President Barack Obama once said, “The future belongs to young people with an education and the imagination to create.” In the best interests of our shared future, every child’s education should include opportunities to engage in creativity and the imagination. An education rich in the arts prepares our young people to inhabit the future with an appreciation for beauty, the capacity for joy, and with leadership that is guided by both the head and the heart.”

– Nancy Magee, San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools

Making Arts Education a Priority in San Mateo County

The San Mateo County Office (SMCOE) has been expanding its efforts to promote and support arts education in all of our schools. In 2017, SMCOE hired a Visual and Performing Arts Coordinator who helps support an annual Art Institute, quarterly Art Showcases, a countywide Art Expo, Creative Residencies, and the development and 2020 launch of a Visual, Performing, and Media Arts Strategic Plan.

Visual, Performing, and Media Arts Strategic Plan

Motivated by data showing that only 44 percent of students in San Mateo County receive some arts education at the secondary level, and only 36 percent of students from households with low incomes have this opportunity, SMCOE embarked on an effort to increase equity and access to arts education for all students.

SMCOE worked together with teachers, school administrators, leaders of arts organizations, working artists, and others to develop a strategic plan for arts education in San Mateo County. The Visual, Performing, and Media Arts Strategic Plan: Creating Equity and Access to Arts Education for All Students in San Mateo County Public Schools was officially released in January 2020. To learn more, visit www.smcoe.org/arts.
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Arts Expo
In 2018, the San Mateo County Office (SMCOE) created a brand new celebration of learning – The Next Big Think – that features not only a STEM Fair, but a countywide Arts Expo as well. This change reflects SMCOE’s commitment to STEAM education and creating space to celebrate students’ various passions and interests. Held every March, the Art Expo has grown in size and now includes 1,000 examples of student visual, performing, and media art and attracts more than 2,000 people.

Annual Arts Institute
The SMCOE hosted its 3rd annual Arts Institute in 2019. This day-long event has grown to include more than 100 teachers from across the county and provides educators with an opportunity to connect with each other, participate in workshops with experts from a variety of fields, and tackle important topics.

Creative Residencies
SMCOE is planning to launch Creative Residencies, a pilot program to provide teachers the opportunity to immerse in hands-on music, theatre, visual arts and dance experiences and develop mindsets to help build creativity. The program will include two hands-on and interactive Arts Immersion days and two Curriculum Integration half-days to create STEAM-based activities for the classroom that support the California Arts standards.

Art Takes a Bus Ride
SMCOE partners with the San Mateo County Transit District to coordinate the Art Takes a Bus Ride art competition for San Mateo County students in grades 1-12. The artwork of two finalists is displayed on the side of a SamTrans bus for a year, and student art is displayed on cards inside the buses.

Walt Disney Family Museum Show Features Art of Students in Court Schools
The Walt Disney Family Museum in San Francisco hosted an exhibition of artwork created by students in SMCOE’s Hillcrest School. The Exhibition, “Fresh Starts,” presented juried artwork created by youth who were incarcerated. The students participated in art-making sessions facilitated by museum staff at three juvenile detention centers in the Bay Area. In the words of one Hillcrest student, “I want to thank you for bringing the Disney Museum teachers here. I feel so alive when I am doing artwork and the good feeling lasts for days.”