The arts are a very important part of our culture and our society. When we teach and encourage creativity, imagination, and innovation through the arts, we are opening up the world to our children, who will become the next generation of our teachers, our business professionals and our leaders. This isn’t about creating professional artists, although when that happens it is something to celebrate. It’s about instilling in our students a life-long love of the arts, and through the arts, helping us develop a better understanding of the human condition. It’s also important to remember that the arts help us develop emotional intelligence and provide a positive outlet for stress/trauma, as well as for positive self-expression. Every child deserves the opportunity to learn and develop through the arts as well as through all of the other core curricula. If we really believe that “All Means All,” then we as leaders in education will do whatever we can to ensure that all students, whether they attend schools in rural, suburban or urban settings, have access to an educational experience that includes high quality instruction in the arts.”

– Mary von Rotz Sakuma, Butte County Superintendent of Schools

Working Regionally to Expand the Arts Education Infrastructure in Title I and Rural Schools

Recognizing the effectiveness of partnering and a regional approach, in fall 2019, Butte County Office of Education (BCOE) spearheaded the formation of the North State Arts Education Consortium (NSAEC). With Title IV funding for schools with large populations of low socio-economic student populations in the region, we initiated a nine month project that brought together eight county offices of education (Butte, Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Siskiyou, Tehama, and Trinity). The county offices of education facilitated online professional development and distribution of equipment funding to 54
school districts, 200 participating teachers, and 20 single subject peer coaches. We provided professional development on arts integration to classroom teachers and distributed approximately $1.7 million to schools for purchase of arts equipment.

We continue to communicate with our north state partnership via a new North State Arts Education Consortium website (nsaec.bcoe.org) that contains resources for arts education planning, advocacy, and professional development and exemplary lesson plans developed through the project. We continue to add more resources throughout the year. We also maintain a listserv of administrators and educators from the North State who wish to continue to work to increase access to arts learning for our students.

In Butte County, the nature of our work is on partnerships as well. It also emphasizes assistance to Title I and rural schools. By partnering with nonprofit arts organizations BCOE has helped to secure funding from the California Arts Council for pilot projects in arts learning. One program at a Title I junior high school combines instruction from a visual artist and a historian to help students appreciate cultural diversity.

Another program is in its third year at the county’s juvenile hall high school. A nonprofit theatre organization works with students for ten week sessions to teach improv techniques that culminate in performances for parents and staff.

Supporting Equity and Access to Arts Education
As adopted in the Butte County Strategic Arts Education Plan it is our goal to support equity and access to arts education by offering support, technical assistance, and professional learning opportunities to elementary and rural schools. These are two segments of public education in our county with the fewest arts learning opportunities for students.

Facilitating Collaborations that Support Social and Emotional Well-being Through Arts Learning
While BCOE is committed to increasing arts learning in our public schools, we also recognize that the Arts naturally help develop social and emotional well-being. Employing arts learning by emphasizing Social Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies helps to mitigate the effects of trauma and make people more resilient to the effects of trauma.

The trauma of the Camp Fire in Paradise in 2018, precipitated formation of a new BCOE Trauma Informed Teaching Artists in the Schools program. Initial placements began in February 2020 in Paradise schools. However, through a partnership with the Butte County Arts Council we have plans to expand the program to schools throughout Butte County with high need populations of students.

We modeled our program on the Creative Sonoma program which was started in 2017 in response to their devastating wildfires. Butte County teaching artists are trained in SEL, the trauma informed classroom, and arts integration.