“Lake County schools take great pride in the variety of opportunities available to all students. I believe that students grow and benefit with exposure to visual and performing arts. Lake County Office of Education will continue to support local teachers as they address the needs of students by integrating opportunities for students to shine and express their learning both academically and artistically.”

– Brock Falkenberg, Lake County Superintendent of Schools

Creating Community

Lake County has been continuously involved with the development and adoption of new instructional strategies for arts education in the classroom. Local educators understand the advantage of incorporating art into the lives of students as a gateway to culture, diversity, and expression.

The past few years have been plagued with county-wide evacuations and wildfires. Despite these adverse events, local communities have emerged unified in their attempts to recover and rebuild what was lost. It has been observed that with expression of creativity comes problem solving, and with imagination comes innovation. These elements help cultivate a strong, diverse community where individuals are able to support and celebrate one another.

Art Education

Lake County became involved with the Arts and Creativity Initiative (ACI) during the 2018-2019 school year. Over 20 elementary school teachers are currently participating from around the county. These teachers receive support from the Lake County Office of Education’s Education Specialists, who coordinate Lake County’s implementation of the ACI. Teachers participate in workshops to learn and try new instructional practices that will benefit their students. These concepts add value in art and contribute...
to a deeper understanding in other areas of study.

One example is *Notice – Wonder*, an exercise that encourages deep observation of a piece of artwork. This activity aims to stimulate classroom conversations where each student can contribute to a discussion about what they see and wonder about. These sorts of activities allow students to refine their attention to detail, and practice patience as they look further into an art piece. *Notice – Wonder* goes beyond artwork and forms a line of communication in the classroom where all students are able to contribute to the conversation. This process of reflection leads to what we want to see in our schools: engagement. A crucial benefit to this strategy is that it is accessible to all students and can be differentiated to engage students at multiple levels.

Another tool from *ACI* is the *Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS)*. *VTS* uses objective conversation between the teachers and the students when looking at a new art piece to develop and promote an art-based vocabulary. Teachers are trained to ask the question “What do you see that makes you say that?” Teachers then paraphrase and link student responses using domain-specific vocabulary. For instance, when a student says that an artwork looks happy, we hear teachers responding with, “you’re noticing the bright colors and you’re thinking this creates a positive tone.” This is when teachers are able to introduce elements of art such as: composition, texture, light, color, etc.

Participating teachers worked alongside their colleagues during the *Summer Art Institute* to develop a collaborative art project that they would later conduct in their classrooms. This project integrated a hands-on approach where teachers played the role of students and worked alongside each other just as their students would in the future. The project was designed to give students the opportunity to work through challenges with one another. Teachers guide students through making decisions, adapting to change, taking turns, and sharing materials and a creative space as they complete projects together.

**Community Involvement**

Aside from the required elements of *ACI*, the Lake County Office of Education is collaborating with the Middletown Art Center to bolster the quality of professional development available to teachers over the course of the three-year initiative. Artists from the Middletown Art Center instruct and guide teachers through strategies learned from the *Art and Creativity* initiative trainings as they visit classrooms, model strategies, and offer field trips to the Middletown Art Center. Field trips consist of a gallery tour and include studio time where students get the chance to work on an art project with professional artists.

Lake County Office of Education will continue to support art in schools and curriculum as local teachers learn and adopt new techniques to empower student self-expression, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking skills.

Resilient communities are built from diversity and innovation; Lake County is dedicated to nurturing the curiosity of children by providing the tools and expertise needed to produce work and foster these ideals.