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UNIQUE ART SHOW DRAWS CHILDREN TOGETHER

A unique art show, Drawn Together, opens this Sunday, May 25, 2008 at the downtown Redwood City library. The show features a series of collages and mosaics created by special education and general education students in five Redwood City schools and will run until mid-June.

Drawn Together was developed and sponsored by SEPTAR, the Special Education PTA of Redwood City. "Part of the goal of SEPTAR is to build inclusive communities in our schools," explained SEPTAR board member Alicia Levine. "We wanted to create an art project where children could explore how bringing different abilities and skills to the table, literally, can create something that is far more interesting and beautiful than they can do just working by themselves."

The project grouped children from Special Day Classes (SDC), which are classes comprised of children with special needs, and from general education classes to work collaboratively on the art projects. Students at Henry Ford, Hoover, Roosevelt, Selby Lane, and Taft schools participated. While for the most part, the general education students provided assistance to the special education children, at Selby Lane, the opposite held true. Here the middle-school special education students were matched with a kindergarten class and enjoyed the chance to assist the younger children create vividly-colored mosaics while learning that pastels are different from crayons. "It was so great to see the special education kids being the helpers for a change," commented Ms. Levine, "it was a rare opportunity for them to be the leaders."

Ms. Levine who has several years of experience working as an Art-in-Action volunteer, collaborated with SEPTAR board member and graphic designer, Lea Cuniberti-Duran, to develop specific art projects for each school. Each project needed to both illustrate the principal that diversity creates a more interesting world, and give the children the opportunity to apply that concept experientially. For Ms. Cuniberti-Duran, this went beyond group collaboration; it was equally important that the children enjoyed each other's company. "For me, the best part was seeing how much fun the children had together," said Ms. Cuniberti-Duran. "I hope both groups of kids came away from the experience looking forward to spending time with each other more often in the future." Ms. Levine observed, "Initially some of the children were uncomfortable with the idea of working with differently-abled students. By the end of the class though, they had forgotten all about it. Next time maybe that hesitation won't be there at all, and they will want to interact with the "different" kids because they've experienced how fun it can be."

At Taft School, the special education children already had assigned buddies, and the program was a chance for them to illustrate exactly how much they do enjoy each other's company with a series of paper collages entitled, "What we like to do when we are together." "This was a great way for the children to come together creatively. They were able to communicate with each other, share their ideas, and generate



a piece of art that was a collaborative effort. Plus they had a great time doing it. I am so proud of all of their work," said teacher Jeanette Tomates. "It's a great program and we hope it continues next year."

The Drawn Together project was also partially inspired by the annual Inclusive Schools Week. As defined on its website, the Week, "highlights and celebrates the progress of our nation's schools in providing a supportive and quality education to an increasingly diverse student population." Drawn Together was welcomed by the school district, which helped the parent group connect with teachers interested in participating. "We love opportunities that foster friendships and connections between all students," said Mary Maher, Director of Special Education for the Redwood City School District. The project received support from the California PTA as well, which provided grant funding for materials.

SEPTAR brings families and educators together to meet the special education needs of children in Redwood City. For more information, please visit: www.septar.org. Samples of Drawn Together art can be seen at: www.septar.org/DrawnTogether.html