USU receives grant for arts education

Program will use money to mingle museums, schools

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Museum acquisitions will continue to be used to teach not only art in area schools, but mathematics and geometric concepts as well, thanks to a federal grant supporting arts education.

Community children in northern Utah are set to benefit most from the $149,000 grant provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services under the Museum for America program. Utah State University will be using the money to continue a pilot program that began last fall in various local schools, which mingles university scholars with public school students, to diversify traditional study programs.

"When area school representatives who participated in our museum education tours came to us and said they needed help raising math scores, we took a critical look at how we could creatively address this deficit through the museum's collection," said Laurie Baefsky, director of the USU ArtsBridge program.

"Schools need help teaching math in a way that children can understand and retain concepts, and classroom students need more hands-on arts in their lives."

The idea is to integrate art into math, science, language arts and history using activities such as the creation of murals, wall-sized mosaics, outdoor classrooms, alphabet books, photography and poetry.

Institute of Museum and Library Services funding will make the program available to participating schools at no cost and will bolster existing USU ArtsBridge programs. In association with the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art Education Program, funds will support the development of the Spiraled Learning Project, which uses the museum artifacts as the vehicle to teach math and geometric concepts.

Classes involved in the project will participate in trips to the museum, a new art-math curriculum, online support and anything to include "outside learning," said museum curator Nadra Haffar.

By looking at math through the artist's eyes, as well as examining art through the lens of mathematics, learning is enhanced and extended, she said, adding that the "spiral" comes from an integrated approach to learning.

Museums are positioned to play an integral role in the education of their communities, said Anne-Imelda M. Radice, director of the institute. The Museums for America grant program supports projects that build museum capacity and help institutions serve the community in diverse ways. The organization provides more than $17 million in support of museums to sustain cultural heritage, lifelong learning and to be centers of community engagement.

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