



BRIDGing our Stories

(Building. Relationships. Inclusion. Diversity. Growth)



Background and Purpose

- Academic achievement disparities persist in math, reading, and graduation rates between low/high socio-economic status and White/Black or White/Hispanic students
- LGBTQ students face discrimination, poorer learning engagement, and academic performance
- Webster Groves School District, MO also experiences these disparities
- Education affects health and quality of life, making it vital to address and reduce achievement gaps
- Strong student-teacher relationships and storytelling promote equity and engagement in the classroom
- BRIDGing Our Stories empowers WGSD community members to advocate for their needs and embrace diversity so that everyone feels valued and welcome.
- Students and faculty submitted various art projects created using different mediums to answer the following prompts:
 - What is a day in your life?
 - What would you like your teachers to know about you?
 - What does family look like to you?
 - Based on who you are and where you come from, what are your experiences as a WGSD student or staff member?

Methodology

- Engaged various teachers and student organizations at both schools
- Recruited participants through posting flyers
- Shared FAQs with families
- Advertised in the District and School newsletters and Instagram
- Collected artwork and integrated them in an professional development workshop for teachers that featured national expert on equity and the power of storytelling
 - Teachers identified ways to incorporate art into classroom techniques to promote self-expression and understanding
- Hosted community gallery to showcase the work of the Webster Groves School District to community members so that new relationships and connections could be established

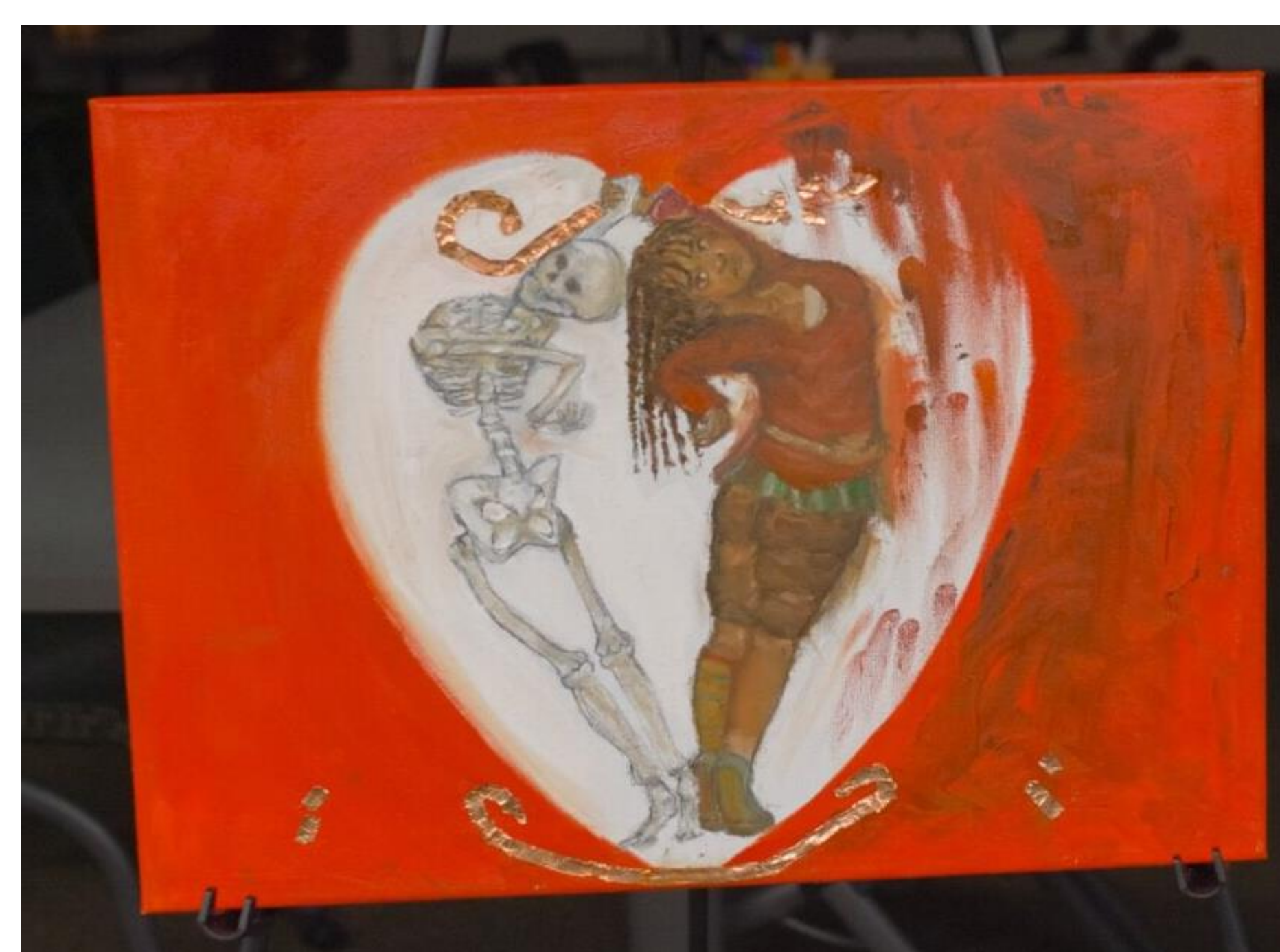


Results

Community Art Gallery

- 24 total submissions
- Formats submitted: painting, photography, digital art, drawings, poetry, dance
- Art themes: culture, social norms, disability, disparities, religion, mental health

“This piece represents how it feels to be a young wheelchair user. Many people are judging you, talking about you, and looking at you like you’re nothing. Some people can’t look past the wheelchair and don’t view me as a person.”
-WGHS Student



“The heart that surrounds it is Sankofa, an African symbol that is attached to the proverb "It is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot." As a Black Woman in America, I am told nothing of my original heritage. My painting represents the death of culture, what I wear is my history of trends to fit in and the heartache that came with it. However, with Sankofa, I can understand my ancestors through appreciating the culture I and my sisters and brothers have created.”
-WGHS Student

Professional Development Training

- 100 staff attended
- 43 responses on survey that focused on 3 common themes:
 - Making purposeful connections
 - Incorporating music
 - Developing new classroom activities to encourage relationship-building

“Look for more intentional opportunities for students to share their voices in my unit and lesson designs.”

“Give students the opportunity to build community by talking to one another about themselves through music.”

Next Steps

- Conduct follow-up surveys of participants and staff to assess changes made in their learning/social environment
- Research and apply for other sources of funding to expand the project to district elementary schools
- Submit abstract to present at national conference

Acknowledgments

- Dr Shane Williamson, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at WGSD
- Dr. Kerry Arens and Ms. Jenny Willenborg, WGSD Chelsea Center
- Participants and teachers/administration at WGSD