

THE WINDSOR TIMES

District Arts Plan wants to ensure arts education for all

By Heather Bailey, Staff Writer, heather@sonomawest.com

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Banded together – The 2017 Windsor Middle school band. Should the new District Arts Plan be passed, students can look forward to more such opportunities.

Proposed plan up for consideration at Dec. 19 school board meeting

Many districts would look upon Windsor schools' arts programs with envy, but the Windsor Arts Now Community feels there is still room for improvement.

“We think we are doing pretty good sixth grade through 12th grade,” Joella Olsen, one of the leaders of the group, said. “We offer band, strings and chorus in the usual sequence for a continuum from sixth to 12th grade. We would like to see a more established art, music, theater and dance program at the elementary level.”

“The law says dance, art, music and theater,” she continued. “It says the schools will provide arts education in all four areas and we don’t do that. So yes, Windsor is very lucky; we have a great community and some things are in place, but some things are not and we’d like to change that.”

Olsen and others formed a committee, drawn from attendees at a kickoff breakfast they held earlier in the year, to draw up a district-wide arts plan, which was recently completed and presented to the Windsor Unified School District Board of Trustees.

Olsen and her group are now hoping that the board will vote to accept it. “We have asked that they approve the plan and it might be approved with certain caveats, but we are hoping they approve the plan and move forward with our first funding priority,” she said.

That first funding priority, out of 30 listed in the plan, is for the hiring of a district arts coordinator who can “shepherd this through,” Olsen said. “Be willing to bend and sway with the board and what they are willing to fund or think is interesting or appropriate for the district. We feel that we were successful in creating a plan, but we understand that the plan is not concrete. It reflects people and finances so it’s going to be a fluid document and it’s going to change.”

The heart of the plan is the idea of not only expanding arts education through all the grade levels, but also the idea of arts integration, that is, using the arts to teach concepts in mainstream classes.

“It’s the idea of combining the arts with existing curriculum and getting something even bigger and better,” she said. “Arts are a great way to deliver information and remember it. So, if you are not just delivering arts instruction but maybe you are combining with mathematics. Maybe you are learning about perspective in (drawing) and understanding the measurements that go with it. The idea is that arts can make the curriculum stronger and more memorable.”

In addition, Olsen notes that not all students have equal access to what arts curriculum is available.

“Sometimes kids who need to come out for interventions, they come out during that sort of elective time,” she said. “So, they don’t get those things when they have other needs. There’s a lot of ways to fall through the cracks so that you don’t get the arts and we’d like to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

Without question, the sticking point in the current economic climate will be funding. Olsen and her group believe that alternate and additional funding sources can be found in the community and through groups like the Windsor Education Foundation.

“The first thing is this coordinator — is the board interested in making the initial contribution to the plan which would be this small amount for an arts coordinator?” she said. “Then we hope this coordinator will be connected with the town and the groups that came forward and figure out how do we avail ourselves of programs for schools that don’t cost so much.

“We are not looking at just the school district to fund this. We’re looking to be very creative in the community and with arts grants and ways to integrate arts into existing curriculum to make it strong and more powerful. We recognize there are fiscal restraints, but we don’t recognize any creative restraints as of yet,” she finished.

Sidebar:

Want to get a little holiday cheer and support Windsor music students? Check out these winter concerts and performances:

Dec. 6 – Windsor Middle School String Concert, 6:30 p.m. Windsor Middle School Multipurpose Room

Dec. 7 – Town of Windsor Christmas Tree Lighting, WUSD students performing, 5 p.m., Town Green

Dec. 13 – Windsor High School Band, Strings and Drum Line Concert, 7 p.m., Windsor High School Theater

Dec. 14 – Windsor Creek Concert, Singing and Recorders, 9 and 10 a.m.,
Windsor Creek Elementary

Dec. 14 – Windsor Middle School Band Concert, 6:30 p.m., Windsor Middle
School Gym

Dec. 19 – Windsor Middle School Choir Concert, 6:30 p.m., Windsor Middle
School Multipurpose Room