

# THE WINDSOR TIMES

## Arts plan seeing benefits at local schools

By Heather Bailey Times Editor  
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### But funding issues threaten future of some programs

At the Feb 4. meeting of the Windsor Unified School District Board of Trustees, the board heard a report from the district's Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Plan Coordinator Elizabeth Robertson, who is also a music teacher at Brooks Elementary, on the achievements of Phase III of the district's VAPA plan and heard about plans for the next phase.

“One of the special things about Windsor is that we have a strong commitment to equality of access and quality for our students, and our arts plan is a good example of that,” Robertson said. “It opens up opportunities for students that they wouldn’t have otherwise.”

“The strategic plan for the arts help our students grow,” she continued. “They can get skills in other places but in the arts they get hem over and over again, they use every bit of the brain’s capacity. It create new (brain) connections, they are working with their entire motor skills and complex thinking skills and attention span.”

### **Phase III findings**

Phase III moved at lightening speed largely due to the remarkable iAspire grant the district received totaling approximately \$1.6 million. With that funding, the district was able to move forward on several fronts in regards to integrated arts education.

Among the achievement for phase III are offering three-day trainings in arts integration and ELA standards to teachers in the summer of 2019, and completing an articulation agreement and Common Core aligned scope and sequence in visual art, music, media art, theater and dance.

The district also hired an additional full-time music teacher (Robertson) who implemented programs at Brooks and the middle school, and created a VAPA integration leadership team and hired the VAPA coordinator (also Robertson).

There was also a summer camp available in June 2019 for arts integration.

Grades TK through 5 completed unit 1 of the iAspire curriculum, including a digital media component and assessments.

Audio equipment was purchased to begin creating dedicated performance space in the multipurpose rooms at Cali Calmecac and Mattie Washburn and storage units for art supplies were purchased for each campus. \$70,000 were spent in grades five through 12 for materials and equipment, including 50 instruments for Cali and Brooks’ music program. Also purchased were Apple TVs, iPads, storage carts and other accessories for each elementary school site to facilitate the integration of the iAspire curriculum.

A myriad of performance opportunities were made available so students could perform and their families and community could be engaged in their education.

## **Moving forward to Phase IV**

The biggest challenge going forward with regards to the district's arts plan is how to continue the level of service and enthusiasm the programs created under the iAspire SSAE grant, and step forward into Phase IV of the arts plan.

“We are doing amazing and we want to keep momentum going, but we need to be cognizant of keeping and sustaining what we have,” Robertson said. “We want to plan a second summit. The cost is approximately \$15,000 in addition to grant-funded costs but we are looking at ways to defray costs. We’re discussing opening the summit to not just Windsor teachers, but teachers from other schools who will pay to join us. We’re looking to create some community arts partners.”

The Phase IV goals are broken down by category. Under the heading of curriculum and professional development are plan and implement a second professional development summit, and complete the iAspire Units 2-4 (which have already been paid for; finalize the grades five through 12 vertical alignment and create a sharable document for the community, and complete an interest /needs survey and implement a professional development plan for VAPA and AME teachers.

Under program development and leadership, it is suggested to keep on the VAPA coordinator as a 0.20 for 2020-21 and to continue the use of iAspire grade level leads in TK through fifth grade; and to continue the work of the iAspire leadership team to create maintain and sustain arts integration programs for TK through five; explore funding sources to expand the Artist-in-Residence program, and increase collaboration with the Luther Burbank Center and Creative Sonoma for artists-in-residence.

Phase IV envision a more effective usage of existing spaces to accommodate the arts and continue exploration of structural upgrades to the WHS performing arts facilities.

Finally, under the heading of families and community engagement, the recommendation is to continue the collaboration with Windsor Arts Now, increase performance opportunities in the Windsor community and at school sites, increase communication

from VAPA departments to the community at-large, via social media, the WUSD website and a newsletter, and explore community partnership, sponsorship and grants to help fund Windsor@Weil in perpetuity.

On other item on the list that wasn't included was the board's adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of All Students to Equity in Arts Learning, but that was because the board had already adopted that at an earlier meeting.

In the end though, the issue for any program in the WUSD is the cost, and while Robertson is searching for grant funding to defray as much direct cost as possible, the proposal for the district does include a cost of \$37,738.60 if the biggest ticket items (the Arts Integration Summit, the Artist-in-Residence Programs and Windsor at Weil) find outside funding.

### **Great ideas, but funding is a concern**

While the board was in support of the arts plan, the looming fear of costs and budget woes tempered their enthusiasm.

"We as a board are supportive, however we are qualified with our budget, which is bad news," said trustee George Valenzuela. "We had talked about a parcel tax and doing research and talked preliminarily that that would help fund the VAPA program. I want to caution that whatever we do if we add to VAPA what does that do to other programs. I would love to give you all the money and more, but the reality is on the back end we're deficit spending and Sacramento money not coming. Whatever we do, we have to keep in mind the other end, there is another consequence, but I hope we can keep the ball rolling."

Trustee Rich Carnation brought back the idea of reevaluating programs, especially at the high school level, and seeing what programs are really being utilized by students as a way to find extra dollars, "Maybe we need to take a comprehensive look at what we are offering and say, 'some of those things were great eight years ago, but we don't need so many resources there,' and make adjustments so we can put the resources towards this. If we start thinking that way sooner, we can get on that pathway."

Trustee Bill Adams and vice president Stephanie Ahmad both had a slightly rosier view.

“Thanks for presentation, its clear how much effort you put into it,” Ahmad said. “It’s easy to see all the components. Everything is attainable, and this makes it that much easier for us as a board and community to visualize what it looks like and where we’re going.”

“On phase IV I would like for us to double what we put in last year. I would like to get the coordinator from a 0.2 to a 0.4,” said Adams candidly. “Engaging the community is one thing that struck me, is there ever a catalog of events and plans anywhere? I’d like us to start to gather that list of things we do. I know there is a ton of stuff we’re doing, but I’ve never seen it gathered under one tent before. I’d like to revisit this with the board in a month or so when we’re more refined on budgets.”

Parent and W-Pac member Andrea Lagourgue made a brief public comment wondering if the arts program could be publicized in such a way as to draw students from other districts.

“I’ve sat in enough meetings know enrollment is declining. If we have an issue with enrollment and people not coming here, I feel this would be an amazing way to get people here,” she said. “This stuff needs to be out more in the public. It could be really important in people coming and staying in our district. If they know we have these programs, feel like it might be a big draw. We keep talking about cutting, maybe talk about how to get bodies and revenue back.”