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Pam Catindig | Pam@Mavertise.com

Maverick Marketing Advertising & PR

Lisa Baehre | LBaehre@SandlerCenterFoundation.org

Executive Director, Sandler Center Foundation

Developing Children’s Hearts & Minds in a Post-Pandemic World

Sandler Center Foundation’s Virtual Academy Returns

Innovative Educational Programming made possible by PRA Group helps address the steepest academic declines ever reported

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Great change can give rise to great innovation. The challenges of the last two years have forced the Sandler Center Foundation to strike out on new paths toward meeting the educational, social, and emotional needs of the children they serve. With the help of PRA Group, the return of the **Virtual Academy** is a flagship example of the Foundation’s flexibility and agility in rethinking business as usual.

The SCF **Virtual Academy** is a robust program of carefully curated programs and performances which are SOL aligned and socially/emotionally growth minded. These programs are delivered to students either virtually or in their schools. Bringing the Virtual Academy directly to the children alleviates transportation and staff shortage concerns and potential health risks inherent in gathering for field trips.



The Virtual Academy programming focuses on the development of both the hearts and minds of children. A recent Purdue University study shows exposure to theatre programming increases verbal scores across all social-economic levels. This is especially important in a time when the [steepest academic declines ever recorded by the National Assessment of Educational Progress have been reported](#), largely attributed to the pandemic lockdown.

Recent performances have addressed bullying prevention, environmental concerns and coping with mental health challenges. Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage, Jewish History, Women’s History, Black History and Military Appreciation have also been celebrated. Teachers are grateful for this critical and impactful programming and the demand is high.

Educators can find out more about how to register for Virtual Academy programming for their students at SandlerCenterFoundation.org/virtual-academy.

Partnering with the Richmond Ballet, which will offer live in-person performances of Don Quixote next spring in schools, the Sandler Center Foundation is on track to break its performance record with 32 performances this year. Over the last 1 ½ years, with the help of PRA Group, the Sandler Center Foundation has been able to reach 23,000+ students and teachers, as well as uncounted parents and family members. “It is because of the generosity of sponsors like PRA Group that access to this type of programming continues,” said Lisa Baehre, Executive Director of the Sandler Center Foundation. “When pandemic restrictions made gathering at the Sandler



Center a risk, we had to develop new ways to accomplish our mission. Ironically, our new strategies have allowed us to impact more children than ever. Innovation is often born of necessity. There is a silver lining to the challenges we've faced and we're grateful."

ABOUT THE SANDLER CENTER FOUNDATION

The Sandler Center Foundation is a 501(c)3 organization that serves the community through three focused pillars: education, community outreach programs and performance underwriting. Each of these pillars undergird the Sandler Center Foundation's mission to educate, inspire, and enrich our community, strengthen local arts organizations, and instill an appreciation of the arts in future generations.