

## **1. Reflections on Unified by Diversity:**

The Unified by Diversity grant challenged students to learn about their peers and staff in a different way and focus on the positive impact of diversity on the campus. In Video Productions, students were successful in learning how to use the newly purchased equipment. Students really enjoyed interviewing other students on campus and learning about their unique cultures and experiences. AVID and Yearbook students learned through recording, analyzing, and disseminating information about how diversity benefits everyone and consequently promotes unity in our schools and greater society. The cameras, lenses, and other photography accessories that we received through the EEF grant provided a new mode for academic expression, and the equipment also added legitimacy to our recording goals. In advanced art, students enjoyed reaching out to staff members to get feedback on how to represent our campus in a diverse way through their large mural. Our cultural dinner project aimed to celebrate diversity and foster cultural understanding among our students through a series of themed dinner events. Band and choir students were able to learn music from a culture they may not have been previously familiar with, and students who have a Latino background were able to feel a sense of pride in having their peers learn music from their culture. Through the purchase of the accordion, many students got a chance to see an instrument they had only heard before, and many students were able to try to play it. Together, they learned how the instrument works, and some students were able to get guidance from family members on how to appropriately play it. It brought not just the students closer together, but families as well.

## **2. Did your grant do what you thought it would?**

We achieved our goals of celebrating diversity on the Rincon Middle School campus. In Video Productions, we were successful using the new equipment to document student experiences on campus. In exploratory and advanced art, students created art pieces that focused on diversity, highlighting their culture and traditions. A group of advanced art students created a mural to represent the Unified by Diversity grant that will hang at the front of the school.

Yearbook students learned to use a different medium to express their thoughts on cultural inclusion and valuing diversity. They photographed it, and they also felt like participants in the celebration of diversity. The photographic element of recording diversity around them gave rise to powerful thoughts and expressions of caring and inclusion. It was less linguistic and more emotive by nature, and that led to some great expression as the students engaged in it.

AVID students conducted extensive research on colleges and universities, and they made inquiries at more than ninety schools, collecting information that included university programs designed around diversity and inclusion. Students presented the research as part of their College Fair on March 7th. During the fair, they taught other students on campus about the importance of recognizing the need for supporting diversity at our highest academic institutions. Structured, informational support for incoming college students provides a feeling of comfort and inclusion for prospective students. Structured support also promotes an

awareness of new cultural experiences that helps people see through the eyes of others more easily.

In Advanced Cooking, as we reflect on its planning and implementation, we are delighted to report that it not only met but exceeded our expectations in many ways. The students were so excited to make these wonderful dinner meals from different countries, such as France, Germany, Vietnam, Italy, Mexico, India, Greece, and the United Kingdom.

Band and Choir students had the opportunity to learn music from the Mexican culture and there were mixed responses from students. Many students were excited about the opportunity to learn new music, regardless of which culture it comes from. We were able to discuss holidays like Día de los Muertos (which the band's song Día de los Muertos March was based on), and we were able to discuss how different cultures use music. The choir students had a much more challenging time with "La Llorona," as many of them do not speak Spanish as fluently as is needed. We discussed the song and its meaning and we talked about the different versions of the myth that exist in different parts of Latin America/South America. The song itself was a bit challenging and many of the choir students felt overwhelmed. We had some of our Spanish-speaking students assist with the pronunciation of words to try to help the class learn the music, but more time is needed to accurately learn the words with the melody. The students agree that we would like to work on it next year and program it for one of our concerts to help continue celebrating the diversity of our students.

### **3. Did it do more?**

This grant achieved more than even expected. In Video Productions, students shared experiences and passions flourished as they were recording their videos. The video production class produced four videos about advanced art. These videos advertised the program and also integrated cultural aspects of art.

In Yearbook, we all became very vested in what we were doing, and that was super fun. We are very proud of the students for their effort and role in championing diversity. They didn't just record diversity, they soaked it up while doing their work. Their brainstorming developed around the activities of our campus, which was inspiring. Student agency flourished as students inquired about events, made necessary arrangements to schedule photo shoots, and began suggesting what they'd like to see with their cameras. Mr. Yates felt like a facilitator, which was really cool for him. He says that he simply provided the tools, gave encouragement, and added enthusiasm.

In AVID, we talked a lot about why it's important to have structured support for inclusive diversity programs. We started with the academic microcosm of our classroom. We all agreed that a comfortable, safe learning environment was essential to allowing students to grow academically in AVID. Then, students learned that our classroom was analogous to that of college. Students want to go to a college where there is a feeling of unity and an opportunity for comfortable learning. It seems logical that if we learn about diverse cultures, we are less likely to distinguish ourselves from them. And, we are more likely to promote inclusion in our own culture. The discussion around this concept was more than Mr. Yates anticipated when we set our Unified by Diversity goals.

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This year, culinary arts pushed the envelope, creating complicated meals that had never been done before in this program. For example, one of our Vietnamese students took on the challenge with his group of cooking Phở, which included a mix of special spices that created a wonderful aroma. Students developed restaurant-quality dishes and exceeded expectations.

The advanced art students also pushed the envelope by using mural art to convey the grant theme of, *Unified by Diversity*. They research different countries, continents, languages, and disabilities to symbolize the grant and our school. Even with the current controversies in our country around diversity, the students were able to approach this topic in a positive, non-partisan way. Another successful aspect of the grant was the finale performance at the Rincon Middle School talent show called *Unified by Diversity*. It included a combination of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students as well as Rincon Middle School staff members. The students and staff are part of the Peers Uniting Peers program, a collaborative effort of Mr. Novello, Ms. Todd, and Ms. Josephson, and all the amazing paraprofessionals to bring students of all backgrounds together to build friendships and have fun. The goal for this student-choreographed dance was to highlight different cultures. The first song represented Lunar New Year. The second song honored the traditions of the Hawaiian culture. The final song showcased ballet folklórico dance styles. We also collaborated with two other staff members, Ms. Rojas and Ms. Selene, who designed clothing for the production. Many RMS students designed accessories and created the choreography.

In Band, the students had a very good question, which led to some research on composers. A few students said that while they enjoyed playing Día de los Muertos March, it didn't *sound* very Mexican. They commented that it sounded "white-washed," or like it was created by a non-Mexican composer, which it was. This question led to a talk about composers who are women and people of color (POC) in the music industry and how they are vastly underrepresented. When students asked why, it was explained that women and POC composers do not get as much notoriety or recognition, so their music isn't chosen as often, which means they can't become as famous as some other composers. In the end, the students decided that we need more diversity in music composition, and some of them even felt moved to create music of their own, as many of them identify as POC. In Choir, we had a talk about how challenging it must be for English Language Learners to learn music in English, and how the English-speaking students were struggling in Spanish. In the end, they realized that if we sing diverse music, they all end up having the same struggles. They want to program more diverse music for our future performances to better reflect the culture of students at Rincon. The students who tried the accordion realized that it is much harder (and heavier) than they thought it was, and didn't realize how much still went into learning it. They have more appreciation for the musicians who play the accordion at their family parties!

**4. Are there changes you want to make before you do this again next year?**

In Video Productions, we would like to focus more on documentary filmmaking next year and continue to use our newly purchased equipment towards that goal. The challenge in chorus was learning the music, which is written in Spanish. Before we do this again next year, we would need to begin practicing the music in the fall or purchase cultural songs with English translations. In Yearbook and AVID, there is always a need for changes in the curriculum, but they are minor and mostly revolve around organization and planning rather than functional goals.

As far as improvements in culinary arts, there is always room for growth. Giving students a choice when choosing each country's recipe is a great idea, but can be a challenge. For example, students want to choose recipes that can be extremely time-consuming and not possible over a couple of days due to time constraints. However, in the future, more time will be integrated into the planning portion of the dishes in order to monitor the student ingredients more closely and provide further guidance. In advanced art, next year there will be a designated team lead for each mural as well as other roles in each team. We will spend more time on interpersonal communication strategies and accountability, since this year, some students struggled with working appropriately with teammates.

For Band and Choir, something we would change is that the teacher and students would spend more time researching the composers to make sure that we are choosing music by a composer who reflects the culture we are trying to represent. There is a short list of POC composers out there, and in the future, they want to pull from that pool. For Choir, the teacher believes that easier music would be appropriate, or to plan for more time to work on lyrics. The students liked "La Llorona" and enjoyed listening to it, but singing it was such a challenge that they felt defeated. So Ms. Barlow would choose something that is in both English and Spanish, or has easier Spanish for our non-Spanish speakers.

One thing students did not like was that their productivity during the grant was interrupted a lot by many weeks of testing. They are communicating with the leadership team to see how the schedule can be shortened next year so that it does not interrupt large grant projects like this.

**5. Can it be adapted/shared with other grade levels and teachers?**

In Video Productions, students in 7th and 8th grade were collaborating together to interview and document students in the other art classes on campus throughout the school year using video production techniques. Next year, this could be expanded to other subject areas.

The Yearbook and AVID teacher said that it would be great to share the goals of our grant with the school. Staff would simply be uniting their ongoing efforts in support of diversity at our school by establishing a school-wide theme for unifying through diversity.

Although the grant applied to all grade levels, only 7th and 8th grade students created murals. For mural art, the grant could be expanded to 6th graders who could design a group mural.

In Culinary Arts, this project absolutely can be adapted to other grade levels and teachers. For example, on our campus, different grade levels could explore different countries and cultures through Social Studies and in conjunction with the culinary art students.

Music is very attainable and flexible, so Ms. Barlow thinks that other grade levels could very easily try to adapt it to use with their students. Anyone can learn to sing with time, so breaking “La Llorona” into sentences and practicing the Spanish one sentence a week would aid with almost any grade level learning it. As for the band piece, the “Día de los Muertos March” was easier than we had anticipated, so Ms. Barlow thinks it would be appropriate for grades 6-8, but would be too challenging for the elementary level. The accordion is very heavy and needs large hands to play, so she does not think it would work for younger students. But she believes grades 6-12 would love being able to try learning the accordion!