



## Embracing Our Differences Receives Grant

By [Sarasota Scene](#) |

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Embracing Our Differences (EOD) announces it has been awarded a \$15,000 grant from the Bishop-Parker Foundation to support its yearlong educational initiatives in Manatee County.

According to Patrick Arthur Jackson, EOD's vice president of learning and engagement, EOD's educational programs reached 16,586 students and 463 educators in Manatee County during the 2023-2024 year. These programs included free field trips to EOD's internationally recognized outdoor art exhibition, opportunities for students to create artwork and quotations for the exhibition, art and writing workshops, education seminars and two annual reading days that provided books to pre-K through third-grade students and their classrooms. Jackson adds that EOD's programming is tailored to reach students and educators from all walks of life, spanning pre-K to high school, across public, private, and charter schools.

"Hatred, bullying, and discrimination are still far too common in schools. Our programs aim to inspire students to counter these challenges with kindness and understanding through the power of art and writing, says Jackson. "This generous grant from the Bishop-Parker Foundation is a testament to its commitment to standing up for

Manatee County's students and teachers. Their support will allow us to continue helping students build self-esteem, develop social skills, and gain cultural awareness, while also equipping educators with tools to foster inclusive classrooms. Together, we are creating a community where everyone feels welcomed and valued."

Jackson points out that bullying remains a significant challenge for many students. The 2022 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey revealed that nearly 58% of Manatee County middle and high school students reported experiencing verbal bullying, while 10% admitted to skipping school because of it. By offering inclusive, educational opportunities, EOD empowers students and teachers to challenge biases, embrace different perspectives, and build stronger communities.

One participating Manatee County teacher reflected, "EOD's mission helped my students recognize how our differences can unite us. Through projects like our multilingual literacy garden, students worked together to celebrate the diversity of our school community. Programs like these create a ripple effect of kindness and understanding."

For 21 years, Embracing Our Differences has delighted viewers with its annual outdoor display of 50 billboard-sized works of art and accompanying quotes. This high-profile art exhibition draws on the passion and perception of artists, students, and writers, to create powerful statements of inclusion, kindness and respect. The scale and impact of this open-air art show has continued to grow, attracting more than 4.8 million visitors since its inception. EOD's annual exhibition is the heart of a year-round program of activities using art as a catalyst to create awareness and promote acceptance.

Embracing Our Differences' next outdoor exhibition runs Jan. 19-April 13, 2025, in Bayfront Park, Sarasota; and March 1-March 31, 2025, in Poynter Park, St. Petersburg.

For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710, or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org)