

Collaborate Beyond School

Engage with your community



Atwater Elementary, Shorewood, Wisconsin

Arts education does not need to stay within school walls. Learning is sparked by curiosity and rooted in exploration, and communities that surround schools can fill students with awe, inspire deep inquiry, and provide a wealth of authentic exploration opportunities. Local institutions, ranging from design agencies to universities and after-school programs, can become invaluable partners that enrich students' experiences.

Community Partners

Community partners have become a cornerstone in teaching and learning at Roosevelt Elementary in Keego Harbor, Michigan. Principal Dennis Rapal said he's seen a

paradigm shift at his school during the past three years. "Traditionally, teachers tell students what to do and follow up to make sure students get the right answer. We flipped that," he explained. "Students tell us what they're interested in. Students are now the architects of their inquiry-rich learning process. They design their learning pathways with our community partners and go deeper than we've ever gone before."

Because they use design thinking as the iterative process to solve problems, Roosevelt Elementary staff reached out to neighboring Sundberg-Ferar, a globally renowned design firm whose clients include Coca-Cola vending machines, Kenmore appliances,

Delta showerheads, and numerous medical device firms. Jeff DeBoer, the agency's chief innovation officer, comes to Roosevelt Elementary and talks with students about product design and redesign. "He makes sure kids know that problem-solving in the real world isn't a race to the finish line. Designers keep reimagining improvements," Rapal said. "DeBoer treats the students like co-designers, sketching their ideas as they collaboratively brainstorm new vacuums, toothbrushes, and sponge handles."

The partnership also involves students getting out of the school and visiting the Sundberg-Ferar headquarters. "The depth of questions our students asked the designers was significantly above their grade level—not only in their vocabulary, but in their conceptual understanding of what it means to design solutions with an aesthetic in mind," Rapal observed.

Students see similarities between the work of designers and architects in their architecture classes, taught by Lawrence Technological University students, who visit the school twice each month. Hands-on lessons about form and function, scale, and perspective are tangible as students experiment with folded paper and 3-D printed structural



Roosevelt Elementary, Keego Harbor, Michigan



Los Berros Elementary School, Lompoc, California

supports. Walls in Roosevelt Elementary are covered with sticky notes, where students write the similarities among artists', designers', engineers', and architects' work. The key parallels students see between these fields include the steps of asking questions, sketching ideas, and exploring others' points of view. Another wall features students' notes on how art is essential in many careers and industries, such as doctors, industrial designers, graphic designers, entertainment, and publishing. Students at Roosevelt Elementary have come to realize that anyone who creates anything is an artist.

Student initiative is seen in each of their community partnerships. When Lowe's awarded a grant

to the school, students asked for help in managing the project the home improvement store funded. A Lowe's project manager comes to Roosevelt Elementary to help students understand project management—focusing on their plan, preparation, problem-solving, and steps to project completion. “There is a wealth of experience in every community—just step outside of your building and connect with them,” Rapal recommended.

Step Into the Community

Just as at Roosevelt Elementary, stepping outside of the school building to engage the community is a key to success at Creedmoor Elementary in Creedmoor, North Carolina. “We used to struggle with family engagement until we decided to step out of our building and meet parents in the community,” admitted principal Nancy Russell. “Many of our parents fear school or have unpleasant memories.”

According to the principal, 36 percent of students' parents don't speak English fluently and find classic school-based parent events intimidating. “When we take our art program off campus, it levels the playing field. Art is a way parents can communicate with us. And they get excited to create art with their kids,” Russell noted.

The results are stunning, with tenfold increases in participation. For example, for years the Math and Literacy Family Nights held at the school averaged only about 15 participants. But the most recent Create Night, which was held in the community center, attracted more than 150 participants. During this colorful family event, teachers talked with parents about the power of creativity. The success at this venue led to their next community partnership. The manager of the apartment complex where many Creedmoor students live was so inspired by Create Night that she offered to frame and display student artwork throughout the building's lobby. As a result, Russell explained, students “feel like they're famous artists and that our community cares.”

Seeing teachers in their community center and their apartment complex has helped parents develop deeper relationships with educators. Stephanie Layton, a Creedmoor kindergarten teacher, reflects on the realities of their community and the personal insights she gained: “Life is tough here due to poverty. Only four of my 24 kindergarteners' parents have jobs. Our Create Night helped parents see that I'm not judgmental.” During Create Night, Layton worked with parents to complete the Crayola Visions of a Child's Future exercise,



Students at Roosevelt Elementary in Keego Harbor, Michigan, actively engage and collaborate together during Chalk Talk.

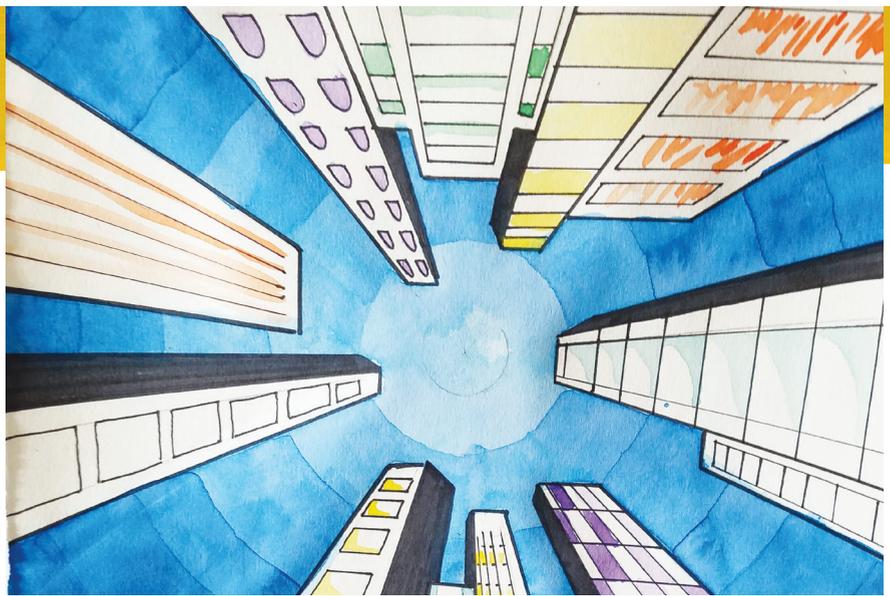
Roosevelt
Elementary
Design Thinking
Protocols

during which families had engaging conversations with their kids about how creativity can shape their future. “The parents are really proud of their children, just like I am,” Layton continued. “The art gave me the opportunity to see parents’ passions for their children. I’m honored that they shared so much with me. I’m touched by how much closer we have become.”

Russell understands the need to reach out to families beyond the school walls and continues to look for new ways to get into the community. “It is a challenge for families, especially those without cars, to get back to school in the evening. Now we ask ourselves what we can do to make it more convenient for them,” she said. Next stop—the trailer park where two full busloads of students board each day. “Why not ask the trailer park managers if we can set up tents and bring art and dinner to the families?” Russell has pondered. “Just ask” has become her motto. She’s also approached the health clinic—which said yes—so the school will set up a tent and hold a Create Night there, too.

Give and Receive

Successful community partnerships are about giving as well



Bush Elementary School, Idaho Falls, Idaho

as receiving. When Los Berros Elementary in Santa Barbara, California, decided to embrace arts integration, staff knew sharing this pedagogy with others would help embed the approach beyond their school.

So the school connected with the local YMCA, which provides after-school care in the building, and invited their staff to all its professional development workshops. “We eliminated classic homework this year, looking for more meaningful learning experiences. We knew that shift would impact the after-school care program,” said principal Heather Anderson. “Traditionally, their programming focused on helping students do homework. Those worksheets were not as rigorous as the hands-on art that our

teachers and the YMCA staff now do with students.”

Including the child care program staff in arts-integration professional learning has increased continuity for students. The emphasis on creative thinking instead of rote worksheets has enriched the learning experiences and raised expectations for original thought.

Partnering with community organizations helps embed art-rich instructional practices during the school day, family events, and after-school programs. The impact of integrating art is seen within and beyond school. **P**

Cheri Sterman is the director of education at Crayola and vice-chair of the Partnership for 21st Century Learning.

To embed the design-thinking process schoolwide, Roosevelt Elementary faculty created a series of protocols that are being adopted by the district’s larger community of learners.

CHALK TALK. This visually rich brainstorming process builds communication and collaboration skills. Ideas are written or sketched—with no talking. Small groups use poster boards or sidewalk chalk on the playground to draw a problem and visually

brainstorm solutions. Every few minutes the groups rotate. New eyes see each group’s work and build upon it with more sketches. The rotation continues until the groups return to their original ideas. They discuss solutions, including others’ contributions.

CAROUSEL SHARES. At any point in the design or creating process, students or teachers can call for a collaborative “carousel share.” Students take responsibility for helping each other reflect and

redesign. The work is set on display, and students walk around it. Keeping eyes on the work, they critique it and offer feedback.

I-CENTER. The school’s library has been transformed into a learning hub focused on information, integration, and innovation. One of the favorite statements in the I-center is, “I used to think. ... Now I think. ...” Having each student reflect on how they see problems and solutions differently is intentional in the I-center.