



Amplifying the Arts

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ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE IN RIVERSIDE COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION COURT AND COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Beginning in the 2024–2025 school year, Riverside County Office of Education’s Alternative Education and Instructional Services units began working collaboratively, utilizing Prop 28 funding to add arts to the school day at all of the county’s court and community schools.

Dr. Deanna McCarty, Executive Director of Alternative Education, and Louisa Higgins, Arts Administrator of Instructional Services, brainstormed and envisioned what the arts might look like for the hundreds of students at secondary sites spread all across the large county of Riverside.

They came up with a hub of three regions to support the South County (Murrieta and San Jacinto), West County (Riverside), and Coachella Valley (Palm Springs and Indio). Artists would be assigned to one of the hubs for a six-week period to deliver sequential, standards-based arts classes.

Next came the task of identifying highly effective artists and educators with the experience and attitude most fitting for this important work. The artists toured the facilities and received training in trauma informed practices and the rules and regulations for the probation programs.

At last, we began to offer the three rotations. Mrs. Karen Riley brings us stimulating visual arts. Mr. James Coats shares the wonder of poetry. Mr. David Ricks engages with the joy of dance. On the right-hand side, you can see more about their background and why they love to do this work!

It is our privilege and pleasure to bring this program forward and continue it for many years into the future. We know that art is for everyone, and that all students in our county have a right to benefit from a full and complete education that serves the whole child.

MEET THE ARTISTS



Karen Riley

“Art is a very powerful tool that everyone should have access to. Connecting your hands and mind to paper, clay, cardboard or whatever medium to communicate is a unique and whole human experience. Sharing this opportunity with students is truly rewarding for me!”

Make a difference. Karen Riley believes that we can improve the world by cultivating creative solutions involving art and environmentalism. Karen, the Executive Director and founder of the S.C.R.A.P. Gallery (Student Creative

Recycle Art Program) and leads a high impact environmental arts education program. Working primarily with recycled and reused materials, her body of work includes collage, assemblage, and mosaic.



James Coats

“I believe in poetry’s ability to inspire and influence positive change; that’s what I try to bring to these community schools, a safe place for creative self-expression, where students can investigate their experiences and build empathetic connections with each other. It is truly a transformative gift that means everything to me.”

James Coats is an award-winning author, poet, and educator from Southern California. As a creative change agent, he believes the arts can inspire youth and influence positive change

in the world. He is a four-time San Bernardino County Poetry Out Loud Judge and three-time Riverside County Teen Poet Laureate Judge. He is also the winner of the 2021 San Gabriel Poetry Slam, and has been featured nationally. You can find him attending poetry readings throughout California or follow his poetry via his Instagram @MrLovingWords. He became the Artist in Residence at The Garcia Center for the Arts in 2022. Additionally, you can take a poetry workshop with him through his organization Lift Our Voices Education, which hosts an award-winning workshop monthly called Be The Change: Social Justice Writing Workshop. He also has four poetry collections: *If I Had Lived* published in 2018, *All The Ways You Are Wonderful* in 2020, and *Home Is A Voice* in 2022. His newest poetry collection, *Midnight & Mad Dreams*, published by World Stage Press, released in 2022. He is a 2023 Poetry Pushcart Prize nominee.



David Ricks

“One of the things I enjoy most about teaching is helping people discover their artistic voice through movement. Helping others find the courage to be themselves and have fun while doing it, is a pleasure. I think that being in the court and community settings is exciting because the youth light up, relax, and enjoy themselves without worrying about what anyone else thinks. Dance has a unique way of bringing joy to any situation. Being the one who brings that joy and shares it is the coolest thing about teaching. We find joy together!”

David Ricks has been dancing and teaching for nearly twenty years. He is experienced teaching in all age groups and settings, with the unique ability to connect and communicate. David puts people at ease and helps them begin to use their bodies effectively to communicate stories, ideas, and emotions. Though David has performed countless times, been featured in videos, and is a force behind local community dance events, his highest calling and legacy is teaching dance to young people.