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PRESS RELEASE

Windsor High School Wins State Recognition as California Exemplary Arts Education Award Recipient

Windsor, California—In May, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond announced that 33 California schools were selected for the California Exemplary Arts Education Award, and the Windsor Unified School District is proud to announce that Windsor High School was one of them.

In order to be recognized as an Exemplary Arts Awardee, schools must offer sequenced instruction to all students in a minimum of three of the five arts disciplines identified in the Arts Standards: Dance, Media Arts, Music, Theatre and Visual Arts. They must also show one level of improvement for at least one student subgroup in one of the following three areas based on the Dashboard: School Climate, in the area of Suspension Rate; Student Engagement, in the area of Chronic Absenteeism or Graduation Rate; and Academic Achievement, in the area of English Language Arts, Mathematics, or College and Career Readiness.

“This year has been especially challenging for our students and schools, but I commend these schools for recognizing that this is a time when the arts are more critical than ever,” Thurmond said in May. “These schools excelled in providing quality arts education, despite all the obstacles presented by distance learning. It is with great pleasure

Brooks Elementary – Cali Calmécac Language Academy – Mattie Washburn Elementary - North County Consortium
Windsor Middle School – Windsor High School - Windsor Oaks Academy – North Bay Met Academy

we honor these schools for their steadfast dedication to arts education that plays a powerful role in supporting wellness, bridging social divides, and expanding creativity and critical thinking in our students.”

WHS teacher John Richards helped write the application for this award, though he is quick to give credit to the entire school community that has had a hand in creating the program that WHS has.

“WHS has a phenomenal art culture — it is both present in our dynamic elective programming as well as embedded within our incredibly special core system. Currently, we have four separate small learning communities that focus their curriculum around arts integration, exploration and career readiness,” Richards said. “But our biggest take away from this application process was the realization that 100% of students on WHS's campus have access to some level of art class. Whether it is an ART 1 introductory class, Beginning Guitar, or Arete or Nueva — two of the aforementioned programs — we are not exaggerating when we tout that there is an access point into the arts for every single kid on this campus.”

The application process was a lengthy one, and it included virtually hosting four panelists from across the state, who spoke with several of WHS’ teachers, administrators and industry partners. Panelists also sat in on some art classes during distance learning to see live education, and they finished up their process by hosting their own round table discussion with current students and alumni.

“This award is evidence that through some incredibly tumultuous years for our community, art has been a constant for our students and our staff,” Richards said. “We have established one of the most inclusive and dynamic art programs in the state, and we hope that Windsor High School, Windsor Unified and the Windsor community at large understand how special our programming is. Art is not simply ‘an elective’ at Windsor High School, but rather a creative and vibrant pathway to skill building, character building, and, most importantly, community building.”

Richards also feels that the across-the-board support for arts integration helps fuel the access and equitability of offerings for students. “We have allies across our administration and counseling department who help us shepherd students into these classes,” he

said. “This partnership between the front offices and our classrooms is essential in helping us sustain diverse learning environments and capturing and focusing the interests of students from all over our campus.

“With a constant flow of curious and engaged students, we have been able to build out a wonderfully diverse catalogue of offerings and experiences,” he concluded.

That across-the-board commitment can be seen in Richards himself. “Technically, I am a history teacher, not an ‘arts’ teacher. So, if you really want to know what sets Windsor High School apart from other campuses, it is the fact that a Social Studies teacher believes so much in the art programming at this school, that he has dedicated his career to collaborating with and celebrating the work of his colleagues and students. Arts integration is not just a buzzword at Windsor High School — it is a philosophy that we live by.”

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