

# **Ellison Grant Reflection**

## **Introduction**

As a Social Emotional Academic Development (SEAD) interventionist at North Hill Elementary, I know firsthand how creative learning experiences can boost students' confidence and engagement. The idea behind the Art Docent program is straightforward but powerful: bring volunteer community members into classrooms to teach art history lessons that inspire students to create their own individual artworks. What makes this even more exciting is how perfectly it complements our school's social emotional learning initiatives.

## **Why I Applied**

Working as an interventionist, I regularly see students who struggle in traditional academic settings but light up when given creative outlets. Kids who can barely sit through a math lesson suddenly become completely absorbed when drawing or painting. The problem is that our school, like most schools, has limited resources for comprehensive art programming. This grant opportunity allows us to address multiple needs at once. We can provide rich art experiences for our students while strengthening our community involvement.

## **What We Did with the Grant**

The grant funding allowed us to purchase the comprehensive "Art Docent" curriculum along with all the needed art supplies. The curriculum is a game-changer because it provides our volunteer docents with well-designed lesson plans, high-quality art reproductions, and age-appropriate activities that connect art history with hands-on creation. It also provides funding for quality art supplies allowing students to create meaningful work rather than just basic crafts. Having good materials to work with encourages students to take their art seriously and feel pride in their creations.

Our volunteer community members are incredible and include retired teachers, parents, and even some grandparents who are passionate about sharing art with children. Each docent brings their own enthusiasm and perspective to the lessons. The sessions follow the curriculum's structure: about a 15- 20 minute introduction to a featured artist or art movement, then guiding students through creating their own artwork inspired by what they learn.

This program naturally connects to our school's social emotional learning focus. The curriculum and the docents emphasize creativity as a valuable skill, not just in art but in problem-solving and self-expression. When students get frustrated with a technique, the docents encourage perseverance, helping kids understand that mistakes are part of the creative process. Group projects and collaborative elements build cooperation skills, and sharing artwork with the class takes real courage for many students.

## **What We Learned**

This program reinforces the idea of the power of community involvement in education. Our volunteers bring an energy and authenticity to the lessons because they genuinely want to share their love of art with children.

The program supports our social emotional learning goals almost effortlessly. Some students who rarely speak up in class find their voices when discussing their artwork. Some kids who struggle with traditional academics discover they can be successful learners in different ways. The emphasis on creativity, perseverance, cooperation, and courage isn't forced or artificial – it emerges naturally from the art-making process. The impact on student confidence is remarkable. Students who say "I can't draw" begin to see themselves as artists. When their artwork is displayed their pride shines through.

Quality art supplies make a real difference in what students can accomplish. When kids have good paper, proper brushes, and vibrant paints, and other materials, their work looks more professional, and they feel proud of what they create.

Perhaps most importantly, art education can reach students who struggle in other areas reinforcing our belief that schools need diverse learning opportunities to serve all students effectively.

## **Looking Forward**

The success of this program is so clear that our PTSA committed to continuing it beyond the grant period. They set aside funding for art supplies and are actively recruiting and training additional volunteer docents to continue the program. This commitment means that what started as a one-year grant project will become a permanent part of our school's culture.

This is a huge victory. Too often, great programs disappear when grant funding ends, but our school community recognizes the value of what we created and is investing in keeping it going. The PTSA's involvement also means we have dedicated personnel to coordinate schedules, manage supplies, and support our volunteer docents.

## **Conclusion**

This art docent grant does exactly what we hoped it would do – it brings joy, creativity, and meaningful learning experiences into our students' lives while building stronger connections between our school and community. The fact that it perfectly supports our social emotional learning goals is an added bonus that makes the program even more valuable. When you combine passionate volunteers, quality curriculum, good materials, and students eager to learn, amazing things can happen. It also reinforces the importance of community support for education.

As a SEAD interventionist, I see how this program particularly benefits students who struggle in traditional academic areas. Art gives them a way to succeed, to lead, and to feel proud of their abilities. That alone makes this grant particularly impactful. The combination of art history education and hands-on creation, delivered by caring community volunteers, creates something special at our school and we are truly grateful to the Ellison Foundation for this opportunity.

