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Art in the Form of Inclusion

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What comes to mind when you think about Junior High? Maybe a good friend or a great teacher? For some individuals, it may have involved negative emotions, like bullying. Students and faculty at Holmes Junior High are standing up to that experience and making a statement through art in the form of inclusion through a partnership between Holmes and UNI faculty, staff, and students.

For local students at Holmes Junior High in Cedar Falls, IA, there is a hope to cultivate a more inclusive culture for their time in Junior High and beyond. One that highlights positivity and inclusion for all students and staff. Dr. Wendy Miller, Associate Professor of the Art Department at the University of Northern Iowa, Jeremy Prouty, an Extended Learning Program teacher at Holmes Junior High, UNI Art Education students, Holmes Junior High Students, and the UNI Public Art Incubator, collaborated in creating "Holmes Pride," a legacy piece to be hung in their school cafeteria.



The collaborative paint project is a large wooden wall relief sculpture that the UNI Art Department designed through the inspiration of Holmes Junior High students. The piece is titled, "Holmes Pride." Dr. Miller, Jeremy, and their students wanted to help the school bring their vision of inclusivity to life, and what better way than to promote artwork. Dr. Miller stated, "The goal was to be inclusive and to provide students an opportunity to realize their collective vision in a well-made piece of artwork, something that may be considered a legacy piece for their school."

The legacy piece has many dimensions to it that were developed through conversations between Holmes and UNI students and faculty.

The piece included 8 main symbols that encompassed: leadership, athletics, Holmes students and staff, clubs at Holmes, creativity, performing arts, music, and the combination of unification, inclusivity, and community at Holmes. The finished relief sculpture highlights these eight symbolic images that represent unique qualities of Holmes students, staff, and the curricular components and extracurricular opportunities within the school.

UNI and Holmes students shared this about what the piece meant to them:

Our artist statement:

This collaborative relief sculpture shows how inclusive Holmes students are and how they are always ready to reach out to someone in need. Holmes students are ready to accept anyone, no matter who they are or what they look like. Our artwork is a creative representation of how teamwork brings everyone towards a common goal and shows that everyone can be themselves. This combined collection of symbols demonstrates how we work to fit the pieces together like a puzzle because if you're missing a piece, it's not complete. At Holmes Junior High, we are more than the sum of our parts. This artwork reflects the spirit of community within our school, a community where we value every person, every day.

An important component of community engagement is both parties seeing benefits. Through UNI and Holmes student communication and collaboration, both groups were able to benefit in an especially remarkable way.



Dr. Miller stated, "Through this project, both groups of students were pushed to use critical and creative thinking skills, and this project required flexibility, adaptability, and collaborative skills and how to plan and

execute a large project from start to finish." UNI students were able to use what they had learned in the classroom to create a real-world, tangible experience for the

next generation of students in the community.

Students were given a positive experience on UNI's campus with pre-service teachers as they worked through the creative process. Dr. Miller stated, "This project encourages jr. high students to reflect on their shared culture and positive image of their school." Shared culture is what will allow students to recognize exceptional inclusivity, which was another great thing that came out of this collaboration.

Dr. Miller's fall students worked with the Holmes students through electronic communication to craft the artist statement shown above and create a "key" to help explain the symbols. Art Education students were then able to stain and assemble the final pieces together with support from Dan Perry, Public Art Incubator Coordinator, and The Public Art Incubator as a whole.

The "Holmes Pride" legacy art piece was installed this past Monday, October 5, 2020, in the Holmes Junior High cafeteria. The impact of this inclusive, collaborative, artwork project is something to be proud of for both Holmes Junior High and the UNI Art Department for generations to come.

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