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Incorporating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) into Arts Celebrations

Introduction

Celebration is a powerful tool for PTAs to use to encourage all students to explore and be involved in the arts. By featuring diverse artists and diverse forms of expression (like spoken word, step, cultural dances, etc.) in your celebrations, you can showcase your PTA's commitment to acknowledging and appreciating different perspectives and lived experiences to represent the broad variety within the PTA family. Together, by celebrating diversity through the arts, school leaders and families can offer positive reinforcement for participation in arts programs, like the National PTA [Reflections](#) program.

The ways that you incorporate diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) into your arts celebrations should be specific to your community needs and backgrounds. There are many different activities, ideas and efforts to explore. As a starting point, consider the experts and artists in your community. Ask for assistance from art teachers, artists or arts advocates in your school community to develop learning experiences that provide the community with a more rich and diverse understanding of the arts. To further your connection with the larger community, you can also feature diverse local artists (e.g., artists of color, LGBTQ+ artists) in your celebrations to introduce students and families to art from various perspectives and identities.

Don't be afraid to start small or to fail. Remember efforts in DEI take time and effort. It is normal for your efforts to be different from or less successful than what you initially expected. Spend time discussing any feedback you receive with your PTA to fully understand what worked and what did not. This will better prepare you for future events or efforts in DEI.

Steps to Follow When Celebrating DEI in the Arts

Celebrating diversity, equity and inclusion should be done with intention and with best practices in mind. Incorporate the following steps in your efforts to celebrate diversity in the arts:

Step 1

Have conversations about diversity with your planning team and establish DEI goals to help orient your work. Your DEI goals should be achievable but also challenging enough to foster impactful change in your community.

- **Diversity goals** focus on acknowledging, appreciating and incorporating diverse perspectives, skills and experiences. Diversity goals also focus on supporting less represented or resourced areas and groups.
- **Equity goals** emphasize fairness in resources, opportunities and outcomes to move beyond "equal across the board." Equity goals acknowledge and address bias and privilege.

- **Inclusion goals** are oriented around putting diversity into action with intentionality to ensure people can fully participate with equal voice and right to be heard. Inclusion goals focus on power dynamics and setting up a level playing field in which people can freely engage.

Step 2

Reconceptualize diversity in your community by expanding your PTA's definition of diversity—consider diversity in ability, race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, geographic location, religion socioeconomic status. By acknowledging and accounting for different aspects of identity, you broaden the impact of your celebration while not singling out specific identity groups. This provides all students and families with a space to share their experiences and explore issues related to power and privilege.

- Explore our definitions of diversity, equity and inclusion in [National PTA's Commitment to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion](#).

Step 3

Solicit input from your community to learn more about their backgrounds. As you think about celebrating diversity and the arts in your community, think about the makeup of your community first. Ask students, families and community members to get a view into how your community thinks the arts should be celebrated.

- Your community may hold unconscious and/or conscious bias towards specific artists or art forms. Embed education and advocacy into your celebrations to help educate attendees on these biases and to inform attendees on the importance of diversity in arts education.
- Take time in your programming to provide respectful and accurate context. This helps open space for student artistic expression while also giving your community the opportunity to unlearn bias and grow to be more inclusive and diverse.

Step 4

To ensure your efforts are welcoming and respectful, avoid these common pitfalls related to DEI programming and activities:

- Invite the whole student body, not just students in the arts. This can provide students typically not involved in the arts with a new perspective on the arts and creativity. And, when paired with a celebration event that focuses on diversity, students who may have never seen themselves in other creators will see a new side of the arts.
- Be aware of tokenizing students or families and expecting people to be experts in diversity, equity and inclusion. Despite having a common identity, people always have different experiences, ideas and opinions.
- The ways that you address someone are important. Ensure that speakers and leaders are educated on the correct pronunciations of names, cultures and/or cultural items. When in doubt, be sure to ask for pronunciations in a respectful manner. Speakers and leaders should also avoid assuming pronouns and should respect all preferred pronouns.
- Throughout your arts education programming, make speaker and leader pronouns readily available to others. Regularly sharing pronouns helps challenge the idea that someone's gender identity can be assumed just by looking at them.

- By expanding our definition of the arts to include more diverse artforms, we remember that art can convey cultures, traditions or experiences. It is important for students and families to see and explore different forms of artistic expressions that celebrate and educate around diverse experiences.
- Your event space, whether it is virtual or in-person, should be accessible. Forefront accessibility considerations in your planning, such as: hosting events when working families can attend, translation and/or interpretation for non-native English speakers, closed captioning and/or other accessibility features to meet the needs of your students and families.

Step 5

Look to the future as a part of your planning. Because the celebrations are meant to encourage continued participation in the arts, make sure that you are planning ahead for additional events or activities for students and families. At your celebration event, provide takeaway materials or information about your next arts initiative. Similarly, diversity, equity and inclusion cannot be stand-alone work. Your efforts should be focused on expanding DEI efforts in the future and making your school more inclusive.

- Tie your celebrations to diversity-focused holidays or times of remembrance in the school year, such as Black history month, women’s history month or National Coming Out Day, to give celebrations automatic structure and to ensure the programming is planned into the future. The diverse artists that you include in your programming will provide real-world examples of how students can succeed in the arts themselves.

Key Takeaways

- Celebrations that purposefully recognize diversity in the arts show young artists and communities that diversity and inclusion in the arts is valuable.
- Expanding definitions of diversity to be more inclusive can encourage communities and PTAs to interact with and recognize more diverse perspectives.
- Incorporating diversity into arts celebrations should be purposeful and deliberate to include different identity groups.

Conclusion

Celebration events that focus on the arts and diversity serve a multitude of purposes in PTA communities. These events serve as a platform for communicating the importance of arts education in your school, create an additional space for prioritizing your commitment to furthering diversity, equity and inclusion, and bring a joyful experience to reinforce positive relationships with the arts and creativity.

However your PTA chooses to celebrate, always consider best practices and use the resources available to you. Be sure to check out these National PTA materials to further the impact of your celebrations:

- [ArtsEd Leader Guide](#)
- [Diversity in the Arts Pledge](#)
- [PTA Local Leader Guidance for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#)
- [National PTA Commitment to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion](#)
- [How To Welcome Diverse Perspectives into Your PTA](#)