San Joaquin County Office of Education  
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At the San Joaquin County Office of Education (SJCOE), we value the profound impact that the arts have on student achievement and the important role that the arts play in developing well-rounded students. For over six decades, the SJCOE has provided opportunities for student growth in the arts through band, choir, and orchestra clinics and masterclasses, and has proudly sponsored countywide honors concerts and festivals which have celebrated the dedication, talent, and achievements of generations of students. We proudly support San Joaquin County districts and schools by also providing an artist residency program that promotes creativity and sparks imagination in K-12 classrooms throughout the county.

— James A. Mousalimas, San Joaquin County Superintendent of Schools

A Tradition of Music Performances

For over 60 years, talented student-musicians have taken part in choir, band, and string orchestra performances at the San Joaquin County Middle and High School Honors Concerts. In the lead-up to the San Joaquin County High School Honors Concert in January 2019, Tracy High School senior Raquel Johnson’s life was a blur of recitals, concerts, rehearsals, and practice for all the music groups and programs she participated in. “Music is almost literally my life right now,” she said at the time.

Even though Raquel spent a lot of time on the stage performing, she said there’s still something special about the countywide Honors Concert, where she played viola with the orchestra. “It’s more exhilarating,” she said. In addition to orchestra, the concert also features band and choir performances, bringing together the best-of-the-best student musicians in the county. Raquel was one of 27 students that night to receive the Nelson Zane Four-Year Award for playing in the concert all her high school years.
The concerts are organized by the San Joaquin County Office of Education (SJCOE) Visual and Performing Arts Department, which sponsors the event in collaboration with San Joaquin Delta College and the San Joaquin County Music Educators’ Association. In 2019, nearly 300 students from over 20 schools played in the High School Honors Concert, and more than 230 students from 35 schools performed in the Middle School Honors Concert. In doing so, these students joined thousands who came before them in a tradition of music performances in San Joaquin County that spans decades.

A Culture of Creativity

With an oil pastel in hand and a nearly blank canvas in front of him, artist Mario Tejada looked over the classroom filled with third-graders poised over their sheets of paper. He drew a line, a circle, and some other shapes. The students followed suit -- more or less -- on their paper. Soon it was clear the shapes and lines would connect to form a drawing of Snoopy, depicted atop his iconic doghouse in a winter scene. The day’s lesson was the latest in a four-part “Know the Artist” series that the visiting artist brought to this class at Lincoln Elementary School in the Manteca Unified School District (MUSD). This week’s lesson was to get to know Charles M. Schulz, creator of the Peanuts comic strip. The previous week, students created seascapes with a lighthouse in the style of the artist Paul Gauguin.

Tejada, a veteran with the San Joaquin County Office of Education (SJCOE) Artists-in-Schools program, was teaching as part of a four-week residency at the school. The SJCOE Artists-in-Schools program puts professional artists in “residence” in classrooms throughout San Joaquin County. The program offers California Standards-based lesson plans for residencies in the visual arts and dance and movement. In the 2019-2020 school year, the Artists-in-Schools program will serve approximately 640 K-12 classrooms at 49 schools in 13 San Joaquin County school districts.

Typically, these residencies last for four to eight weeks and are funded through money raised by parent-teacher organizations. However, at MUSD’s Lincoln and Nile Garden elementary schools, it is different. They are part of a Blackwing grant-funded pilot program aimed at cementing the arts into students’ education for three years. Instead of having one four-week residency, third-graders at these two schools have sixteen weeks of art. And the program expands to fourth and fifth grade, too. That means students have instruction in the arts sustained over three consecutive years. “It’s a unique experience for students because it is ongoing and three years-long,” said Sandra Wendell, who coordinates the SJCOE Artists-in-Schools program. “That way, when you enter high school, you’ll know if you have a gift or an interest in the arts.”

There’s more! During a typical residency, a rolling cart stocked with high-quality art supplies comes and goes with the artists. In this Blackwing grant-funded program, the oil pastels, watercolor pencils, tempera paints, charcoals, and artist’s paper stay in the classroom throughout the year. These supplies are for teachers and students to incorporate art into their daily lessons. In Kayci Farac’s third-grade class at Lincoln Elementary, her students have been using the supplies in science class. They captured the colors they saw in the leaves outside when studying the seasons. They drew the phases of the moon. Farac said her students look forward to the art class. “I can’t wait to see what they are capable of after three years.”