

Students work with local group to create mural

By Jesse Broad-Cavanagh

The ceramics department at Blair has been working alongside local group Arts on the Block to create a mural for the vegetable garden outside the SAC by the end of this school year.

The project, a shared collaboration between ceramics students and students at Arts on the Block, is set to be completed by the end of May. With the mural already outlined, the only roadblock in the way is gaining permission from MCPS. "We're waiting to hear back from the county as to whether it will be a permanent installation," said ceramics teacher Jonathan Verock.

Arts on the Block, a non-profit organization that brings students together to create art across Montgomery County, has been working with Blair to organize the project since January. Since then, the students in Blair's advanced Ceramics 2 class have largely organized and designed the mural's mosaic design themselves. "They took the ball and started running with it," said Verock. After generating several sketch ideas over the past few months, the students had to gain the approval of certain school staff and administrators. "They pitched the final ideas to the teachers that lead [the] horticulture [department]," said Verock.

So far, the plans for the mosaic have been met with support. "The teachers in the horticulture department have been very encouraging

and enthusiastic about the designs the [students] made for the space," said Arts on the Block teaching artist Sonal Sheth. The final sketch also received approval from Blair principal Renay Johnson. "Principal Johnson stated that the final approved design was pretty," said Sheth.

The mural, made of colorful porcelain tiles, will work hand in hand with Johnson's goal to beautify the school. "These projects help beautify public and private spaces in which they are displayed," said Sheth. This beautification can also help discourage people from defacing different areas around the school. "Public art can also decrease graffiti and tagging of walls and encourage positive interactions in public spaces," said Sheth.

Arts on the Block also hopes that the students who take part in creating the mural will gain a handful of life skills. "[These projects] provide meaningful opportunities for apprentices to gain real world work experience in the arts," said Sheth. These students not only help design the project, but also will play a large part in making it. Arts on the Block students known as "apprentices" will also assist in assembling the mural. "Arts on the Block is doing half [of] the mural, the other half will be Ceramics 2," said Verock.

Although still awaiting final approval from the county, the mosaic is on its way to being completed. Blair students and Arts on the Block apprentices are each doing

their part to making sure the project will be ready to go when the time comes. "The apprentices have completed the portion of the mosaic requiring glass tiles [and] Mr. Verock's students will complete handmade porcelain tiles at Blair for the rest of the mosaic in May," said Sheth.

More projects like this could be soon to follow. "I hope that we achieve an ongoing relationship between AOB and public schools in MCPS and a more beautified space where the mural is displayed," said Sheth.



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PLANS Jonathan Verock holds ceramic students' mural outline.