



AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE ARTS AND EQUITY





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All children deserve an education that inspires them to discover, to engage deeply, to think creatively, to hone their passion and skill, and to apply that skill in the real world. Yet too often factors like a child's skin color or neighborhood can predict their access to even the most basic educational opportunities and resources. Educational equity—the premise that all children should have fair access to a high-quality education—has become an all-encompassing policy issue in California and the nation. The issue is so complex and persistent that it is often difficult to recognize how a parent, school community, or district can begin to address student needs. The California Alliance for Arts Education has identified an effective set of approaches to address student access, achievement, and engagement to achieve equity in California schools. These approaches focus on arts learning as an equalizing force in education. They empower teachers, parents, and schools to use arts learning strategies to improve student outcomes and to recognize the power of the arts to transform the school experience.

A SHIFTING EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

As the educational vision for California both broadens and deepens, expectations for a creative, inclusive, whole-child education are growing. The adoption of new standards focusing on core competencies rather than specific content, along with a massive funding overhaul and movement toward local control and accountability are indicators of a paradigm shift toward equity and inclusion. This new perspective is not blind to the complex realities of the opportunity gap but envisions the real possibility of a robust, healthy, and equitable education system. Advocates understand that these new systems will improve outcomes only if they truly reach the needs, desires, and imaginations of the students that those policies are trying to address. As we strive to provide students with what is necessary to thrive in school and in life, learning through the arts emerges as an essential vehicle to engage students in their education.

Longitudinal studies indicate that arts education increases literacy, advances math achievement, engages students in school, and motivates them to learn. Beyond school, the arts prepare students for taking their place in the workforce by equipping them with creative skills, problem-solving abilities, and the capacity to collaborate and communicate effectively. What's more, the arts prepare students for life itself by cultivating perseverance, facilitating cross-cultural understanding, and building community engagement. But most important, the arts resonate with children, providing traction with students who might not otherwise engage, tapping the uniqueness and dignity of each child, and helping children develop the sense of self-worth essential for other learning to take root.¹

- ¹ Arts Education Partnership (<http://www.aep-arts.org/>), a national hub for information about arts education, includes ArtsEdSearch (<http://www.artsedsearch.org/>), a clearinghouse for arts education studies.
- ² http://www.foreachandeverchild.org/The_Report.html
- ³ This is happening not only in California. National research also confirms a lack of arts education resources for students of color. [Americans for the Arts](#).
- ⁴ http://www.artsforla.org/sites/default/files/LCAPInfographic_1.pdf
- ⁵ See "Doing Good by Doing Art" by James Catterall for a study showing profound long-term impacts of arts education on at-risk student populations.
- ⁶ The Kennedy Center has numerous publications and information concerning arts integration as well as impactful research concerning student engagement and creativity. <http://www.kennedy-center.org/education/ceta/>
- ⁷ Arts Education Partnership (<http://www.aep-arts.org/>) has vetted, summarized, and synthesized more than 200 arts education and art integration research studies.
- ⁸ Meryl Goldberg authored a policy brief for the Commission on Teacher Credentialing entitled "Arts Integration in Teaching and Learning." She has also authored the book *Arts Integration: Teaching Subject Matter through Arts in Multicultural Settings* (2012, 4th edition, Pearson), which delves deeply into assessing students' understanding through arts in several chapters.
- ⁹ <http://ericbooth.net/the-fundamentals-of-el-sistema/>
- ¹⁰ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-m-eger/chula-vista-unified-commi_b_8078240.html

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THE TIME IS NOW

For too long the students who have most needed the educational resources to inspire them² have been the least likely to get them. In 2007, the research study “An Unfinished Canvas - Arts Education in California” (SRI) reported that “in California’s more affluent schools, almost twice the percentage of students received instruction in each arts discipline compared with the high-poverty schools,” confirming that access to arts education is directly related to the fundamental injustices in the education system.³ Where there are few or no arts courses, the educational picture often looks dreary in many other aspects of school life as well, including higher dropout rates, less availability of high-level coursework or effective teachers, and poor academic performance.



In response to this crisis, many schools are seeking new and innovative approaches to address persistent student needs, particularly in underserved communities. Arts education is emerging as a significant strategy to address student engagement and achievement in California schools. Lack of access to arts education is one aspect of the inequity problem, and arts learning strategies can be an integral part of the solution. The California Alliance for Arts Education has identified three approaches to empower schools and districts to use arts education to achieve equity goals.



- **Arts in LCFF:** The state-mandated Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) offers school districts the opportunity to pursue arts education as a strategy to enhance student learning, improve school climate, and increase student and parent engagement.
- **Title I Arts:** There is growing national recognition that arts education supports the goals of the Title I federal funding stream, targeting the most underserved students.
- **Arts Integration:** Integrating the arts throughout curriculum can motivate students to unleash the critical and creative thinking skills central to college and career readiness.

These three approaches can and do often intertwine. LCFF and Title I are aspects of the finance and accountability structure affecting schools, while arts integration—a burgeoning approach to curriculum—can help achieve the desired outcomes of LCFF and Title I, as well as address the requirements of Common Core learning. These are not the only pathways to achieve equity goals, nor are they the only successful arts education strategies in schools. In fact, these approaches are most successful when part of a holistic and integrated strategy to address student needs.



WHAT YOU CAN DO: GET INVOLVED IN YOUR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LCAP PROCESS.

- **Recognize that district-wide planning and budgeting happens annually in the spring, influencing each individual school site council’s financial planning. LCFF mandates that all LCAP plans include parent and student input.**
- **The Alliance’s website, artsed411.org, provides LCFF toolkits, leave-behinds and templates as well as information on regional and local arts education networks.**



THE ARTS IN LCFF

Implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) has sparked further thinking about the alignment of arts education and equity in California. LCFF prioritizes resources for the students who need them most, requiring districts to increase or improve services for high-need students. The accompanying Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) is a framework for districts to bring all stakeholders together—administrators, teachers, parents, and students—to develop three-year district financial plans. The LCFF budget structure allows districts to make community-specific decisions according to a set of statewide priorities, all of which align with documented benefits of arts education. The new goals reflect a shift away from a focus on test scores and toward a more comprehensive understanding of what our students need to be successful. As research documents how arts education increases student attendance, lowers dropout rates, decreases disciplinary problems, and encourages positive student attitudes about school, districts can champion arts learning programs that foster the desired outcomes of LCFF.

As LCFF was rolling out in 2014, arts education advocates raised their voices, offering a fresh approach to these new educational priorities set forth by the governor. The Alliance, in partnership with Arts for All and Arts for LA, has developed a host of resources that includes webinars, an online toolkit, a [leave-behind flyer](#) in both English and Spanish, and a sample [Local Control Accountability Plan template](#) to help districts and schools articulate how arts-based approaches address LCFF priorities. In the publication “5 Examples of Arts in District LCAPs,” the Alliance highlights the various ways districts are investing in the arts to serve the needs of students, including hiring credentialed arts teachers, providing time for teachers to develop arts-integrated lessons aligned with Common Core, creating or updating their district arts plan, or providing arts and music equipment. Both El Monte City Elementary District in Los Angeles County and La Habra School District in Orange County are investing in professional development for teachers in arts education to address the needs of English Language Learners. According to their LCAP, Twin Rivers School District, north of Sacramento, is hiring 20 Visual and Performing Arts teachers, giving 100% of K-6 students access to arts education in order to increase attendance and improve academic performance. Newport Mesa School District is investing in music education specifically to increase achievement in math.

Sine the LCFF was established, the Alliance has analyzing LCAPs and developed tools that measure the success of district LCAPs, highlighting trends and best practices for improving outcomes for high-needs students through the arts. According to research by Arts for All and the LA County Arts Commission, more than three-quarters of the 81

school districts in LA County mentioned the arts in their 2014-2015 LCAPs. The majority of those plans linked the arts to the statewide priorities of course access and student achievement.⁴ After only one year into LCFF, arts-based strategies are beginning to take hold as districts articulate what they value, what they are held accountable for, and how they envision overall success for their students.

THE ARTS IN TITLE I

Schools and districts that receive federal Title I funds are charged with improving educational outcomes for the most underserved students. Over the past four years, the Alliance has developed a “[policy pathway](#)” to enable Title I schools to use Title I funds to promote arts education strategies. Combating confusion and false perceptions about the allowable uses for this funding, the Alliance has worked with the U.S. Department of Education and the California Department of Education to clarify that Title I funds may be used for arts activities that are designed to help improve academic achievement for at-risk students.

A significant body of evidence showing the positive impacts of the arts on the social and academic development of high-needs and at-risk students reinforces the idea of investing in arts education for this purpose.⁵ The arts can connect marginalized students to their school experience, activate parental involvement, and promote student success. At Meadow Homes Elementary School, a chronically underperforming school in a high-poverty area of Concord, principal Mary Louise Newling is using Title I funding to provide each child with 30 minutes of music, 90 minutes of visual art or theater, and 90 minutes of hands-on science learning every week and has seen improvements in almost every facet of her school. San Diego Unified School District, the second largest in California, is investing \$3 million of Title I funds over a two-year period to promote arts integration strategies in 22 schools as an innovative way to increase student success. The Alliance’s recently unveiled website, title1arts.org, provides school and district leaders with compliance guidance, research resources, and examples of school-site strategies to advance this policy pathway.

ARTS INTEGRATION

Arts integration is “an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area and meets the evolving objectives in both.”⁶ Put simply, students learn subject matter and demonstrate their comprehension of content through the arts, such as creating comic books to illustrate the key points of literary works or [rapping mathematical concepts](#).

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Understand the financial picture of your school and district: LCFF relates to district-wide funding allocations from the state of California, while Title I is federal funds allocated to specific school sites.

- **Know if your school receives Title I funding. Utilize the resources at title1arts.org to educate and advocate to the site council and principal at the school.**

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Gather information! Decisions about arts-integrated curriculum happens at the school level, but can be influenced by district-wide priorities. Site administrators usually oversee professional development allocations.

Arts for All in Los Angeles has a searchable website for teacher training programs throughout California: <http://pd.laartsed.org/Search/>. **The Kennedy Center’s CETA program is the most nationally recognized professional development program for arts integration:**

<http://www.kennedy-center.org/education/ceta/>
Know if your school district or County Office of Education has a Visual and Performing Arts Coordinator. Gather information about your school and district’s capacity to support arts learning. This [checklist](#) from New York City provides a guide to inventory your school for arts learning capacity.

Arts integration strategies are gaining recognition for their ability to foster creative and critical thinking as well as to create a classroom community that encourages kindness and fairness as students work collaboratively to solve problems.⁷ Arts integration strategies also encourage more equitable access to content for diverse learners, including English Language Learners. For some students, lack of access to technology or limited English proficiency hamper their ability to show what they know via traditional student assessment methods. According to California State University San Marcos professor Merryl Goldberg, “Artwork can provide a tangible representation of students’ understanding of content knowledge, and thus act as an artifact for assessing their knowledge.”

There are a number of professional development opportunities for teachers to learn new teaching practices that incorporate the arts. [Creativity at the Core](#), a statewide professional development initiative, integrates arts with Common Core, while the Armory Center’s [Artful Connections with Math](#) program works with teachers to create hands-on lesson plans that make abstract math concepts concrete and tangible. While these professional development programs target existing teachers, the Alliance recognizes a need for new teachers to come out of their pre-service credential programs aware of how arts might be integrated into the teaching of other subjects. To support that effort, the Alliance recently released a policy brief in support of including arts integration into pre-service credential programs for new teachers.⁸

OTHER PROMISING MODELS

Other collaborations to serve the most underserved in California’s education system are focusing on the transformative potential of arts education for specific at-risk populations. Perhaps the most publicized is the Turnaround Arts initiative, a national model that provides ten low-performing schools throughout California with an extensive host of arts education services, resources, and materials. Additionally, many programs partner community arts resources with schools and districts. The California Arts Council is entering into its second year of a pilot JUMPStARTS grant program supporting local arts organizations that provide arts education programs to youth within the juvenile justice system in an effort to curb the school-to-prison pipeline. El-sistema-inspired music programs, such as the lauded collaboration

between San Diego Youth Symphony and Chula Vista Elementary School District, believe that “effective education is based on love, approval, joy, and consistently successful experiences within a high-functioning, aspiring, nurturing community,” where “every child has limitless possibilities and the ability to strive for excellence.”⁹ The success of the program and the belief system has inspired the Chula Vista Elementary School District to invest \$15 million in arts education over the next three years.¹⁰ Student agency is also a priority for [Destiny Arts](#), a program in the Bay Area that combines dance with violence-prevention training to empower students to achieve greater self-awareness and confidence.

These programs showcase the potential of arts-based strategies to improve school outcomes, but such pockets of arts education excellence are still the exception rather than the rule. For systemic change, we need a shared policy vision that will prioritize arts education as an essential strategy to achieve student success and to improve school climate. That vision will continue to build as more schools and districts invest in arts education strategies.

A SHARED VISION

Excellence for all students in the 21st century means developing students’ sense of self, their engagement with their community and their world, and their capacity for joy and persistence as well as positive expression and reception. There is no one way to solve the problem of inequity in our schools. The solution exists in the collaboration of multiple perspectives, bringing expertise and commitment to a shared educational vision in which each child is given equal opportunity to succeed through inspiring and engaging lessons taught by inspired and engaged teachers. We need to build schools that honor the flavor and culture of their students but are not hamstrung by the socio-economic profile of any given zip code. We envision schools that are community hubs, places where parents, teachers, and students gather to create a positive learning community in which the realities of a child’s life outside of school are not ignored, but acknowledged and addressed. As we continue to push for a shared arts and equity agenda for education, California’s schools are poised to be models of innovation, high-level learning, inclusion, and equity, where every child is prepared to deal with the world they are inheriting and make it a better place.

INVEST IN ARTS EDUCATION TO HELP ALL STUDENTS SUCCEED

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) offers a historic opportunity to invest in our children's future. Arts education aligns with LCFF goals and nurtures a set of unique skills and outcomes for students that help them succeed in school and in life.

Rosalie O'Connor

GOALS OF LCFF

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

SCHOOL CLIMATE

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

BROAD COURSE OF STUDY

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

PUPIL OUTCOMES

BASIC SERVICES

BENEFITS OF ARTS EDUCATION

Higher attendance rates and lower drop out rates ⁽¹⁾

Increases parent and community involvement ⁽²⁾

Decreases disciplinary problems and encourages positive student attitudes about their classroom ⁽²⁾

The arts have a central and essential role in achieving the finest aspects of the common core ⁽³⁾

Theater, dance, music and the visual arts are a valued part of a broad course of study, as set out in the state education code (51210, 51220)

Boosts test scores and achievement in literacy, math skills and ELA especially for English Language Learners and low-income students ⁽¹⁾

Increases graduation rates; fosters 21st Century work skills like creativity, critical thinking and collaboration ^(1, 2, 4)

Credentialed arts teachers enrich standards-based materials and learning in classrooms ⁽²⁾

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