

Napa County

Napa County Office of Education

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“To me, the arts are the heart of the school experience. Students who experience the arts will reap a lifetime of benefits, either as participants or observers. Being involved in music, dance or drama enriches our lives beyond measure, and we owe this to every student.”

– Barbara Nemko, Ph.D., Napa County Superintendent of Schools



The Power of a Plan

Four years ago, the Napa Valley Unified School District Board of Education adopted an Arts Education Master Plan -- the first ever in Napa County and the first of its kind in the state to leverage a team of educators, arts advocacy groups, and funders in support of K-12 public school arts education. The five year, public/private partnership, resulted in the creation of an Arts Coordinator position and various structures through which teachers could get involved.

Shared leadership was an important concept that was baked into the plan from its inception. An Arts Cadre of 13 teachers (mostly arts specialists, but later including generalist teachers and local artists) and a smaller Arts Leadership Team met monthly to do committee work, share successes, and plan for the implementation of the Master Plan together. Their work resulted in

changes to Board Policy (viz, identifying the Arts as core curriculum), an annual professional development budget for arts specialists, a plan to support arts education in our earliest grades via arts integration training, and a recommendation (which was ultimately funded) to increase the number of middle school music classes to meet demonstrated demand.

The Leadership Team sees itself as “a voice for equitable access to the arts, so the arts may give voice to all students.” The full Arts Plan and highlighted success stories are available on the district website at nvusd.org/arts.

Napa Can Dance!

Napa COE was proud to co-sponsor a state-wide professional learning opportunity with the CCSESA Arts Initiative in February 2020. The event was held at Napa County’s largest performing arts venue -- the Napa Valley

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Performing Arts Center at Lincoln Theater in Yountville.

Nancy Ng and Patricia Reedy of Luna Dance Institute (Berkeley)



led a roomful of teachers, administrators, and dance advocates in an engaging exploration of the new California Arts Standards from the perspective of Dance.

State-funding Leveraged to Increase Arts Education

A consortium of Napa County schools received Title IV funding via the Student Success and Academic Enrichment Grant (SSAE) to increase the capacity of classroom teachers to integrate the arts throughout the elementary school curriculum. The grant reasoned that student engagement is critical to learning and that the arts increase engagement in two important ways:

- by preparing the brain for learning (i.e. addressing the effects of trauma), and
- by providing multi-modal forms of expression.

Spearheaded by the Napa Valley Unified School District (NVUSD), the focus was teacher professional development.

K-5 generalist teachers and the grant provided opportunities for specialized audiences to learn about arts integration, including teachers of Advanced Learners and mental health workers in the Special Education department. These trainings resulted in improved teacher confidence and attitude



regarding incorporating the arts in their classroom. Many teachers even remarked on the salubrious effects they experienced *themselves* in the artistic process.

By the end of the nine month grant, over 66% of NVUSD elementary teachers had received at least eight hours of training in arts integration (up from 16% before the grant), which represents significant progress towards reaching this goal of the Arts Education Master Plan.

The Value of a VAPA Coordinator

Napa Valley Unified School District, the largest district in Napa County with over 17,000 students, created for the first time an Arts Coordinator position to implement its newly adopted Arts Education Master Plan. This position has resulted in a flourishing of teacher engagement in the arts throughout the district's nearly 30 schools.

In addition to serving as "Implementer in Chief" of the Arts Plan, an Arts Coordinator also benefits other district processes, including policy discussions, budget development, planning professional learning for teachers, and communicating positive stories about the school district.

While the initial focus of an Arts Coordinator will be "internal," this leader also serves a valuable role in the broader community. This person is not only a bridge *builder*, but also serves as a bridge herself, as she connects teachers with guest artists, donors and opportunities. The Arts Coordinator is also a story-teller, working with the local newspaper, local Arts Council, district newsletters, and service groups to tell the amazing stories that come out of student arts programs.

Some of the work needed to support the arts in schools can happen without a dedicated position, but having a person who is both accessible and accountable allows a district to quickly take advantage of funding opportunities (such as the \$40 million competitive The SSAE grant in 2019) and provides a consistent support for district arts specialists, a consistent arts contact for the public, and a consistent symbol of district dedication to the arts (access, opportunity, and equity) for all.