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More Than Music and Art: Meet Our PJUSD VAPA Teachers

Meet our District's Visual and Performing Arts & Music teachers and see how music and the arts are helping students learn, create, and grow across our PJUSD Schools.

From singing and dancing to painting and playing instruments, students across our elementary schools are learning and creating with the help of Amber Suniga, Karen-Symone Lee, Iveth Faatiga, Leandro Lopez, Salina Williams, and Moises Marquez.

Together, they help bring music and Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) to our elementary students as part of PJUSD's larger arts program. Their work gives students an early foundation in the arts that can continue as they move into middle and high school.

Learning starts early, with kindergarten students singing, moving, and learning about beat and rhythm. As students grow, they learn instruments like the recorder and ukulele and explore art, design, illustration, ensembles, and more.

For the team, the arts are about more than creating art or learning an instrument. They give students a chance to try something new, build confidence, and discover what they can create.



“The arts create a low-stakes environment; it’s not scary. Our students are willing to take more chances, and it creates a space for them to explore,” said Symone Lee.

Faatiga and Suniga see connections between the arts, brain development, and classroom learning. Lopez wants students to see how the arts are all around them and how those skills can help them become stronger learners. Williams enjoys introducing students to different artists and cultures before encouraging them to create something of their own.

And the students are excited. Williams said students know when VAPA Day is coming and do not want to miss it. According to the team, it’s been a big boost to attendance. “Their eyes light up,” she said.

Marquez, who supports elementary band, also teaches at Creekside Middle School, where he is launching a new Mariachi class this year. He hopes students will be singing together by winter and performing with instruments in the spring.

Each spring, ensembles from across PJUSD come together at the Francis J. Bettencourt Performing Arts Theater, giving students a chance to proudly share what they have learned with their families and community. The team hopes to see our PJUSD families come out and enjoy the annual performance.