



BILLY KINGSLEY / THE TENNESSEAN

Brittneee Whitlow, 12, sits at a table by herself while Precious Evans, 13, Orlando Elam, 13, and Diamond Carter, 10, share a table to work on a language exercise at The Salama Institute. The program is a mission of Salama Urban Ministries on Eighth Avenue South.

# Salama Institute cultivates young leaders

## Program blends academics with performing arts

By **NANCY DEVILLE**  
Staff Writer

Salama Urban Ministries on Eighth Avenue South is in an unassuming building: a brick facade with a modest glass door accented by decorative shrubs.

But once inside, a vibrant mural of children studying and dancing greets visitors, a painting that depicts the lives the organization works so hard to transform.

The organization carries out its missions through The Salama Institute, a program that develops leaders through a year-round, five-day-a-week experience for students in pre-K through 12th grade in Edgehill and other communities. The intensive program focuses on developing academic, arts and leadership skills from a faith-based perspective.

leadership skills weekly. Last year the group began the year-round program.

"The students are all being trained to be leaders and give back," said Stan Weber, executive director of Salama. "My whole heart and passion is that these young people would reinvest in their communities."

"We want to get our students to strengthen academically, and we also use the performing arts for the disciplines. If they can perform on the stage today, they can perform for the business tomorrow."

### Staff aims to bridge gaps

On any given day, you'll find students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, in matching burgundy polo shirts, focusing on school homework, clicking away on laptops for computer-assisted instruction, or training in the visual and performing arts.

To attend, there must be a financial or academic need, and students are required to commit to the rigorous five-day-a-

income and sign a covenant once their child is accepted, pledging to work with Salama leaders so the program can be successful.

The academic curriculum is aligned with standards set by the Tennessee Department of Education and No Child Left Behind Act, along with electives such as financial management, manners and etiquette, citizenship, college/post-secondary school preparation, job training and professional development.

The staff hopes not only to enforce what's learned during the school day, but also bridge some of the gaps. Classes meet 3:30-6:30 p.m. daily during the school year and all day in the summer.

"I concentrate on academics so much, so coming here and putting an emphasis on the arts gives me a balance," said Danicia Hayes, a junior at Hume-Fogg Magnet. "We have tutors that help us with our homework, and that helps me keep my grades up. This program has helped me become more

There is just as much emphasis placed on music and performing arts as academics. With assistance from faculty members at Fisk and Tennessee State universities, the group has put on musicals such as *West Side Story* and *Dreamgirls* at various venues throughout the city. Later this year, students will perform *Grease* at Belmont University's Trout Theater.

"Salama is not just the run-of-the-mill after-school place where you just come and do nothing," said Bill Crimm, Salama associate director. "It's about excellence and quality."

Chavez Lewis hopes to one day become a Broadway performer, and he said his singing, acting, dancing and speech skills have been enhanced as a result of attending the Salama Institute. "The people here work with you in everything that you do," said Lewis, a student at Hunters Lane High. "From your biggest interest to your smallest interest, they make sure that you succeed in what you aspire to do."