SITKA CENTER FOR
ART AND ECOLOGY

2024–2025

IMPACT REPORT

US Poet Laureate Ada Limón listens to Forest Grove High School's Maiachi Tradición perform at Nestucca K-8, Cloverdale, OR

***The evening with US Poet Laureate Ada Limón** was the most moving, inclusive community event the Nestucca Valley School District has hosted. People from all over Oregon attended the celebration of diversity in people and the natural world. The cross-collaboration with the Forest Grove School District and the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology facilitated a once in a lifetime event for those in attendance and championed the importance of individual voice in expressing community and diversity. It gave me hope for humanity in a time where people are trying to squash personal expression and diversity of thought. Thank you Sitka Center for bringing this experience to our community, and thank you Ada Limón for your beautiful talent and voice."*

Misty Wharton, Superintendent
Nestucca Valley School District

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"In art literacy class I feel safe, supported and allowed to be more creative than usual. Art literacy gives me something to look forward to in my day."

Alana, middle school student

Service Area 2024-2025

3 Oregon Counties
9 School Districts
17 Schools
5,076 Students

Clatsop County (2,132 students)
Hilda Lahti Elementary School
Warrenton Grade School
Lewis & Clark Elementary School
Astor Elementary School
Pacific Ridge Elementary School
Seaside Middle School
Jewell School

Tillamook County (1,475 students)
Garibaldi Grade School
Liberty Elementary School
South Prairie Elementary School
East Elementary School
Nestucca K-8 School

Lincoln County (1,469 students)
Toledo Elementary School
Crestview Heights Elementary School
Sam Case Elementary School
Yaquina View Elementary School
Newport Middle School

17 Schools

9 Districts

5,000+ PreK-8 Students

CREATE

Overview

Meeting the Need

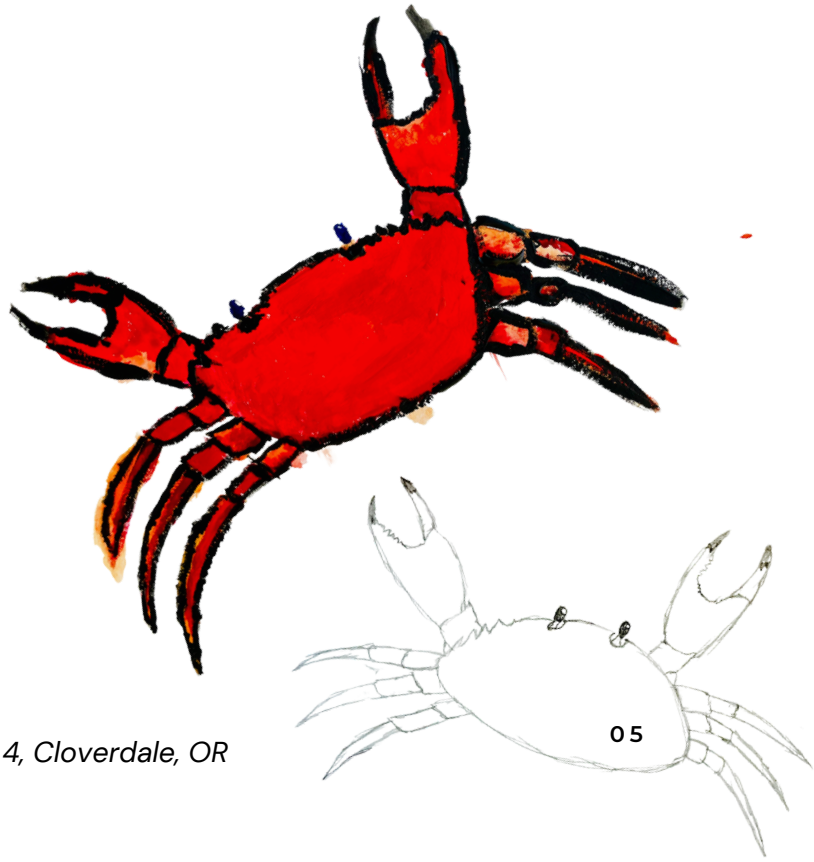
Most public schools in Sitka's rural Oregon coast communities serve economically disadvantaged families and cannot provide art programming within their standard curriculum. Across the coastal region, over 90% of students qualify for free or reduced meals based on federal income guidelines. Recognizing this gap, Sitka aims to deliver high-quality, free art and STEAM education (science, technology, engineering, art and math) directly to students, enhancing learning experiences, nurturing creativity and self-expression and supporting underserved youth.

2025 Impact

By the 2024-2025 academic year, **K-8 Create became the largest rural-serving art education program in Oregon.** The program now reaches over 5,000 PreK-8th grade students across three counties—Clatsop, Tillamook, and Lincoln—covering nine public school districts and 17 schools. The 900% growth since 2020 reflects both the demand and the success of providing consistent, high-quality arts education to rural communities, significantly enriching student experiences and expanding educational opportunities across a tri-county region.

Solution

In 2019, Sitka partnered with Community Arts Project (CAP), transitioning CAP's art literacy and classroom arts programs into Sitka's stewardship in 2020. Leveraging Sitka's greater administrative capacity, the K-8 Create program rapidly expanded, transforming CAP's original framework into a comprehensive, regional model for delivering monthly art and STEAM lessons directly to rural schools.



Fiddler crab illustrations by Sammy, Grade 4, Cloverdale, OR

2024–2025 Impact

150%

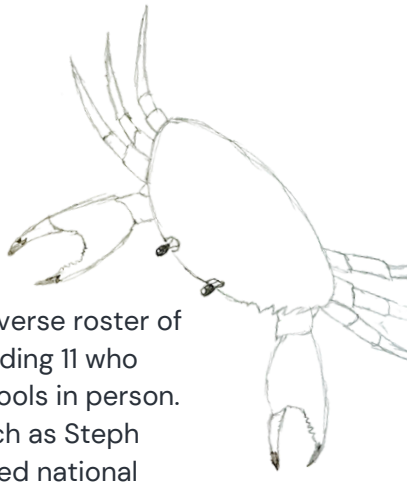
Annual audience growth, from 2,000 youth in 2023 to over 5,000 in fall 2024

1

Regional Program Expansion

Responding to strong community demand, K-8 Create grew to serve all five Clatsop County districts and four new Lincoln County schools in 2024–2025. All nine school districts across three coastal counties — Clatsop, Tillamook and Lincoln — now host the program. This expansion represents a 150% increase in reach compared to the prior year and 900% growth since program launch in 2020.

2



Artist Engagement

K-8 Create showcased a diverse roster of 19 professional artists, including 11 who visited classrooms and schools in person. Oregon-based creators such as Steph Littlebird and Mike Vos joined national and international voices like Gasali Adeyemo (Nigeria/Santa Fe), Maja Sereda (Poland/Seattle), and U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limón. Through their contributions, lessons in illustration, natural pigments, photography, poetry, textiles and music connected youth and classroom teachers to a wide range of cultural and creative practices.

3

Cultural Connection

K-8 Create fostered cultural connection across our tri-county region, linking students, schools and communities through shared creative experiences. Much like an “everybody reads” program, lessons created a common language of self-expression and curiosity, helping establish a culture where creativity is valued as part of a well-rounded education. This region-wide approach strengthened community identity while ensuring every student had a place in the conversation.

4

Access for All

K-8 Create deepened its impact by working hand-in-hand with classroom teachers and support staff. Educators participated alongside their students in monthly lessons, strengthening their own creative confidence while helping ensure every child could take part. Together, we adapted activities to meet the needs of English language learners and students with special learning needs, making sure creative opportunities were accessible to all.

Community Voices

"Teachers and principals from across our district continually share positive feedback about how K-8 Create builds student engagement, connection to school and social-emotional wellbeing. This impact extends beyond individual classrooms—students bring their learning and enthusiasm home to their families, creating shared moments of connection around their creative work."

Majalise Tolan, Superintendent
Lincoln County School District

"Sitka Center has proven its ability to bring high-quality, engaging, culturally relevant arts education to even the most rural schools. They designed K-8 Create to meet the needs of communities like ours."

Cory Pederson, Superintendent
Jewell School District

"Sitka Center's work aligns with our county's goals of fostering a vibrant, connected community where all young people have opportunities to express themselves, build confidence and engage in meaningful learning experiences. I see Sitka as a valued partner in these efforts, both within Tillamook County and across the broader north coast region."

Mary Faith Bell, Commissioner
Tillamook County

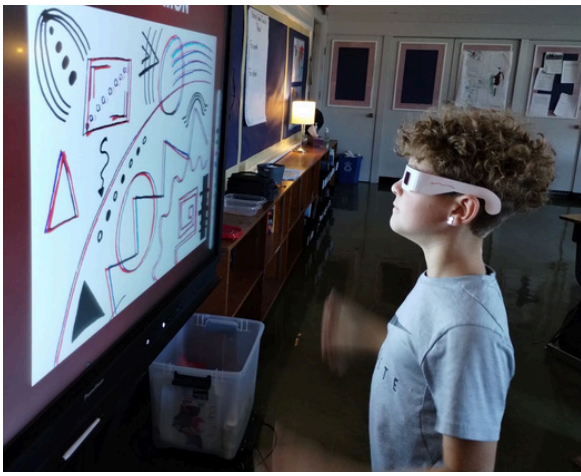
"Sitka has demonstrated that rural communities can—and should—have access to high-quality arts education. Their success along the north and mid coast provides a model that can be replicated in other rural regions of Oregon."

Representative David Gomberg
Oregon House District 10

How It Works

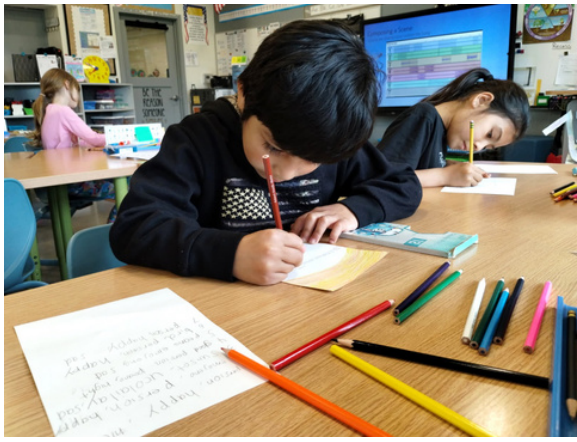
Delivery in Schools

K-8 Create takes place during the academic school year. Sitka's Art Instructors based in the communities they serve travel classroom to classroom, leading monthly art and STEAM-integrated lessons designed for each grade level. Classroom teachers and support staff participate alongside students, ensuring lessons are inclusive of English language learners and students with special learning needs. This teaching model allows every child to take part while also building teacher capacity to integrate creativity into the school day.



Curriculum and Feedback

Lessons are inspired by professional artists and art movements chosen with local demographics and cultural relevance in mind. Scheduling takes place at the beginning of the school year, ensuring time is set aside for art in ways that work for classroom teachers. Ongoing evaluation includes student reflections, teacher and administrator surveys, and superintendent-level input, creating a feedback loop that continually strengthens program quality.



Funding Model

K-8 Create is sustained through a shared investment model. Schools make a modest $4,000 contribution that affirms local buy-in, while keeping the program affordable. The majority of program costs are underwritten by private foundations and donors, matching school funds $7 to $1, making it possible for every lesson, supply kit and teaching artist to reach classrooms free of charge to students and families, including supplies. ***As demand grows, Sitka is working to secure multi-year philanthropic partnerships that will provide the stability and capacity needed to meet the rising call for equitable arts education in rural Oregon as state funding models change.***

Calm, serene forest
Overlapped, entangled with the sharp, metalic angles
No living thing is not connected by the forest
No living things are strangers
Every being is family
Centuries of changing is
The thing that brought us here
In all places everyone is connected
On every place on the planet
Nothing isn't family

Curricular Example: Place-based Photography and Poetry

In March and April 2025, students learned landscape photography with Portland-based artist Mike Vos and explored nature-inspired poetry by U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limón. They then exchanged photos with peers in other counties, writing poems inspired by one another's images. In May, the finished photo-and-poem pairings were displayed in a tri-county youth art showcase and free, public reading by Limón, connecting classrooms across Clatsop, Tillamook, and Lincoln counties in a shared celebration of creativity and place.

"Art is not only an important way to communicate thoughts and ideas, but it is also ***a powerful way to connect to others and build community.*** *As a person who grew up with limited opportunities, it is important for me to share my experience and technical knowledge in the arts with the next generation across Oregon state."*

Mike Vos
Sitka Photography Fellow

"I truly believe experiences like these enrich and deepen our students' understanding of themselves and our world. Thank you for providing such engaging and interesting lessons. Teachers who have participated in the lessons are absolutely raving about their experiences."

Rachel Williamson, Principal
Liberty Elementary School

Nestucca K-8 School Summer Day Camp

In partnership with Nestucca K-8, Sitka hosts a free summer day camp for up to 100 K-8 students. Held during four weeks in July, the camp offers four days of immersive arts and nature programming each week, connecting youth with professional artists through hands-on projects and outdoor exploration.

2025 Camp – "Nature, Innovation and Impact"
Youth engaged in bookbinding, digital photography, felting, poetry and mask making, exploring personal connections to nature. Teaching artists included musician and ornithologist, Thomas Meinzen, performing artist Kai Hynes, textile artist Julia Hames, visual artist Maja Sereda and photographer Mike Vos.

2025-27 Strategy

Sitka's 2025–2027 K-8 Create strategy balances coastal growth with capacity building for long-term sustainability. Year 1 centers on listening, evaluation and capacity building, while Years 2–3 apply these insights to guide thoughtful expansion and strengthen partnerships within and beyond our nine-district footprint.

With the loss of a major federal funding stream and more changes underway in Oregon's state funding for K-8 education, securing multi-year philanthropic partnerships will be essential to sustaining access for the 5,000 rural students currently served through K-8 Create, and to building momentum toward statewide solutions and impact.

YEAR 1	YEARS 2-3	ONGOING
Grow to serve three new Lincoln County schools and serve 20 schools region-wide in 2025-26.	Launch a multi-year growth strategy, informed by Year 1 insights and planning.	Collaborate with regional and state ODE leadership and others on long-term arts education solutions.
Conduct a listening tour of current and prospective rural school districts and stakeholders to inform program delivery, resiliency and expansion.	Align K-8 Create milestones with Sitka's next five-year 2026-2030 strategic and financial plan.	Take a systemic, needs-based design approach, ensuring K-8 Create evolves in step with regional and statewide needs and advances Sitka's mission: *art and nature access for all*.
Co-host a summit of education and arts sector leaders and community organizers to identify top strategies to further close access gaps.	Take action on top strategies; include funders investing in systemic change and community-driven solutions.	Advocate for statewide arts education access solutions and cross-regional partnerships that center and meet the needs of rural schools.

the sea is
full of
fish, find
one that
makes you
HAPPY

SITKA

Thank you for helping inspire the next generation of rural artists and innovators and for fostering curiosity and creativity across the north-central Oregon Coast.

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