

Coronavirus Florida: Sarasota-Manatee arts educators unite to provide remote arts instruction



This screenshot shows an online arts lesson created by Embracing Our Differences as part of the Suncoast Arts REACH Task Force curriculum. [YOUTUBE]

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A partnership of arts and education organizations will be providing parents and teachers access to online arts lessons.

More than a dozen local institutions have come together to form an arts education task force with the goal of helping parents teach their children about the arts while schools are closed to help slow the spread of the coronavirus.

The [Suncoast Arts REACH Task Force](#) includes art, education and philanthropic organizations that will provide free online arts education resources and an online resource calendar with daily arts-based activities.

“We are overwhelmed with gratitude that the Arts and Cultural Community came together to provide such meaningful and engaging experiences for our families, now more than ever,” said Laura Kingsley, Assistant Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer for Sarasota County Schools.

The task force includes the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County, Asolo Repertory Theatre, Circus Arts Conservatory, Embracing Our Differences, Manatee Arts Education Council, Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, The Ringling, the Van Wezel Foundation, the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, Venice Theater, the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County, Manatee County School District and Sarasota County Schools.

Every Friday, the site will post new daily activities for remote arts learning. A press release announcing the initiative said the activities could range from videos on how to make costumes, museum tours, storytime reading events and virtual art lessons.

The materials are aimed toward children of all ages, and the initiative is funded by the Van Wezel Foundation.

With schools closed for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year and more than half of all child care facilities shut down, teachers have been forced to shift their curriculum online. This can be particularly challenging for the arts teachers, where much of the instruction is hands-on. Task force organizers hope these resources will be put to good use by instructors.

Janet Kahn, Executive Director of the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County, said the online tool will be useful now, but she hopes they will also lay the groundwork for further arts education once schools and child care centers have reopened.

“These arts integration experiences are a wonderful resource for preschool teachers to intentionally plan art activities with children whether in the classroom or online through ZOOM meetings,” Kahn said. “The activities build a teacher’s toolbox for use now during these uncertain times and in the future and help facilitate positive connections with the families they serve.”