

## **MEDIA CONTACTS**

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### **Twenty-five Area Teachers Complete Yearlong Embracing Our Differences' Education Ambassador Initiative**

*The educators worked toward creating more inclusive and respectful school cultures by participating in professional development workshops and designing their own EOD-inspired projects.*

(Sarasota, FL; June 8, 2021) Twenty-five teachers from 20 Sarasota and Manatee schools engaged in a yearlong Education Ambassadors initiative coordinated by Embracing Our Differences. According to Ben Jewell-Plocher, EOD's education director, the program was designed "to empower teachers and school staff to carry messages of diversity, inclusion, respect and integrity into their schools in innovative ways." Jewell-Plocher adds that, through this program, members become the EOD "experts" at their schools and participated in professional development workshops hosted by EOD and led by teaching artists and presenters from The Kennedy Center (in partnership with The Van Wezel), and New 42 Studios (in partnership with the Hermitage Artist Retreat, ALSO Youth and others). Each teacher worked with their students to create original, EOD-inspired projects centered on community-building activities that inspired cooperation, communication, and empathy. The teachers received funding towards their EOD-inspired projects and a \$500 stipend at the end of the project. The initiative was funded by Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation.

“Words alone cannot do justice for the work put forth by our Education Ambassadors this year,” says Jewell-Plocher. “Amidst an ever-changing, challenging school year, these teachers committed time, energy, and effort towards professional development and the creation of innovative, school-based diversity and inclusion projects for their students. The total student impact of 6,485 would not have been possible without their dedication and ingenuity.”

**A quick glance at four of the Education Ambassador projects:**

- **Brittany Braniger (Rowlett Middle Academy): “Through Our Eyes.”** Two hundred elementary and middle school students collaborated to create a multi-disciplinary conversation on diversity. First, elementary students wrote about what diversity meant to them. Then, middle school theatre students took their responses and created a poem. The poem was then shared with middle school art students who created illustrations inspired by a line from the poem. A culminating video and printed catalogue were produced and shared with all students and families.
- **Freda Williams (Pine View School): “The Bubble.”** How many times have we heard the saying “oh you are just living in your bubble” regarding relating to other people? Thirty third-grade students explored their bubbles, what they have in common and what they could learn from one another through the creation of bubble art projects with their families. Final projects were displayed at school

allowing students to share and reflect on the many similarities and differences that make them both unique and connected to one another.

- **Tatiana Hernandez (Buffalo Creek Middle School): “Deconstructing Race Through Visual Art Color Theory.”** Two hundred and fifty visual arts students explored the challenging topic of race through original art projects. All artworks were created after class discussions, written reflection, and visual examination of works by Black artists, including Kehinde Wiley, Amy Sberald and Kara Walker. The final project included: a collage of various “flesh tones” created by mixing red, yellow, blue and white acrylic paint accompanied by a mind map illustrating student interpretation of what race is; seven large-scale portraits of Black figures; individual silhouette paintings and collages illustrating a personal, fictional or historical narrative.
- **Asiyah Luqman (North Port High School): “Cautious Consumption and Media Literacy.”** One of the quickest ways for discrimination and hate speech to spread is through social media. One hundred and sixty language arts students explored how to critically examine the validity of content that they interact with every day and identify the tools needed to examine content before taking ideas at face value. Students researched different media sources, polled their fellow students on their social media and news consumption habits and presented their results and solutions to validate and seek out diverse sources through interactive, professional presentations.

For 18 years, Embracing Our Differences has drawn on the passion and perception of artists, students, writers, and others to create powerful statements of diversity and acceptance in its annual outdoor public art exhibition consisting of 50 billboard-sized works of art and accompanying quotes. The scale and impact of this outdoor exhibition has continued to grow, attracting 3,560,000 visitors since its inception. This exhibit is the heart of a year-round program of activities designed to use art as a catalyst to create awareness and promote diversity. **The 2021 exhibit has been extended and is on view at Nathan Benderson Park in Sarasota through August 8.** For more information about *Embracing Our Differences*, call 941-404-5710, or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).

**Photo captions:**

- *Brittany Braniger and students at Rowlett Middle Academy*
- *Tatiana Hernandez and students at Buffalo Creek Middle School*
- *Students at Buffalo Creek Middle School*
- *Artwork by students at Buffalo Creek Middle School*

**About Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation**

The Charles and Margery Barancik family has long believed in the power of philanthropy to shape our world and enrich the lives of all people. It was the expression of this belief that led them in 2014 to establish the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation—a private, family foundation located in Sarasota, Florida. The Barancik Foundation creates initiatives and awards grants in Sarasota and beyond in the areas of education, humanitarian causes, arts and culture, the environment, and medical research. Visit [barancikfoundation.org](http://barancikfoundation.org).

**About Embracing Our Differences**

Embracing Our Differences is a not-for-profit organization that uses the transformational power of art and education to celebrate and promote the diversity of the human family. It accomplishes this through an annual, large-scale outdoor juried art exhibition and a comprehensive series of educational initiatives, programs and resources designed for teachers and students. Visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).