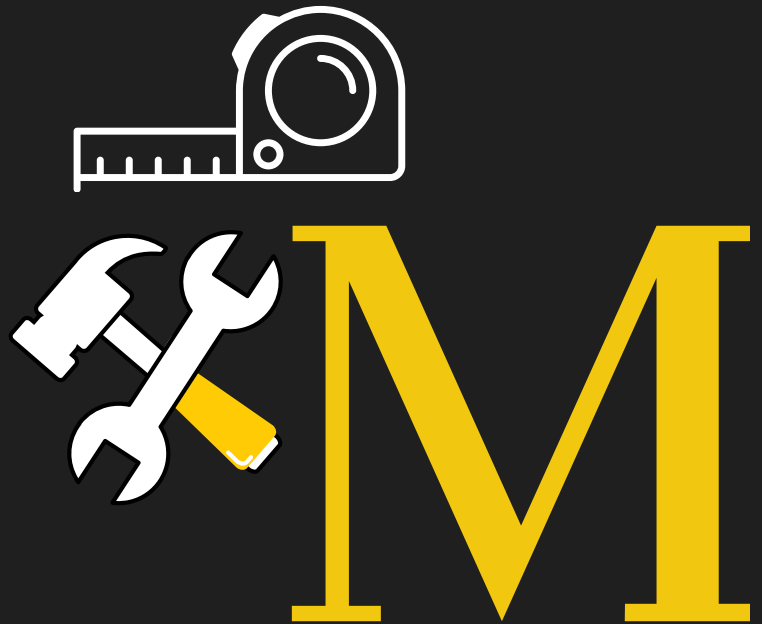
Students were exposed to the engineering behind costume and prop design. Students were allowed to assist with creating ruffs for the costumes and stage décor. Additionally, 2025 participants were taken on a field trip to the Industrial Sewing and Innovation Center (ISAIC) in Detroit, MI, where they learned more about the innovation and sustainability behind the manufacturing process. Student production assistants also helped with the stage design and set build.



ART OF PERFORMANCE

In addition to the art of dramatic performance, students were introduced to the art of stage combat. They learned the fundamentals of stage combat, including falling safely and an introduction to hand-to-hand combat. Students were also introduced to the art of language in voice and text. Through the exploration of heightened language, participants in this class surveyed verse versus prose, metaphor, antithesis, and the iambic pentameter, as well as understanding the relationship between voice and text.

Integrating mathematics with theatrical stagecraft, students were also introduced to the many aspects of building a set. To this end, students created set designs and participated in the construction of the set. Additionally, students explored the mathematics of theater by learning about angles, timing, and sequencing in lighting design.



MATHEMATICS OF SET BUILDING

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT SiD?

The evaluation team identified numerous and significant differences between SiD's summer STEAM conservatory and the dramatic arts activities offered through schools and community organizations. Most notably, the STEAM conservatory involves:

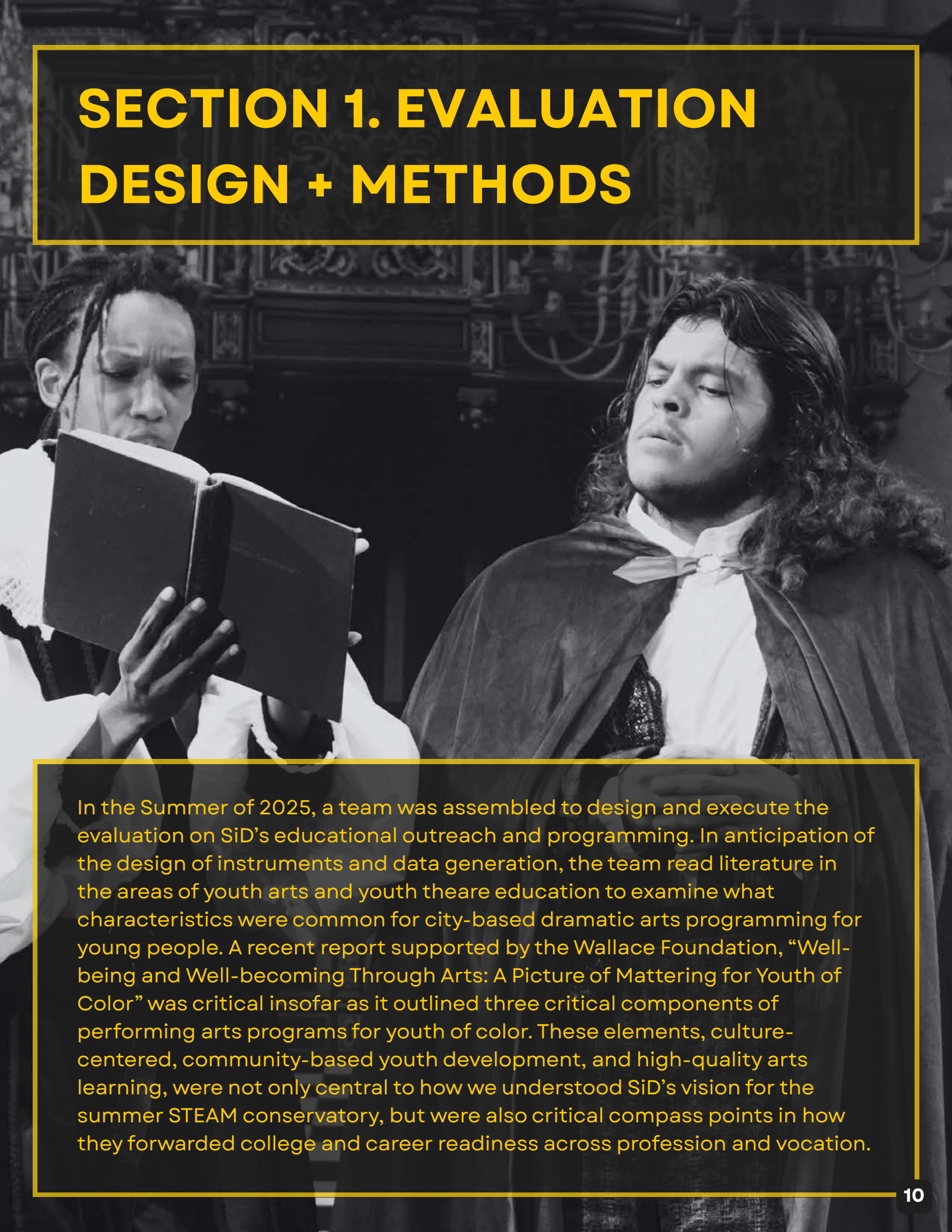
1. new and different people than youth customarily interact with, learn from, or know
2. more choices and freedom in creativity and expression as compared to the requirements and structure of school-based drama programs
3. a paid professional conservatory environment in which to explore, take risks, and develop one's practice, self-confidence, well-being, empathy, and leadership
4. a focus on financial literacy and technical education, encouraging youth to pursue interests that are grounded in career training, while receiving professional feedback and sharing their knowledge and skills with others



STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Section 1 presents the evaluation design and methods used to elicit educators' and students' perceptions of SiD educational programming. In this section, the questions that guided the evaluation are provided, along with an outline of the limitations. Section 2 provides a summary review of SiD STEAM across the year. We provide a year-at-a-glance for all conservatory years and identify who, in terms of financial support, provided funding for the organization. Section 3 highlights the central findings and qualitative dimensions of the evaluation of the summer STEAM conservatory. These are presented as themes, each oriented toward one of the guiding questions, and include direct quotations from participants, thereby highlighting the voices of the young people themselves. Afterward, we identify areas for growth and improvement, underscoring critical ways to enhance the conservatory experiences as understood by both participating young people and through my direct observations as the researcher.

SECTION 1. EVALUATION DESIGN + METHODS



In the Summer of 2025, a team was assembled to design and execute the evaluation on SiD's educational outreach and programming. In anticipation of the design of instruments and data generation, the team read literature in the areas of youth arts and youth theatre education to examine what characteristics were common for city-based dramatic arts programming for young people. A recent report supported by the Wallace Foundation, "Well-being and Well-becoming Through Arts: A Picture of Mattering for Youth of Color" was critical insofar as it outlined three critical components of performing arts programs for youth of color. These elements, culture-centered, community-based youth development, and high-quality arts learning, were not only central to how we understood SiD's vision for the summer STEAM conservatory, but were also critical compass points in how they forwarded college and career readiness across profession and vocation.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What characterizes Shakespeare in Detroit's arts educational programming, and who are its participants? What defines the summer STEAM conservatory, who participates, and how does it contribute to the desired outcomes for youth creativity, arts learning, and the community?
- What tangible and perceived benefits do youth gain from being involved in Shakespeare in Detroit's summer STEAM conservatory, in terms of desired youth developmental outcomes and other potential advantages?
- What is unique about Shakespeare in Detroit's programming for youth? What about the summer STEAM conservatory? How do these experiences differ from other dramatic arts opportunities available to youth in Detroit, Michigan?

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

To answer the three broad evaluation questions as completely and accurately as possible, the team generated and drew on a range of existing data. In particular, we leaned on:

- Utilizing existing records and program documentation to provide program background and description.
- In-depth qualitative methods (focus groups, qualitative interviewing, daily observation) to provide greater understanding and insights into different program situations, outcomes (both expected and other), and differences with and between other types of arts learning experiences.

QUALITATIVE DATA GENERATION

A range of data was generated throughout the 2025 summer STEAM conservatory. These facets included participant observation, document analysis, and interviews with both participating youth, the executive director, and the teaching artist team. I detail each of these areas below with greater specificity.

Participant Observation

Given the complexity of the summer STEAM programming, the PI served as a participant observer throughout the 5-week conservatory. This meant that he attended all workshops, rehearsals, production assistant duties, and teaching artist meetings. During the conservatory, the PI also recorded observations and questions in fieldnotes. These fieldnotes provided in-depth details on the duration of activities, interactions with near peers and teaching artists, and direct quotations from the rehearsal process.

Document Analysis

The executive director of SiD provided the evaluation team with a range of annual reports that documented the number of youth who attended the conservatory, the core content included in both in-school and summer STEAM programming, and other information that enriched our understanding of the programming. These documents served as tertiary data points for the evaluation team to better understand the more focused qualitative methods (e.g., interviews).

Interviews with Teaching Artists (TAs)

The PI interviewed teaching artists during the summer STEAM conservatory. These interviews asked TAs about their philosophy of teaching their focal content area (e.g., improv, stage combat) and the primary objectives they hoped youth would take away from their workshops and classroom time. In addition, the executive director was interviewed by the PI. These interviews ranged from 37 to 78 minutes.

Interviews with Participating Youth

All participating youth, including the three young people focused on production (i.e., costuming), were interviewed during the STEAM conservatory. During their interviews, participants were asked about their participation in theatre, the programming offered by SiD as part of the summer STEAM conservatory, and their approach to “learning to play a part” in the 2025 season’s production of Hamlet. These interviews ranged from 22 to 84 minutes.

DATA ANALYSIS

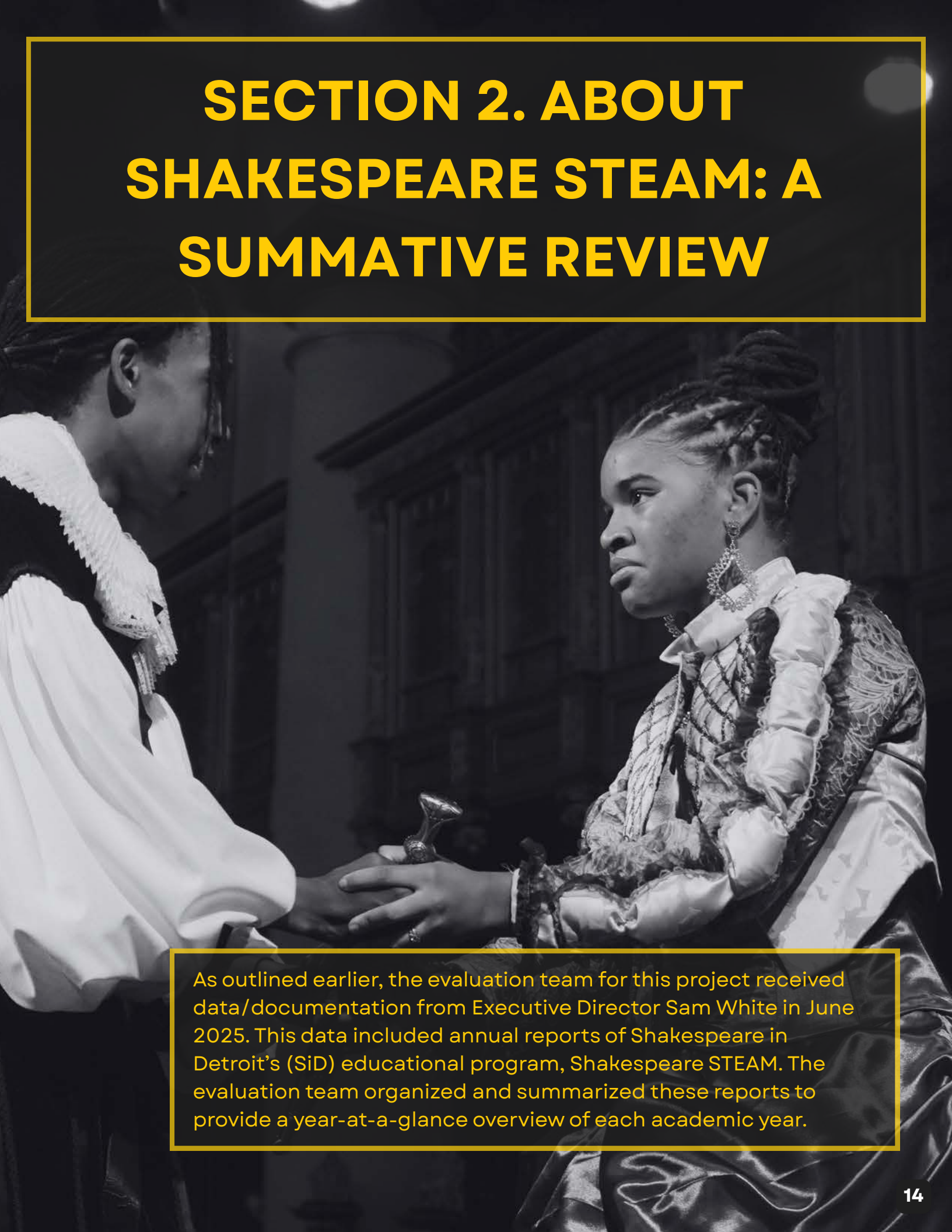
Data analysis was an iterative process. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 1996) was used to examine the qualitative data. This process included: (1) a critical read and familiarization of the data generated through participant observation and interviews, (2) the generation of initial codes (e.g., STEM learning) to help identify the (3) creation of themes. The latter steps included (4) a comprehensive review and collapsing of themes, (5) the renaming of themes, and (6) the production of this report. The draft report was circulated for review, comment, and discussion among the organization's key stakeholders and team members prior to finalization.

Human Subjects Review: The University of Michigan's Institutional Review Board approved the study. Documentation is on file in the Office of Research.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As with any program evaluation, this study has several limitations. The 2025 summer youth conservatory was a single-point-in-time data point compared to previous years' organizational-reports, which inherently contain biases. To mitigate this limitation, the study included other data collection methods (interviews and observations). Moreover, asking youth to report their own perspectives respects their opinions and promotes positive youth development. Nonetheless, outcomes and perceptions of programming were often the result of multiple interacting factors. Some youth, for example, expressed difficulty attributing effects solely to SiD without bringing up their high school theatre experience. Additionally, many had difficulty discussing the 2025 program without mentioning previous years in which they had participated.

SECTION 2. ABOUT SHAKESPEARE STEAM: A SUMMATIVE REVIEW



As outlined earlier, the evaluation team for this project received data/documentation from Executive Director Sam White in June 2025. This data included annual reports of Shakespeare in Detroit's (SiD) educational program, Shakespeare STEAM. The evaluation team organized and summarized these reports to provide a year-at-a-glance overview of each academic year.

YEAR-AT-A-GLANCE

2019-2020

During the 2019-2020 academic year, SiD launched its in-school programming by partnering with four schools in Detroit, namely The School at Marygrove, Boggs School, Clippert Academy, and the Detroit School of Arts. In its first year, Shakespeare STEAM's instructors engaged with 130-140 students representing grades 3 through 12. SiD's primary focus was to gauge the program's feasibility through collaboration with school partners, community response, and student and teacher engagement. The program was supported by nine teaching artists and marked a strong beginning for SiD's in-school educational programming. The program was funded at no cost to the school district, students, or faculty. SiD successfully raised \$66,193 for its 2019-2020 Shakespeare STEAM programming through various grants.

2020-2021

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, SiD adapted its programming to a hybrid model, combining in-person instruction from Fall 2019 to early Winter 2020 and fully virtual delivery from March to June 2020. Additionally, the teaching artists created a repository of content for their YouTube channel to provide easy digital access to their curriculum. Shakespeare STEAM continued its educational programming in two schools, Boggs School and The School at Marygrove, with approximately 50 students receiving online instruction and over 1,000 students and parents engaging with curated YouTube content. These digital modules covered a range of topics, including stage combat, embroidery, puppetry, and other related arts. The program was funded at no cost to the school district, students, or faculty. SiD was able to raise \$78,500 for their 2020-2021 Shakespeare STEAM programming and other expenses through various grants.

YEAR-AT-A-GLANCE

2021-2022

In the 2021-2022 academic year, Shakespeare STEAM resumed its in-person programming and collaborated with three schools: Boggs School, Clippert Academy, and Cass Technical High School. A team of nine teaching artists engaged with approximately 120 students; five of these students were recruited for SiD's Summer Conservatory. The program was funded at no cost to the school district, students, or faculty. SiD was able to raise \$72,500 for their 2021-2022 Shakespeare STEAM programming through various grants.

2022-2023

The 2022-2023 academic year saw Shakespeare STEAM's programming expand to five schools: Boggs School, Clippert Academy, The School at Marygrove, and Detroit Premier Academy's middle and high school programs. Between 120 and 160 students participated in a range of workshops and integrated learning experiences, including a one-day event at the Michigan Science Center and collaborative poetry sessions with the InsideOut Literary Arts program. Additionally, SiD also piloted new workshop models within the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), further extending its reach and impact. The program was funded at no cost to the school district, students, or faculty. SiD successfully raised \$75,795 for its 2022-2023 Shakespeare STEAM programming through various grants.



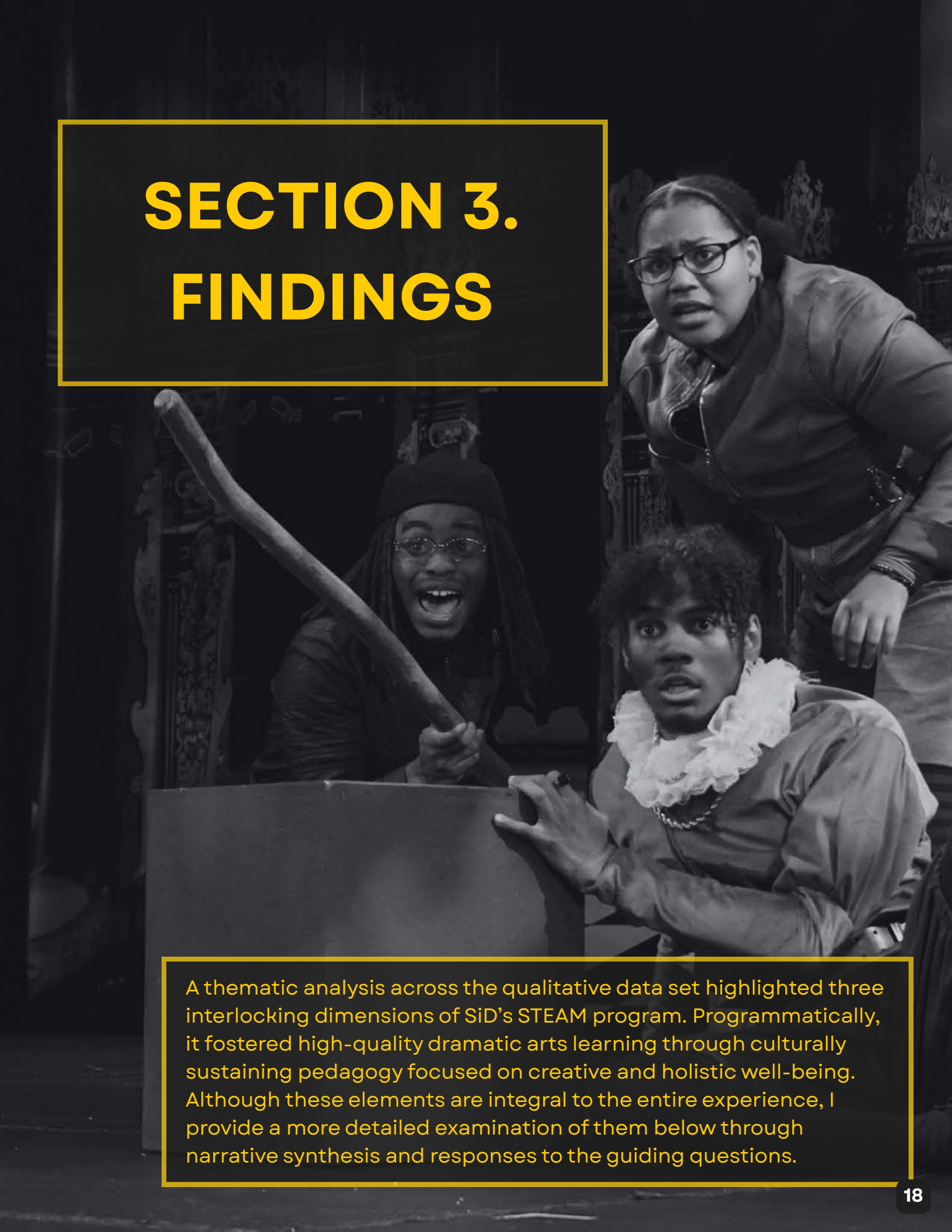
FUNDING

Shakespeare in Detroit (SiD) has cultivated a diverse and growing network of financial support since its founding. Early support came through community-driven efforts, including a 2013 Kickstarter campaign and support from the Detroit 300 Conservancy, which helped launch SiD's first major production of *Othello* in Grand Circus Park.

For seven consecutive years, the Downtown Detroit Partnership (DDP) has partnered with Shakespeare in Detroit to bring outdoor Shakespeare to the masses. Over time, corporate and foundation sponsorships have played an increasingly integral role, with contributions from organizations such as Delta Dental, Deloitte, Greektown Casino, Southwest Airlines, and the Hitz Foundation. In 2023, SiD's production *Techno Tempest* was proudly sponsored by The Gilbert Family Foundation.

SiD's Shakespeare STEAM program offers vocational and artistic training to its youth participants. Supported by the Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation and the Walters Family Foundation, these partners provide scholarships to the participants. Additionally, Banyan Investments has supported the renovation of SiD's current home in the Marygrove Conservancy, underscoring the organization's steady growth from a \$65,000 budget in 2018 to a robust, city-supported cultural institution. Additionally, SiD offers the community a chance to donate to their cause of bringing the Bard's work to life through their official website.

SECTION 3. FINDINGS

A black and white photograph of three students in a theatrical setting. A student in the background wears a dark hooded robe and a turban, holding a long wooden staff. A student in the foreground wears a ruff collar and a chain. A student in the upper right wears a leather jacket and glasses. They are all looking towards the camera with expressive faces.

A thematic analysis across the qualitative data set highlighted three interlocking dimensions of SiD's STEAM program. Programmatically, it fostered high-quality dramatic arts learning through culturally sustaining pedagogy focused on creative and holistic well-being. Although these elements are integral to the entire experience, I provide a more detailed examination of them below through narrative synthesis and responses to the guiding questions.

QUESTION 1. WHAT IS SiD DOING?

What defines the summer STEAM conservatory, who participates, and how does it contribute to the desired outcomes for youth creativity, arts learning, and the community?

Across the years, SiD and its partners have funded cohorts of 15-20 young people (ages 12-18) each year as part of the summer STEAM conservatory. As a program requirement, all participants reside in Wayne County, Michigan. In 2025, the STEAM conservatory comprised 16 young people, ages 13 to 18, and schools from throughout Wayne and Oakland counties were represented. Promoted through social media, school networks, and word-of-mouth, auditions were held (both in-person and remotely) in May at Matrix Theatre Company in Detroit, Michigan.

For all participating youth (n = 16), the compensation and scholarship are a defining feature of SiD's STEAM conservatory. Indeed, this funded opportunity not only served as a rationale for many to audition for the conservatory but also for their educators and teachers to deem it a high-quality experience. Of course, with the monetary incentive, expectations and standards for participation are heightened. As one participant, new to the conservatory this year, commented, "I learned a lot about professionalism. Even in the contract they gave me. I read it with my mom, and we talked about what it meant to dress properly, no street clothes, and like how I should act because I am on the job." This comment was echoed by a long-time attendee of the conservatory. This individual reported that "I think the drive and focus everyone has when we get to working the actual show is phenomenal. I think it is because, you know, this is a paid opportunity. This is a gig. This is real." Another aspect of the scholarship is a course on financial literacy. This, combined with the stipend for participation in the conservatory, provides career and college readiness that differs from that of other area youth dramatic arts programs.

Another central feature of the summer STEAM conservatory is the pedagogical approach. Although anchored in the texts and practices of classical theatre, the executive director and cadre of educators advance Shakespearean voice and text through culturally sustaining approaches to dramatic education. Take, for instance, an introductory voice and text class that Sam White held with students during the second week of the conservatory. Detailing the specifics of iambic pentameter, the teaching artist paused to highlight how language, in all its forms, is, in her words, "beautiful." Noting some of the syntactical features of African American Language (AAL), Sam noted, for instance, the "habitual be" and copula absence that makes AAL distinctive. She also highlighted dialectal differences in Michigan by geographic location. Although these asides may seem minor, they were perceived by youth as ways that the teaching artists "really got to know us," as one new participant described.

“I learned a lot about professionalism. Even in the contract they gave me. I read it with my mom, and we talked about what it meant to dress properly, no street clothes, and like how I should act because I am on the job. This is a job.”

- 2025 Youth Participant

“...this is a paid opportunity. This is a gig. This is real.”

- 2025 Youth Participant

“I think a lot about competitiveness at my place, at my high school. And here it's not that whatsoever. It's quite literally just, like, about your well-being, about the ‘us,’ not the ‘you’ or me.”

- 2025 Youth Participant

QUESTION 1. WHAT IS SiD DOING?

Of course, these pedagogical practices and approaches were not limited to voice and text. They were also present in other courses and workshops in which students participated as part of SiD's STEAM conservatory. The sheer breadth of learning - from costuming and lighting to stage combat and sound - is another distinctive feature of SiD's summer conservatory. While most youth theatre programs emphasize the importance of acting, few provide all learners with the knowledge and technical expertise required for production. That said, the space of rehearsal - guided by an alumnus of the program Arise Rock - was a learning environment in and of itself. Through close reading and youth-centered directing, Arise not only facilitated the staging and production of Hamlet, but also the comprehension of a classic text. Although at times cursory, participants noted the expansiveness of learning environments in their descriptions of their experience with SiD.

Underscoring all the learning at SiD's STEAM conservatory is a concerted focus on the holistic development and well-being of young people. As the only youth dramatic arts program that hosts a full-time counselor and social worker, participants identified the "warm-ups" and "time with Ms. Destiny" as integral to feeling centered and prepared for the work day. Destiny Philson, MSW, led daily well-being exercises (e.g., yoga, meditation) and self-reflection, asking the youth to set goals for themselves in both the short and long term. This was in addition to the support, camaraderie, and team-building that the director and stage production assistants facilitated, and is critical for building an ensemble. As one youth noted, "At school they're all 'pick me-s'. Pick me to the point where you don't want to pick them because they don't have the collective good as the goal. And I think a lot about competitiveness at my place, at my high school. And here it's not that whatsoever. It's quite literally just, like, about your well-being, about the us, not the you or me. I like that." Although an implicit dimension of the conservatory, the "no phones" standard for youth - the practice of turning phones in at the beginning of the day and getting them back at the end of the day - also leads to youth recalibrating their attentiveness and well-being. This is another central feature of the environment.

In all, what makes SiD's STEAM conservatory stand out is the youth-focused conservatory environment in which, through an extensive array of culturally sustaining coursework, young people are provided with opportunities to foster their creativity, all the while prioritizing their well-being. This leads to many youth participants returning to the program, as well as to many pursuing careers and college in the arts or arts-related fields.

QUESTION 2. WHAT ARE YOUTH LEARNING?

What real and perceived benefits do youth gain from being involved in Shakespeare in Detroit's summer STEAM conservatory, in terms of desired youth developmental outcomes and other potential advantages?

Although participants were quick to discuss the learning environment, increased learning in the dramatic arts, and the professionalism required of the conservatory, all participating young people, from acting to production, detailed how “soft skills” (i.e., confidence, empathy) served as primary learning objectives and benefits of attending the conservatory. Indeed, these more implicit instructional elements (e.g., how to hold yourself at an audition, how to ‘feel a part’ together) were relatively ubiquitous in interviews. For example, when interviewing two newcomers to the conservatory, the following was exchanged:

Participant A: “I was definitely about to say confidence. I feel like I've always been so nervous to kind of perform in such a large crowd of people, but this experience has definitely **helped me get out of my comfort zone, helped me get out of my shell, and just be more comfortable with being myself on stage.** But that is **because of what we’ve learned, I do think it is taught.**”

Participant B: “Definitely, I've learned, oh my god, what's the word? I think some **strength**, both physically and mentally. It takes a lot to do Shakespeare in general, but also to put on a performance. And I think that **it takes a lot of strength and confidence and I think I've built that up quite a bit.**”

“I’m learning how to listen more, and I don’t think we’re taught that at school.”

- 2025 Youth Participant

“...how to really communicate to be heard, but how to listen to other people. That is something I will take to college.”

- 2025 Youth Participant

“I feel like empathy is really big here. I love it because we’re close. We’re a group, we’re a team. We’re an ensemble... Here, we care about what we’re feeling, what the other person is feeling, what even you are feeling.”

- 2025 Youth Participant

Question 2. WHAT ARE YOUTH LEARNING?

Confidence, what many young people discussed as combating stage fright and/or heightening one's 'presence' on stage, was a core skill participants gathered throughout the experience. This was often discussed in comparison to how they felt at school, with many highlighting how the confidence built as part of SiD's conservatory was critical to the community they designed.

Empathy was another core skill participants noted in interviews. When sitting down with a returner at the penultimate rehearsal, she noted that the conservatory taught her "Empathy, yeah, gaining some confidence in how to really focus on people. Like, how they feel, how I might feel, how and what people are going through. I'm learning how to listen more, and I don't think we're taught that at school." Albeit briefly captured here, empathy - both as a skill and a practice - is critical for positive youth development and well-being. Noting how it was something that she was "not taught" in schools, SiD's STEAM conservatory provides an expanse for young people to listen and reflect on how they and others feel and act. Another comment, which only amplified what the first returner noted, was made by a returning student. He said, "I feel like empathy is really big here. I love it because we're close. We're a group, we're a team. We're an ensemble. Whereas in bigger productions I've been in, it feels a lot more like every actor for themselves. Here, we care about what we're feeling, what the other person is feeling, what even you are feeling."

Of course, developing strong skills in confidence, empathy, and listening requires greater communicative capacity. Communication was also identified as a key benefit for attending among youth, as a long-time returner said: "Good theater requires you to step outside of yourself. It requires you to be vulnerable so you can take on whoever you're playing and convey that to the audience in a truthful way, evoking some kind of emotion. But you also have to do that in the rehearsal room, and that requires the ability to communicate. So, yeah, that is what I learned this year: how to really communicate to be heard, but also how to listen to other people. That is something I will take to college." Underscored as something that will be of benefit to him in higher education, these more "softer" skills were not only real and tangible benefits in the short term for students, but also cultivated a sense of community that young people would carry forward in their education.

QUESTION 3. WHAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT SiD?

What is unique about Shakespeare in Detroit's educational programming for youth? What about the summer STEAM conservatory? How do these experiences differ from other dramatic arts opportunities available to youth in Detroit, Michigan?

Of interest to program staff and key stakeholders was the distinction between the STEAM conservatory experience and dramatic arts programming offered through schools, private lessons, and community organizations. With an array of opportunities in the dramatic arts for young people in and around the Detroit area, **SiD's STEAM conservatory is unique for its extracurricular training in career and technical education, as well as its programmatic logistics (i.e., program length and scholarship availability).** Below, I detail these with greater specificity, highlighting how these affordances are braided into the organization's core curriculum and learning.

Although many area programs center a production as the culminating event of their youth experiences, **SiD's focus on extra-academic training is unparalleled.** For example, as mentioned earlier, with the scholarship, students were tasked to take a financial literacy course. This class, hosted by Deloitte, covered highly relevant skills, including creating a budget and implementing cost-saving techniques. In short, although compensation was a real and perceived benefit for youth attending SiD's STEAM conservatory, determining how to use the money - whether to advance professional endeavors or pursue continuing education - was a central focus. In addition to external stakeholders visiting the STEAM conservatory, field trips to local industries were another distinctive feature of the program. Take, for instance, a field trip to the Industrial Sewing and Innovation Center (ISAIC). Although loosely tied to costuming and apparel design, the experience provided participating youth with valuable insights into sustainability, social entrepreneurship, and vocational training.

Abstracting from the specifics of the SiD's extra-academic programming, another unique aspect of the program is its logistics, particularly its five-week conservatory duration. Although residential programs often host students for several weeks, SiD's non-residential STEAM conservatory is unique in that it is the only Detroit-based dramatic arts program that lasts five consecutive weeks. This remains critical as, in the words of one younger respondent, the program not only "kept [me] him off my screen and out of trouble," but also provided enough time to synthesize and comprehend a classic Shakespearean title like *Hamlet*. As you will read below, the logic of the program was not only an affordance named by participating youth but also an area for growth, as many wished the conservatory were longer.



RECOMMENDATIONS & AREAS FOR INCREASED IMPROVEMENT

Although the conservatory experience has been discussed in a relatively positive light and consistently highlighted as a critical factor in the development of participating youths' creative skills and learning, several suggestions for enhancing the experience were presented, either directly by the young people themselves or through my ongoing analysis of the program. I discuss these recommendations below in three broader categories: Logistics, Increased Participation, and Continued Professional Development for Teaching Artists.

LOGISTICS

Logistically, the youth requested a program that exceeded the five-week experience. As a former SiD STEAM participant noted, “Last year we just had more time to develop, like more time to get our character and rehearse.” This sentiment was echoed by many other returnees, with first-time participants not detailing this as an area of growth. Notwithstanding, I think this is an important dimension to note, as another youth participant provided a rationale that the conservatory kept him “out of trouble and off screens.” Similarly, students were quite interested in additional courses that SiD could develop for their summer conservatory experience. In addition to costuming, lighting, and sound design, participating young people requested a “stage makeup” and “props” course, as well as subsequent experiences in “advanced costuming,” more broadly. Although some of these experiences were presented to production participants, many of the “acting” students also yearned for more intensive, production-focused experiences.

Additionally, participating young people, across both acting and production, requested a “scene study” class or a series of text workshops. Defined as a class that could “get everybody on the same page about the play,” I echo this sentiment as I believe some of the core elements featured in secondary English language arts instruction (e.g., figurative language) could be brought forward through a close reading of the classic text. Through my observations, I saw the director regularly do this by checking in with the youth and asking, “Do you know what is going on here?” However, with a series of sessions focused on reading the play, participants' plot knowledge could be developed sooner.



INCREASED PARTICIPATION

Beyond logistics, students also articulated facets of what I am calling “increased participation” as a programmatic growth area. Although only named by one participating student, the need to “bring in more Latinos” and “really focus on other parts of Detroit that have Arab and Latino people” was critical. Although the student was unfamiliar with the strategies employed by the executive director and teaching team to generate interest in the summer STEAM conservatory, one strategy for increasing participation among the specified groups was to “advertise to all of the schools in Wayne County” and to “really work hard on not just getting returners.” Although the number of returning students was previously identified as a strength of the program’s ethos and design, the need to expand the program’s impact to new students, schools, and locales in Wayne County was also noted.

Additionally, all three production students named the need for “more of us [production students]” and discussed it. Although the participating production students understood why a 2025 production participant was let go from the program due to misalignment with the standards of excellence, they wanted a larger cohort, “maybe 1 or 2 more of us.” In the future, the recommended size of the 20-person conservatory is 15 participants focused on acting and five participants focused on production.

CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHING ARTISTS

If logistics and increased participation were identified by participating young people as larger areas for growth, sustained professional development for teaching artists was a core dimension that the researcher observed as an area for ongoing growth. Whether through improvisation classes or sessions on the mechanics of stage lighting, teaching artists failed to make connections to core STEM subject-matter concepts or standards of practice. For instance, in the conservatory's improvisation class, when the youth engaged in the improvisation game "Can you hold this?", mathematical concepts and language related to spatial skills could be introduced, highlighting the reasoning they used as they passed imaginary objects. Similarly, the more physics-focused language (e.g., light propagation, reflection, refraction) that is core to the actual technology of stage lighting could and should be introduced to students, just as the names of particular instruments were. As a result, a key recommendation is ongoing professional development for teaching artists to more explicitly understand and articulate the STEM-focused connections they introduce in their individual classes and areas. This professional development should be done in concert with secondary educators in these subject areas, as the learning can and should be dialogic and reciprocal.



FUNDING PARTNERS



Walters Family
Foundation

M&MFisher
Max M. & Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation



M | EILEEN LAPPIN WEISER CENTER
FOR THE LEARNING SCIENCES

THANK YOU

