

Napa Valley **Register**

New school initiative will support the arts

Patrick Sweeney and Barbara Nemko Sep 7, 2016

What if all Napa County children had the tools to tap their creative potential? What might we do to achieve that goal? Every educator knows you would need a plan. A framework. A guide for every class, every school day, every semester.

As educators, we know there is more to life and education than tests and charts. There is creativity and critical thinking, theater and dance, arts and music. Giving students tangible creative skills means they become more employable, and are more likely to find a job post-graduation. In this way, the arts level the playing field. Regardless of financial background, race, or gender, arts education builds a unique set of transferable skills, giving all students a real chance to succeed.

While arts classes have always been present within the Napa Valley Unified School District, we are now creating an organized effort to ensure that these classes are available to all students, at every point in their academic career. Produced in a public-private partnership with our community partners represented in the Arts Council Napa Valley Education Alliance, The Arts Education Master Plan will create a clear pathway for every pre-kindergarten-through-12th-grade student in Napa public schools to have a sequential, standards-based visual and performing arts education.

In other words, children will have access to arts classes, no matter which school they attend or what grade they're in. This consistency in curriculum means that creative

knowledge will build over time, allowing for a deep, comprehensive skill set and a more well-rounded graduate to emerge from our school system.

According to studies by Americans for the Arts, students who are given a sense of an artistic community are more likely to create and positively affect their surroundings. These same students will, on average, have superior academic performance, meaning lower dropout rates, improved memory skills, higher GPAs, and SAT scores that are generally 100 points higher in reading, writing, and mathematics. And the success continues beyond their high school years, contributing to the health and vibrancy of our community.

So, where is the plan now, and where is it going? Programming and curriculum development will be overseen by Visual & Performing Arts Coordinator Chuck Neidhoefer. Appointed in May by NVUSD Superintendent Dr. Patrick Sweeney, Neidhoefer will serve as the lead in sustaining arts education and will work with a team of arts educators to reshape and grow the curriculum during the 2016/2017 school year and beyond.

This month, NVUSD will be recognized by the California Alliance for Arts Education for our hard work and dedication. We are grateful for the support the Alliance provided through their Local Advocacy Network, which offers strategic assistance to 30 communities around the state.

Now, the Alliance is bringing “the world to Napa” to hear our story as part of their ARTS NOW campaign. The Napa Summit will allow NVUSD to serve as an inspiration by sharing a day of learning, engaging and spotlighting how we continue to advance our arts education agenda.

A highlight will be site visits, where we will take our colleagues from around the state to visit our dance, media, music and visual arts elementary and high school classrooms. They will be led through the schools by student leaders in order to see lesson plans

unfold before their eyes. The visits will culminate with an open panel featuring students, administrators, and visitors.

The timing couldn't be better. As we join our colleagues in celebrating National Arts in Education Week, we recognize that "arts education is a core academic subject and an essential element of a complete and balanced education for all students.

Arts have the power to transform lives by providing our youth with skills and experience that support collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creativity. In Napa, we have a lot to be proud of and more work to do. Here's to a bright and colorful future.

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