As a former art teacher, I can speak to how integrating the arts into instruction increases student achievement. It is not just limited to the easily observed and undisputed benefit of increased student engagement and motivation. In addition to increasing creative problem-solving skills, arts instruction also helps children with the development of motor, language, and social skills, along with decision-making and inventiveness. Research suggests that art is a link to increased retention: Each time a student interacts with information in a new and different way, the information is embedded slightly more into their brain.

- Michelle Hutchins, Mendocino County Superintendent of Schools

**Arts Integration Professional Learning**

Mendocino County Office of Education (MCOE) has a goal of reaching our schools and community through the arts. One way MCOE works towards this goal is through sponsorship and support of arts programs and grants that benefit students and teachers in our county. **Arts and Creativity Initiative (ACI), Mock trial, Poets in the Schools, Young Authors’ Grant, Get Arts in the Schools Program (GASP), Poets in the Schools (PITS) and Science Fair** are some of the programs at MCOE that are arts focused or contain artistic elements which blend art into other subject areas.

**Arts and Creativity Initiative (ACI)** is a regional collaborative art grant with Mendocino, Del Norte, Lake, and Humboldt Counties. The grant provides professional development around the arts to teachers in K-5 classrooms with a focus on student instruction. The goal of the project is to prepare participating teachers to integrate high quality arts components into their daily instruction. The grant provides resources and supplies for participating teachers to use in their classroom with coaching support and follow up trainings.
The courtroom Art Contest is a competition that allows students the opportunity to participate in the Mock Trial Program. Contestants observe their schools’ Mock Trials and create drawings of the courtroom scenes.

Coordinated by the Arts Council of Mendocino County, Get Arts in the Schools Program (GASP) is funded by the Mendocino County Office of Education with additional funding from private donors. GASP funds artist workshops and live performances in Mendocino County schools during the school year. The goal of the program is to infuse the arts in the core curriculum and to involve and expose school children to quality, educational, curriculum-based artistic experiences. Artists work closely with classroom teachers and after-school coordinators to enrich the curriculum by presenting arts programs that are relevant to other core academic subjects. Teachers benefit from the partnership by exposure to current techniques and developments in the various art forms. An affiliated branch of California Poets in the Schools, the Mendocino County Poets in the Schools (PITS) is an independent educational organization that is funded in part by MCOE, individuals, and foundations. PITS poets are a multicultural community of trained, published poet-teachers who bring experience for their craft into classrooms. Poet-teachers help foster an appreciation for poetry and encourage students to develop their poetic voice. It also helps students celebrate their creativity, intuition and intellectual curiosity through poetry and the creative writing process. An anthology of student poetry is collected and printed annually with published students receiving a copy. In addition, students are given the opportunity to participate in the Coast and Countywide Poetry Slams.

The Young Authors’ Fair inspires students in elementary schools to write, edit, and publish their own writing. An elementary school may apply for the award funding. Schools which have received funding report that participation in this project enhances children’s writing abilities and appreciation of literature. This program dovetails effectively into the daily writing program by encouraging students to write and publish their own books. The Young Authors’ Fair is a journey through the writing process and a showcase for celebrating student voice.

Our county has deep roots in the arts community and are excited about the state initiative highlighting arts in the schools. Teachers are thrilled to once again have arts be a focus for a well-rounded education. Mendocino County Office of Education is committed to supporting our schools in this venture.