

The Many Faces of Learning

Arlington Advocate Editorial November 9, 2016

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The Arlington Education Foundation fosters and embraces many faces of learning. Our grants reach far beyond classroom walls, funding innovative programs that help all learners thrive. On November 21, I invite you to join us for our annual fundraiser at Ristorante Olivio as we celebrate these unique faces of learning.

If you've driven by the Ottoson Middle School recently, you've undoubtedly seen the bold public art displayed on its facade. The faces of these learners – male, female, black, white, Asian, gay, straight – represent the diverse Ottoson community. An AEF grant funded the 'Inside OUT Ottoson' public art project, giving the Ottoson art teachers the opportunity to spark a conversation about diversity. This project demonstrates a unique face of learning that cannot be learned in a textbook. One where students come together as one to stand for who they are and show that they do not tolerate any kind of hate towards one another.

But students aren't the only learners in our schools. Teachers are lifelong learners; constantly learning new skills to perfect their craft. In Arlington, this learning isn't just through typical professional development or coursework. Through the AEF-supported '*Teacher Leadership*' program, elementary teachers are empowered to take on leadership roles and share their skills with their peers, thus boosting their confidence and improving overall teacher proficiency in the district. AEF's Continuing Scholar Award gives teachers like Jill Connor, a 5th grade teacher at Dallin School, a way to develop her own curiosity and learning. Last summer, Ms. Connor traveled to Spain and Morocco to study coexistence, competition and culture. As a result of this unique experiential learning opportunity, Ms. Connor is invigorating her social studies units and stimulating her students.

AEF does not just support who is learning, but also how they are learning. Today's classroom environments are changing. I'm not talking about the iPads, Chromebooks and other technology that have entered our classrooms. I'm referring to the specific environment in which students are learning. With AEF's support, an elementary classroom is experimenting with standing desks – giving fidgety students alternate ways to kindle learning. AEF also funded flexible classroom furniture in a 6th grade cluster, transforming it into a flexible, innovative learning environment that promotes collaboration and movement and meets the needs of diverse learners.

AEF also puts a new face on what students are learning. Of course, we support creative ways to implement the curriculum – like programming drones, creating outdoor classroom gardens and experimenting with eTextiles – but we also fund programs that help students learn how to manage stress or develop a sense of themselves as capable learners. Recently, AEF funded the '*Safe and Supportive Schools*' initiative which will create a cohesive vision for behavioral health in the Arlington Public Schools. Developing a solid social and emotional health foundation is a crucial component of making our students successful.

The last – and most important face of learning – is the generous Arlington community that makes all of this possible. I hope you will join us on November 21 from 6-8pm at Ristorante Olivio to support our mission and meet some the faces that are opening our eyes to new and innovative ways of learning.

Amy Speare is the President of the Arlington Education Foundation, a non-profit organization that grants over \$100,000 per year to the Arlington Public Schools. AEF depends entirely on community support. Visit them at www.aefma.org.