

# Virtual Art Therapy

## Poudre School District

### Fort Collins, CO



During this past year of the pandemic, Latinx families and students have experienced an increased amount of stress. However, families have also shown an incredible amount of resiliency and ability to learn new things, like participating in virtual family engagement events. In March 2021, Poudre School District collaborated with a Spanish speaking Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) in town to host a virtual art therapy class for the Latinx community. The goal of this workshop was to engage parents and students with the beauty and relaxing elements of art, watercolor painting specifically, and share an activity that adults and children of all ages could enjoy together; stress free and full of individual creativity!

Both elementary and secondary Family Engagement Specialists worked collaboratively to coordinate the event with the art therapist. The therapist provided a list of materials and supplies and the office manager ordered supplies for 50 families. The team of family liaisons helped inform and register families for the event. In addition, they sent the invitation via School Messenger email to families with a link to a Google form for families to sign themselves up. In less than 2 weeks all 50 spots filled up. Bags with supplies were delivered to schools so the students could take them home.

The virtual art therapy class was hosted on Microsoft Teams. Families were sent the link to the meeting via email. All families who registered received a bag with watercolors, brushes, watercolor paper (whole pages and small tiles), a fine point black pen, blank paper, and markers. They were instructed by the therapist how and when to use each item as the project and therapy session progressed and they created their projects.

The therapist explained how drawing and painting use different parts of our brains and helps us connect and process our emotions and stress leading to well-being. She asked each participant to have an intention for the workshop. She explained how art can connect us to positive emotions, past and present, and help calm our busy minds so we can be present and mindful. These are socioemotional skills that adults and students alike can utilize at any time. This workshop helped build positive relationships between parents and their children as well as create community among families in a shared experience.

At the end of the session, families wrote comments in the chat showing appreciation for the class. Families unmuted and shared comments to say that it was a relaxing and calming activity that took them away for the day's stress. They were grateful for the space provided to try something new, something hands-on and different from the norm. They also asked for more workshops like this in the future.

The family engagement specialist's advice to those wanting to implement this program would be give yourself time to purchase the supplies and get them together to send out to families. Another consideration would be to ensure all students have access to a laptop.