

Sculpting a Better Classroom

By Nyah Marquez-Dean

When Ms. Stephanie Schmidt joined the Golden community in 2020, we were facing unprecedented challenges in the structure of education. It hit especially hard for art educators, who struggled to build connections and foster improvement in their students and



their work without seeing them in person. Despite an introduction to the Golden community during such a difficult time, Ms. Schmidt introduced new advancements in the Golden High School art department, allowing students to further pursue their artistic interests through National Art Honor Society memberships, lettering in art, and enabling them to receive recognition from their peers and art professionals.

"I always want to see it growing," she

says. "I would love it if we had so many kids needing art that we wanted a fourth teacher. It'd be cool if we could offer more AP opportunities. ... I'm always open to us growing."

Schmidt earned her degree in Art Education from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and is passionate about providing students with a well-rounded art education. She started teaching in 1998 and came to Jeffco in 2006 when she began working at Bear Creek High School. She came to Jeffco for the opportunity to teach ceramics. "I first started a private preschool teaching art and working with teachers on art, but I didn't really want to do that. I knew I wanted to get into the public schools, and I think I actually came to Jeffco because I could be a ceramics teacher. I could teach 3D. There were more specialized areas, and that was super exciting to me."

One of Schmidt's biggest priorities is student perspectives, especially within Artists in Action, primarily run by its student officers.

"I like giving kids the opportunity to lead a group," Schmidt says. "I think a lot of us are on the same page. So I think it's fun to get ideas from other people." When teaching her students, she considers people's traits and individuality in her personal life. "How would you help support that person versus this person? And what needs do they have? It helps remind

me of how different everybody is, and every kid is so different. And what might work to help encourage you could be something totally different for another kid."

Schmidt took to mentoring in art early on. "I always liked doing art as a kid and being crafty. ... I would kind of gravitate [toward] and rally the younger kids and do projects with them, [which] was part of shaping it." Schmidt's experiences in her high school education motivated her to develop an unusual art education method to cultivate a love of art in her students.



"I remember some of my art teachers in high school, I felt like they didn't really teach me that much. I enjoyed it, but I didn't get that much feedback. ... Part of why I wanted to be an art teacher was because I wanted to see how I could help people really love art, and improve their art, and just keep going with it."

When questioned about how the Golden community has influenced her attitude, Schmidt said, "My students are really cool and respectful and really creative, and I just see a lot of responsibility that kids take on. And that's really... really nice and kind of heartwarming, you know?" Commending her students for their positive outlooks, she encourages them to strive for progress: "We can always do better and be better, and there's definitely room for improvement, but overall I feel like it's a pretty good vibe for me."