

Targeting Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant

**Nu Art Education, Inc. DBA NorCal School of the Arts
Theater Arts & SEL: Conflict Resolution Program**

Sacramento, CA
Innovation Track

Objective 6: The local community has a variety of programs that address risk factors/build protective factors in their local communities.

Request: \$600,000

Abstract:

The mental health of students as well as students inability to engage with peers is promoting violence and destructive coping mechanisms. Following the theory of change that utilizing theater arts as a tool to teach and practice conflict resolution strategies in the classroom will engage students and promote positive connections to peers while building community thus decreasing the risk factors associated with targeted violence, NorCal School of the Arts will create and implement a Theater Arts and Conflict Resolution Integration program to vulnerable populations in Sacramento's title 1 schools.

NorCal School of the Arts project proposal includes professional development for the classroom teachers on theater arts & conflict resolution integrated strategies for the classroom as well as a series of classes for students taught by NorCal teaching artists. NorCal is currently in 150 classrooms in title 1 schools in Sacramento City Unified School District providing Theater Arts & SEL classes, serving over 4000 students. This proposal aims to expand the program and create a new curriculum that engages students in conflict resolution and violence prevention strategies through a kinesthetic, artistic approach using theater arts exercises, theater games and role playing situations of conflict to engage the students in practicing nonviolent solutions.

ND Grants EMW# -2022-GR-APP-00007



PROJECT OVERVIEW

NorCal School of the Arts Theater & Conflict Resolution Integration Program

Northern California School of the Arts (NorCal SOTA) mission is to provide a holistic, individualized and professional training approach that supports artists from diverse communities to create, express, and participate in theater arts educational opportunities. Through arts engagement, students are empowered to embrace social and emotional learning strategies as well as create a positive mindset towards themselves and their community.

NorCal School of the Arts teaching artists will teach 10 classes in 150 title one classrooms and this will in turn train classroom teachers at SCUSD schools to integrate theater arts & conflict resolution strategies into their curriculum and classroom culture. With this intentional integration of theater arts and conflict resolution, teachers will in turn use newly learned strategies to enable students to feel connected to peers as well as gain coping mechanisms to navigate this mental health crisis where students are finding it difficult to socialize and connect to their peers. This approach to conflict resolution and violence prevention tactics through an artistic, engaging process will promote student creativity, decrease student anxiety and depression and help students regain connection to self and community. All strategies given are “non-artist friendly” and will be within the classroom teachers abilities to repeat once the program is over. Teachers will have access to all the lesson plans to repeat the strategies and lessons for years to come.

The pandemic has magnified societal issues of inequities and microaggressions towards our students from marginalized communities and students now have the added task of processing this reality along with the aftermath of the pandemic. Through these classes, classroom teachers will learn tools to enable students to collaborate with their peers and through theater arts, informed by SEL strategies, guide and challenge their class to celebrate diversity while promoting acceptance and skills to resolve conflict in a positive manner.

Classroom Teachers will participate in a survey assessment to evaluate pre and post program effectiveness of NorCal’s teaching strategies and post effectiveness and impact of the program. After each session classroom teachers fill out a survey to provide feedback on how the lesson impacted the classroom.

The initial survey assessment will provide a baseline for evaluation of program goals. Teaching artists will utilize formative and summative assessments to evaluate the impact of the program to share with stakeholders. Student names and information will not be discussed or mentioned to maintain privacy.

TIMEFRAME

In October, year 1, Executive Director of Nor Cal School of the Arts will design Theater Arts/Conflict Resolution curriculum while working with SCUSD Social Emotional Learning (SEL) staff and Conflict resolution consultant Kelsey Thompson-Briggs to infuse arts strategies with conflict resolution and social, emotional learning strategies. Scheduling will begin for all the classroom teachers to receive the theater arts/conflict resolution classes and professional development sessions.

In November-February, NorCal teaching artists will work with classroom teachers and provide the integrated classes for students. These professional development sessions as well as classes will continue through December and January. Each grade level will have a developmentally appropriate arts and conflict resolution curriculum. In February, the Executive Director will work with classroom teachers and teaching artists to evaluate impact and create an impact report for all stakeholders. Assessments and classroom teacher feedback will happen throughout the process to ensure effective delivery and compliance with the grant. Student identification will be confidential and no names of students will be mentioned in the evaluation process.

This program will take place over 2 years and each year 150 classrooms will be provided the program with 10 classes for each classroom. NorCal School of the Arts will continue to be a resource for 150 classroom teachers as well as all the former teachers that have participated in NorCal's programs.

There will be 3 convenings of all the classroom teachers in the program throughout the fall of each year to offer continued training and an introduction to violence prevention and resources to support classroom teachers and the full district. 2-3 Community round tables will take place via zoom to include families of students receiving the classes to ensure the families are also aware of the conflict resolution strategies.

Northern California School of the Arts, Executive Director, Michele Hillen-Noufer, M.Ed will provide oversight, fiscal monitoring and management of the program to include budgeting, monthly reporting, final impact report and all scheduling of professional developments for classroom teachers.

1. Needs Assessment

Decades of research demonstrates participation in theater arts offers students a toolbox of fundamental skills that will enhance their ability to succeed in school and beyond. The benefits of theater arts education for low income children are especially profound. Specifically, studies have shown that theater arts instruction and the creative process associated with theater helps students to better succeed at school as they garner new ways of learning, creating, and focusing. They also gain life skills such as enhanced empathy, greater sense of confidence, a deeper understanding of their identity which for many, has the impact of alleviating mental health issues. Since theater instruction nurtures creative thinking, it encourages students to unlock the possibilities and to foster innovations toward solutions in all areas of their life. Students also become more proficient at many skills that will help them later in the job market, including: Public Speaking, Time Management, Project Management Skills, Communication and Collaboration Skills.

Knowing that everyone has a different learning style and that we all better respond to different types of

teaching techniques, NorCal teaching artists work with teachers on how to recognize the most effective learning needs of their students. In doing so, the NorCal teaching artists provide the classroom teachers with associated learning techniques to make it easier for their students to learn conflict resolution and violence prevention strategies.

Studies have shown theater provides a community experience that educates and enhances community identity, a sense of connection, and raises social awareness for others. By getting children involved earlier in theater, they better understand their world and the value of theater in developing common values within the context of their community. Moreover, studies have shown that theater not only provides our children with positive after-school activities but also leads to other responsible civic engagement and has a direct correlation to a reduction of crime and delinquency.

Educators are experiencing the challenge of navigating teaching in a world with social media and increased screen time for students outside of school hours. Educators seek to try to provide an environment that speaks to the whole child. Teachers are challenged to teach the content subjects such as math, science, ELA while also responding to the extreme isolation, lack of normal connection and lack of social interaction students have with peers as well as address students extreme anxiety and depression symptoms due to the effects of covid-19.

According to the US Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, on Covid-19 student impact, "Isolation, contact restrictions and economic shutdown... have the potential to threaten the mental health of children. Anxiety, lack of peer contact and reduced opportunities for stress regulation are main concerns. Another main threat is an increased risk for parental mental illness, domestic violence and child maltreatment. Especially for children and adolescents with special needs or disadvantages, such as disabilities, trauma experiences, already existing mental health problems, migrant background and low socioeconomic status, this may be a particularly challenging time."

The National Health Council conducted a study that showed, younger populations including teens and young adults (25<) are being hit particularly hard by anxiety and depression. In May 2020, these populations were experiencing higher rates of anxiety and depression than any other single age group. Anxiety rates for this age group were around 80% of screened participants . 90% of screened participants in this age group were also experiencing symptoms of depression. **Studies also show a disproportionate impact on students living in poverty and students of color.** The teachers participating in the NorCal School of the Arts professional development series are teaching in schools with the most vulnerable student populations including disenfranchised and marginalized communities.

US Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, NIH News Publications, 2020.
National Health Council, www.Nationalhealthcouncil.org, 2020.

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Across all of our programs, most students come from Sacramento City Unified School District Schools including our Outreach program, Corps program, Camps, Classes and Leadership Institute.

