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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 27, 2021

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PRESS RELEASE

Windsor Unified School District Receives \$60,000 Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts

Windsor, California—The Windsor Unified School District (WUSD) has received a \$60,000 Grants for Arts Projects award to support iAspire Arts Integration programs. WUSD’s project is among 1,100 projects across America — totaling nearly \$27 million — selected in the second round of Grants for Arts Projects funding for the 2021 fiscal year.

“We are honored to be one of only three school districts in the country to receive funding. This is a very competitive grant, and most recipients are drawn from the non-profit sector or represent county or state departments of education. This grant from the NEA highlights WUSD’s deep commitment to arts education and student achievement,” said iAspire Project Director and Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) coordinator Elizabeth Robertson.

iAspire is an academic partnership between the arts and other core content areas. Students learn about and through the arts by participating in arts integrated units where they show their understanding of academic concepts through the arts and technology.

Students create, revise, and perform/present through music, theatre, visual arts, dance, and digital arts. Observed benefits include

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

increased classroom engagement, improved collaboration, deeper understanding of academic skills, improved classroom behavior, and discovering connections between school, home, and the community.

According to Robertson, WUSD collaborated with Big Idea Arts and Education Consulting to complete the grant application process. The grant application was built on the success of the District's iAspire programs in 2019 and 2020, and included data from the 2019-2020 iAspire pilot program, examples of student artwork, teacher testimonials, and a snapshot of the district.

This grant is specifically for funding professional development and coaching for teachers. Previously, the district was awarded the \$1.7 million SSAE grant, which launched the iAspire program, and provided significant funding for student supplies and activities.

"One of the biggest hurdles for professional development is finding ways to compensate teachers for their time," Robertson said. "The benefit for students is the implementation aspect of the iAspire program. Teachers will participate in professional development, implement strategies they learn with students, receive coaching, and then meet to share and reflect their own and students' experiences and outcomes."

An example of this can be found with the iAspire Migrant Education Summer School at Cali Calmecac Language Academy. Through collaboration with WUSD and regional Migrant Education programs, the District funded and implemented a three-week arts integrated summer program for 75 students.

"Students and teachers integrated the arts with Spanish Language Arts, Science, Social Emotional Learning, and Math," said Robertson. "The program culminated with an art exposition for families and the school community. This program will serve as an arts integration demonstration school and model program for other districts. Evidence of student learning was collected throughout the program including artwork, assessment data, student projects, and classroom demonstration videos."

The District plans to host the program again in 2022.

"We are hoping the NEA grant will enable more WUSD teachers to incorporate arts integration strategies and units into their classrooms. We are seeking to increase students' access to quality arts education

and create equitable arts offerings at each of our elementary sites,” Robertson said.

In addition to benefits for Windsor teachers, the iAspire program includes opportunities for teachers from all over Sonoma County to participate in arts integration professional development. In 2020, 29 participants from throughout the county participated in the iAspire Virtual Summit, and in 2021-2022, Robertson hopes to include additional Sonoma County participants in a professional development and coaching experience.

“We are particularly excited to have the opportunity to expand iAspire programming to other Sonoma County districts, teachers, and students,” Robertson said. “Through professional development and coaching, we are hoping to create a county-wide arts integration professional learning community with WUSD teachers as active participants and teacher leaders.”

Robertson also wants to expand student access to arts specialist programs, increase district partnerships with local arts organizations, and create and implement a similar model at the sixth to 12th grade levels.

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