



EMBRACING OUR DIFFERENCES

LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT SURVEY REPORT



2024-2025
SCHOOL YEAR

As Vice President of Learning & Engagement, I am proud to share the inspiring stories, lasting partnerships, and bold impact made possible through our work in classrooms, community spaces, and creative hubs across the region. **At the heart of our mission is a simple but powerful idea: that education, rooted in empathy and inclusion, has the power to change lives.**

Over the past year, we have deepened our connections with educators, students, and community partners—strengthening initiatives, expanding access to our resources, and reimagining how the arts can support character development and cultural understanding. Whether through field trips to our annual outdoor exhibition, interactive reading days, professional development for educators, or our ever-growing Coexistence Club movement, our programs continue to foster curiosity, critical thinking, and compassion.

This report is both a reflection and a celebration—of the thousands of learners who have engaged with us, the educators who champion our work, and the partners who help us dream bigger.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we are creating spaces where every student is seen, every voice is heard, and every difference is embraced.

Patrick Arthur Jackson

VP, Learning & Engagement





Interactive participation is one of the most effective delivery methods for teaching students the abstract concepts of kindness and inclusion.

Our year-round education initiatives represent the most important aspect of our efforts - reaching and impacting the lives of tens of thousands of students, educators, and adults around the world annually.

Included in this report are the results from the educator surveys distributed throughout the **2024-2025 school year** for the following programs and initiatives:

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During the 2024-2025 school year,



participated in Embracing Our Differences' programming across all initiatives.



Bucket Fillers Reading Day

Using the concept of an invisible bucket to encourage positive behavior, the Bucket Fillers' book series teaches children how to "fill buckets" through acts of kindness, love, and appreciation for others. Embracing Our Differences provides books to each participating student and classroom. Pre-K through third grade educators have the option of selecting an in-person volunteer reader or a pre-recorded webisode, featuring local arts organizations and author Carol McCloud, for their classroom.



10,006

Students

537

Classrooms

80

Schools



10,543

Books Donated



90

Educator Survey Responses

537 educators solicited



How would you rate your overall reading day experience?



4.8/ 5 Stars

based on average rating

Program Sponsors



Kiwaniis
CLUB OF SARASOTA



Bucket Fillers

What did you like about this program?

Selected Comments:

- I love that my third graders brought a knowledge of Bucket Fillers with them this year and were able to add to that with the lid concept! They loved it.
- The children were so excited to get new books and read along. They loved seeing the actual author of the story.
- We loved the entirety of this program! I have used Embracing Our Differences in some capacity every year since I started teaching and am always so thankful for the opportunity to participate.
- I love that the students experience someone else reading aloud to them, someone they are not familiar with. It's a wonderful way for the community to get involved in the schools! In addition, I love that the students get a copy of the book to share at home! I also had the students watch the read aloud as it was different from the in-person experience, and they loved that as well.

Examples of student comments & reactions:

Selected Comments:

- "We can take this home!" That was my favorite comment. I love that they are building a love and desire to read new books and build their library/love of reading.
- One student commented that now he can read the book at home over and over and think about the reader on the screen that read to the class.
- My students were telling their peers that they were filling their bucket while they were sharing, playing, and being a kind friend.
- "I just filled someone's bucket!"
- "I can fill my mom's bucket by cleaning up messes!"
- My class was spellbound during the book reading. They enjoyed discussing the bucket lid aspect and giving examples of how that works in their everyday lives.
- "I love this book, I can't wait to fill someone's bucket!"
- "Yay, I get to take the book home!"
- "My little sister dips my bucket a lot." Students made many connections to their own lives with dipping, filling, and using their lid.
- "I love getting books and having them read to me and I can read along!"
- Students were busy brainstorming ways to fill buckets as soon as the lesson wrapped up.
- One of my non-verbal students pointed often at the read aloud or at the book in his mailbox and wanted to read it over and over again!



Embracing Our Differences Reading Day



In partnership with Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, Embracing Our Differences Reading Day celebrates literacy through a wide variety of books for pre-K through third grade students. These age-appropriate stories focus on themes of acceptance and belonging. Educators select either an in-person volunteer reader or an on demand video read along, and all students and classes are provided with activity videos and their own copy of the selected book.



14,013

Students

737

Classrooms

100

Schools



14,750

Books Donated



94

Educator Survey Responses

737 educators solicited



How would you rate your overall reading day experience?



4.8 / 5 Stars

based on average rating

Program Sponsors



THE PATTERSON FOUNDATION



United Way Suncoast

Schwab Charitable

What did you like about this program?

Selected Comments:

- I loved that the kids all had the same book and could "read" to each other. They were so excited to write their names inside. Thank you for continuing this program!
- This book was great for all my students, especially my Hispanic students. This was very important as the Hispanic Culture was included this year.
- I love that all students get a book, especially working at a Title I school. I also liked the engaging activity at the end after the story.
- I love how interactive the video is! My students loved being able to hear a new story and also complete the activity at the end!
- A district administrator read the story which made it more valuable. The best part (agreed upon by the students) was the movement activity that went with the book. Students will be able to take that experience home to share with their families.



Examples of student comments & reactions:

Selected Comments:

- The ELL students were so excited to share words they understood from their native language.
- My Hispanic students were very happy and proud as this book was about their culture. It was very important the Hispanic culture was represented in such an engaging manner.
- "Look, Mrs. Slattery, the girl looks like me!"
- My students really like the movement/dance activity after!
- My student who speaks Spanish was so excited to listen to a story with Spanish words!
- My kids now want to create movements for parts of books when we read. One said "we need to do this with our books!"
- "Oh my gosh that's Spanish!! I speak that at home! I know this word!!!" "No Ms. Lloyd, you're saying Abuela wrong. You don't pronounce the B!" It was so sweet and we loved every minute of it!
- The students thought the pictures were beautiful and the story had a wonderful take away message!
- The kids enjoyed the yoga after the book, and they loved the various voices the reader used for different characters.
- One of my students only speaks Portuguese. I know this story resonated with my other students and how they can continue to support him during this transition. He loves art and was very excited about the cartoon and speech bubbles and felt very confident participating with the video to complete his.
- One student loves the fact that Imani did not give up and didn't listen to the bullies.
- They cherished their books and were on cloud nine! One kid said, "I can't wait to take this book home and read it to my baby brother!" One student said, "I am so excited to read this to my mom tonight - she will be so proud!"





Exhibition School Tours



Tours of our annual exhibition have become a signature of our education efforts with thousands of students worldwide benefiting from in-person, live virtual, and on-demand video tours each school year. Through peer-guided conversations with high school aged docents utilizing Visual Thinking Strategies pedagogy, exhibition tours

embrace kindness and inclusion while providing connections to art education and curriculum engagement through student-driven exploration.

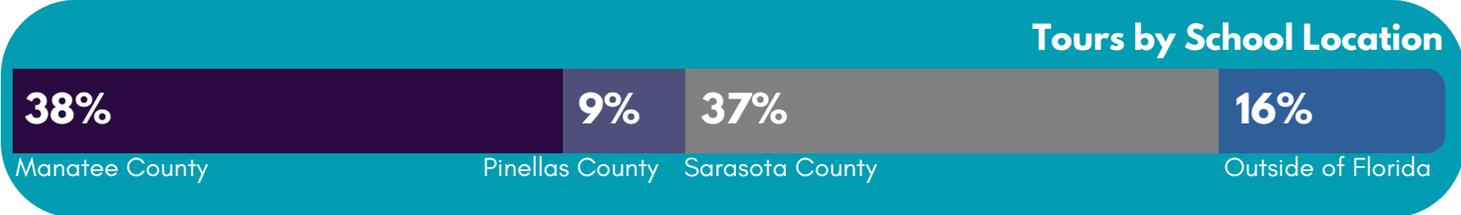
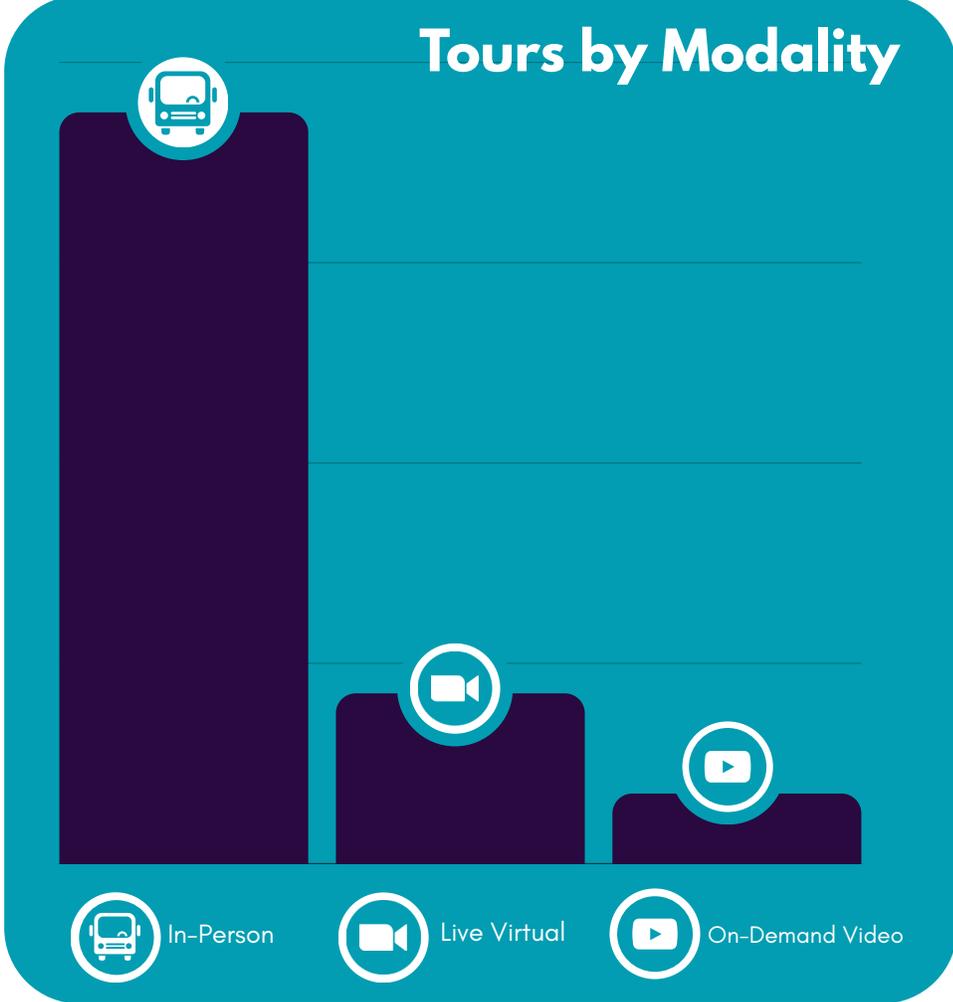


10,842
Students

391
Classrooms

391
Educators

98 Tours **118** Student Docents





39 Educator Survey Responses

391 educators solicited

Tour Modality



Grade Level



School Location



Years Visited



How would you rate your overall **EOD educational experience?**



4.6 / 5 Stars

based on average rating



The **student docents** enhanced our educational experience.



4.3 / 5 Stars

based on average rating



The **online lesson plans** provided were meaningful and beneficial tools.



4.3 / 5 Stars

based on average rating



What was the most significant learning outcome for your students?

Selected Comments:

- I think they learned that being different is something we should celebrate. They love to think and talk about the various pieces of art and how they explore differences.
- This was beneficial for the Title I students at my school to have the opportunity to leave campus and be immersed in this learning experience. Thank you making it happen and offering this unique exploration.
- I think it was powerful for them to see themselves represented in one way or another in the artwork.
- My students saw art in a new way. They saw that other students' artwork was on display with these huge billboards, and they thought that was so interesting. It showed them the importance of embracing our differences and accepting our friends for who they are. My students gained a lot more insight on people and art.

We are always excited to hear student reactions to the exhibition. Please share one or more moments.

Selected Comments:

- The new students who hadn't been before were awed by the exhibit and the fact that they themselves could participate and potentially be on one of the banners.
- "Sometimes I feel like that and I thought I was the only one. I didn't know other people felt like me."
- Our students responded very well to the docents. The lesson plans on the website prepared the teachers and students well. Thank you!
- There was a photo relating to dyslexia - working with students with learning and language delays, it was great to see that. My students really felt seen.
- I had one student say they didn't think their art could really matter, but it was so cool to see other students' artwork on display for everyone to see. I love when my students see art as something they can further and even make a career out of one day.



Comments on the overall educational experience:

Selected Comments:

- The students were helpful, engaging and seemed to enjoy showing us around and asked our students thought provoking questions about the displays.
- Docents were engaging my students with open-ended questions which was very helpful for them to explore the art.
- Each year, I get see kids grow in terms of thoughtfulness, perspective and empathy in such a short amount of time. Very powerful experience for kids.
- My students and the staff/chaperones had a wonderful time! We brought 3rd and 8th graders from our K-8 school and they all loved it. I was excited to see it was guided and it really kept the students interested in the artwork and the guides asked them some great questions. I loved that one group was asked to reenact the painting, and the students loved it!

Is there any additional information you would like to share with us about your experience?

Selected Comments:

- Keep spreading kindness! Thank you for being a spark of light in our dark days.
- Thank you for your dedication to showcasing artwork that can build our community with empathy and kindness.
- We absolutely loved it and it is so important for our Title I students to be able to experience something like this that they would probably never go do outside of school. Thank you so much for making this free for our school and students!
- Honestly, my kids were not interested in visiting the exhibition when we shared our itinerary for the day. By the time we went home, many of them said it was their favorite part.
- We are so grateful to you for your time and the experience we had touring the art virtually. We would have loved to make it in-person, but it just wasn't possible this year. Virtual was a fantastic alternative!





Education Ambassadors

Each school year, cohorts of educators and administrators from Manatee and Sarasota County participate in a yearlong program focused on fostering resilience, kindness, and respect within learning communities in innovative ways. While completing over eleven hours of professional development, participants work with students on projects that highlight Embracing Our Differences' core values.



32

Educator Participants

24

Schools Represented



8,727

Students Impacted



How would you rate your overall ed. ambassador experience?



4.9 / 5 Stars

based on average rating



32 Educator Survey Responses

32 educators solicited

What did you find most valuable about the program?

Selected Comments:

- I appreciate the ability to explore the various perspectives and nonprofit programs in our community. I also appreciate the ability to creatively engage young learners in opportunities to feel valued and strong as members of the school and the community at-large.
- The presentations were amazing and well received. The ongoing support of our classrooms and the teaching profession as we educate the future members of our global society, was wonderful. We have the privilege to educate the whole child as we collaborate with other individuals, particularly those involved with the Embracing Our Differences program.
- What I found most valuable about the program was how it opened my eyes to the power of inclusion. It showed me being part of conversations around identity and empathy helped others grow in kindness.
- It was a new experience as an education ambassador for EOD. The program is wonderful for many reasons. However, I enjoyed networking with other educators and loved the opportunity to create a lesson plan that focused on kindness, love, and community building.



What part of the program did you find least effective in helping you grow as an educator this school year?

Selected Comments:

- Compared to the in-person meetings full of connection and engagement, the Zoom calls didn't have that same level of direct human connection.
- The in-person meetings were difficult for me to work out with my young child at home.
- I did not find anything that was not effective. The timeline of receiving funds would be great if it was moved up though. I feel that, for me, the same issue happens each year with testing getting in the way of some of the projects I want to do.
- There were not any parts of the program that I felt were ineffective in helping me grow as an individual and educator.



What additional resources would have been beneficial?

Selected Comments:

- Having the final project presentation meeting in-person. Also, perhaps part of a session where past participants presented previous projects early on, like how it's been done in the art instructor Summer Workshop.
- I could never tire of hearing different community groups. Could it be possible to double up presenters? Or maybe add an optional bi-monthly meeting virtually. As an Evangelical Christian, it would be great to have my faith represented as well. In general, I felt that Christianity was a minority within the group and not the popular stance. This, in itself, taught me a few lessons that are poignant to this opportunity about my perception and valuing of others that are different than me.
- Just a thought, maybe a shared resource page or a way to chat with the group or ask questions throughout the year when we aren't in class.





Art Intensive Workshop

Our annual workshop for visual art educators seeks to answer questions, provide opportunities for collaboration, and present best practices on Embracing Our Differences student artwork creation while inspiring, reinvigorating, and exploring current challenges in the field of art education.



32

Schools Represented



46

Educator Participants



11,257

Students Impacted



46

 Educator Survey Responses

46 educators solicited

Overall, the quality of the workshop was excellent.



The presenters were knowledgeable.



My knowledge of the content increased.



I plan to apply the knowledge & skills acquired in my classroom.



I feel that my time at this workshop was well spent.



I would recommend this workshop to a colleague.





What did you find most valuable about the workshop?

Selected Comments:

- I found the hands-on approach to be the most valuable part of the workshop. Experiencing a tour firsthand, seeing how it operates, and hearing the positive reflections were incredibly impactful. The host did a wonderful job of immersing the artists in an authentic art environment, thanks to the Ringling. Additionally, the workshop gave me clearer strategies for introducing this topic to my students. Hearing examples from other teachers was especially helpful – I realized I had been overcomplicating things, particularly for elementary students.
- I really enjoyed being taught in the way I should be teaching my students. It gave me real-world examples of teaching practice applications and put me in the shoes of my students.
- I appreciated having so significant time and opportunity to connect with fellow art teachers. Additionally, the time and space work on our collages was especially nice to allow for organic conversations while making art without any pressure of expectation.



What part(s) of the workshop did you find least effective?

Selected Comments:

- I think the literacy section could have been explained better in the beginning. It was a lot of fun but the directions were unclear as were the objectives, still a lot of fun though!
- I would say all of it was useful, but if I had to pick one thing that was least effective I would say the group book project. It was fun though.
- The activities were not helpful in helping the students develop ideas for such a deep concept. Especially the book reading/book making activity. It seems that would be better suited for language arts teachers.
- I can't pick the least effective session because they were all beneficial in some way. However, I would have liked more time in the museum as a group discussing art using VTS.

