



From Lane Arts Council

For Immediate Release

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## ArtSpark continues to expand arts education in Eugene Schools

**Through the ArtSpark initiative, Lane Arts Council, The Rotary Club of Eugene, Eugene Education Foundation, Eugene School District 4J, and community partners have established two artist residencies in each of the 20 4J elementary schools.**

EUGENE, OREGON (April 12, 2022)—The ArtSpark initiative was born from a shared goal to ensure that *every elementary student* in the Eugene School District 4J has the opportunity to have high-quality arts education through Lane Arts Council's artist residency program. Since its inception in 2017, ArtSpark has grown from serving only two schools (Cesar E. Chavez Elementary School and McCornack Elementary School) to **hosting two artist residencies in each of the 20 4J elementary schools**. With the annual fundraiser later this month, Lane Arts Council and the Rotary Club of Eugene are hoping to increase the amount of time each school sees a Teaching Artist and look to continued expansion of the program.

Over the past 30 years, inadequate budgets and pressures to raise test scores and graduation rates have strained many in-school arts programs, often leading to the reduction or elimination of funding. As a result, there were no arts teachers in Eugene elementary schools and very few arts opportunities for Eugene elementary school students prior to ArtSpark. Many nonprofits, including Lane Arts Council, have stepped in to help, but many communities still lack the resources to offer high-quality, equitable arts experiences and access for students, resulting in a fragmented arts education landscape where students in some communities have plentiful arts opportunities, while others have very limited options.

Lane Arts Council believes the arts are essential for learning and developing a well-rounded education, supporting young people in any path they choose. Arts education allows young people to open up to possibilities, exploring their creativity, seeing themselves as successful, becoming more self-expressed, and building more self-confidence. Through arts education, students can express their own unique voice, while learning critical thinking, problem solving, social skills, creativity, collaboration, communication, and mindfulness and see enhanced academic achievement and engaged learning across their education. Creativity and the arts support all areas of life, with benefits extending to students' personal and professional lives with far-reaching effects, no matter the path a student takes.

"I think that art education is so important for elementary learners for a myriad of reasons," says Maria Siegel, kindergarten classroom aide at Cesar Chavez Elementary, "but here are just a few: art allows a child to express themselves, especially with an open art curriculum. This form of expression is not always achieved with the curriculum implemented in schools today. The experience of letting go and creating is a very powerful thing, and some children don't ever get that experience at home. This gives us the opportunity to gift these students the ability to create at school. I am a firm believer that creating and expressing yourself through art is a form of therapy and is incredibly helpful to many individuals. This therapy creates an outlet for children that are going through a tough time, processing emotions and with hard home lives to do so in a safe place. With that in mind, the imagination is a muscle, and while art can be beneficial in many ways, it is also super fun, something needed for all ages to have a rounded educational experience. **Art curriculum is essential for the growth, expression and benefit of budding elementary school students.**"

To continue to serve students and teachers engaged in online learning during the 2020-21 school year in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lane Arts Council created virtual arts programs that integrated with distance learning. 19 teaching artists recorded 166 virtual arts lessons for learners in kindergarten through eighth grade, reaching an estimated 5,305 students.

This year, in-person Artist Residencies supported by ArtSpark have expanded to include both visual and performing arts, which supports a roster of more than 40 professional Teaching Artists. These Teaching Artists lead programs in many different art mediums, including ceramics, mural painting, scientific illustration, natural dyes, fiddle music, salsa dancing, West African music and dance, stop-motion animation, and many more. Lane Arts Council works with each school to customize the Artist Residencies to meet their unique needs and to deepen students' overall learning experience. Residences last for two to four weeks, engaging students in meaningful and creative experiences that align with academic learning objectives.

Larry Myers, a Lane Arts Council Teaching Artist who led the students to paint tiles that will be permanently on display at multiple schools in Eugene, shared how immediate the excitement and impact can be felt with these students. "I was helping a student hang their tiles when he looked through the fence and said to me, 'It's going to be there forever. My art will be here forever!'" Myers says. "It's about the pride they feel and the students' excitement to share what they have created. That's why I do this: **When students make art, they feel proud and gain a sense of confidence in their voice.**"

He mentioned a student who was so excited to tell his mom about the project. "These pieces of art are something students are sprinting home to tell their parents about," Myers says. "**It connects the parents to the students' learning and inspires students to share what they have learned with their parents.** Isn't that amazing?"

ArtSpark has been supported by many local businesses and organizations, including the Eugene Education Foundation (EEF).

"ArtSpark has been a great vehicle for EEF to maximize our community's investment in enrichment," EEF Executive Director Dana Fleming says. "Working with Lane Arts Council and Rotary to bring artists in residence to Eugene 4J elementary schools is one of our most notable collaborations... The benefit of ArtSpark is multi-faceted: students' lives are enriched by having access to art and local working artists, and they get to express themselves as individuals through project-based learning. Programs like ArtSpark are the things that keep students engaged and excited about learning."

Although the 4J School District has increased their financial support for these programs in every elementary school—from \$40,000 in 2018 to \$100,000 in 2021—there is still a need for additional financial support to continue to ensure equitable access for all Eugene 4J students, bring in more teaching artists, and increase the number of hours that students are receiving arts education.

Later this month, Lane Arts Council and the Rotary Club of Eugene will host the 2022 ArtSpark fundraiser, with the goal of raising \$40,000 to continue to provide arts opportunities in Eugene 4J schools. The online silent auction is a celebration of Eugene's culture and arts community with dozens of items including art by 25 local artists. Packages also include combinations of arts experiences and unique Eugene offerings such as the "Out & About in Eugene" package featuring electric bike rentals from Pedego Eugene, a visit to Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, breakfast at Off the Waffle, a treat at Handel's Ice Cream, and drinks at Oakshire.

Support ArtSpark at in-person and virtual events this month:

- **April 22-28: Silent Auction is open online**, featuring artwork and arts experiences donated by local artists and arts organizations. [Register now](#)
- **April 23, 4-7 pm: ArtSpark Kick-off Party & Silent Auction Viewing**, In-person at the Midtown Art Center, 174 E 16th Ave. Join for drinks, hors d'oeuvres, live music, and a performance from Eugene Ballet. [RSVP](#) for this free event.
- **April 27, 7 pm: ArtSpark Virtual Fundraiser**—Tune in to hear from special guests, donate and participate in the silent auction and raffle. [RSVP](#) for this free event.
- **Donate** between now and April 28 to help reach the \$40,000 fundraising goal to continue to provide arts programs in 4J elementary schools.

Learn more about ArtSpark at <http://artspark Eugene.org/>

#### **About Lane Arts Council**

Lane Arts Council cultivates strong and creative arts communities in Lane County. Lane Arts Council provides arts education programs in schools, supports local artists and arts organizations, and coordinates the First Friday ArtWalk. <http://lanearts.org>

#### **About Rotary Club of Eugene**

As the first Rotary Club in Lane County and one of the oldest in Oregon, The Rotary Club of Eugene is a leading service organization of Lane County. This important club has been very involved in the life, business, government and service to people of this community for nearly a century. <http://eugenerotary.org>

#### **About Eugene School District 4J**

Eugene School District 4J is a K–12 public school district in and around Eugene, Oregon. The district serves more than 16,000 students in grades K–12 attend 4J schools in 20 elementary school programs, eight middle schools, four comprehensive high schools, and alternative high school programs. <http://www.4j.lane.edu/>

#### **About Eugene Education Foundation**

The Eugene Education Foundation (EEF) is a nonprofit organization that supports the Eugene School District 4J. As the Foundation for 4J, EEF serves as the fundraising arm of the district by soliciting donations, funding an annual competitive grant cycle, hosting an annual gala, and supporting schools and parent groups in their site-based fundraising efforts. <https://eeflane.org/>

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