

Grayson Middle School Students Take the Stage with Artist King Saladeen at National Neuroscience Conference

Panelists share how a grant from the Renée Fleming NeuroArts Blueprint Initiative inspired personal advocacy, confidence, and real-world research skills

RADNOR, PA, UNITED STATES, June 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- What if a collective arts project could be the key to helping young people feel more self-aware, socially connected, and empowered? Students at The Grayson School are actively proving that it can. Moving far beyond the traditional classroom, Grayson students have served as authentic co-researchers and curriculum designers for a pioneering study led by Thomas Jefferson University and renowned Philadelphia contemporary artist, [King Saladeen](#). As recipients of a prestigious [Renée Fleming](#) Neuroarts Investigator Award, this partnership set out to explore the connection between the arts and neuroscience.



Grayson Middle School students with King Saladeen at the SfNC Conference at FringeArts in Philadelphia.

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Melissa Bilash, Head of School

King Saladeen was joined by a panel of three Grayson Middle School students at The Society for the [Neuroscience of Creativity \(SfNC\) 2026 Conference](#) held this week at FringeArts in Philadelphia to present their findings. During the presentation, the student panelists captivated the audience by discussing their artistic impressions of the project, how it directly built their creative confidence, and how the experience sparked a deep sense of personal advocacy.

Students as Practitioners and Co-Creators

At The Grayson School, experiential learning means students engage with real-world issues as active practitioners, not just passive subjects in a study. This project, titled "Faces of Success," aimed to understand how youth engagement in a collective arts project can enhance social and emotional well-being by directly embedding youth perspectives into its design.

Working alongside Jefferson researchers, a dedicated team of three Grayson seniors also participated in peer feedback and compiled critical post-project data.

"Our students aren't just observing groundbreaking research, they are driving it," said Melissa Bilash, Founder and Head of School at The Grayson School. "Participating at this level demonstrates the power of our school programming. When you treat students as capable practitioners, they rise to the occasion by tackling complex real-world challenges and contributing meaningful data to the scientific and artistic communities."

She continues, "Meeting Renée Fleming, a world-class artist and philanthropist who made this research possible, was another unforgettable moment. To witness her deep dedication to her work at the intersection of the arts, health, and neuroscience, was truly awe-inspiring."

The Science, Art, and Future of "Faces of Success"

The research was led by grant recipients Stephen DiDonato, PhD, LPC, NCC, Associate Professor in the Jefferson College of Nursing, and King Saladeen, an accomplished Philadelphia artist.

By pairing Dr. DiDonato's expertise in trauma-informed care with King Saladeen's vibrant, expressive artistic methodology, the study establishes a measurable link between collective creative expression and adolescent wellbeing. Work continues to design the infrastructure required to scale this curriculum into more complex environments in the future, with long-term plans to integrate youth entrepreneurial opportunities.

The presentation at the SfNC conference marks a capstone for the students' hard work by showcasing the real-world impact of their efforts. The Grayson School looks forward to continuing its collaboration with Thomas Jefferson University and King Saladeen as the data from this study helps shape the future of neuroarts in education.

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