



## Renewed Focus: For Art's Sake

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By Matthew Sarr [msarr@portervillerecorder.com](mailto:msarr@portervillerecorder.com)

### **Burton School District hosts Arts Now Community launch**

In an age where STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) are the main attraction for many school districts around the state, Burton School District hosted an event Thursday to steal some of the spotlight back for the arts.

In cooperation with the California Alliance for Arts Education, the district hosted an Arts Now Community launch breakfast — an opportunity for voices from around Porterville to share their thoughts and ideas and pull together as a community for arts education.

Around 60 people representing a variety of fields and interests were in attendance at the event, including Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux, Porterville Vice Mayor Brian Ward, Pastor Mark Pitcher of Porterville Church of the Nazarene, and Chamber of Commerce CEO Monte Reyes.

“The interest here today is to make sure we are educating the whole child,” said BSD Superintendent Sharon Kamberg. “Arts education is something that has been around forever, but has also been ignored for a while. In the test-taking age we are pushing our students through, it is important for us to re-evaluate our priorities and find ways to enrich students’ lives with the arts you see around you in the room today.”

The scene was appropriately set inside the Summit Charter Collegiate Academy gymnasium for an event celebrating the arts. Attendees were greeted upon arrival by the sounds of the SCCA jazz band, three artists had their easels and canvasses set up and were painting original still life pieces, and a series of tables showcased student sketches, photographs and sculptures.

“We have one goal. Our vision is that every student in public schools receive a quality education that includes the arts,” said Robin Hampton, CAEE representative. “We do that by working alongside local advocacy groups like you who support arts education.”

She shared a story of how her own son Jordan used his love for playing trombone in band class to overcome bullying and a fear of public speaking when he was in grade school.

“He said ‘I belong there (in band). I make a difference there,’” said Hampton.

The Hamptons made it a point to keep their son involved in music in middle school, and one year later he performed a trombone solo with his jazz band in front of 900 students.

“I knew at that moment what arts education could do. What we saw in our son in one year was amazing,” said Hampton. “It gave him back his confidence, and I thought there shouldn’t be one student like Jordan in this great state that doesn’t have access to the arts.”

Last week, that same boy stood in front of a group of generals at Vandenberg Air Force Base and made a presentation.

She went on to summarize how education in California schools has been negatively impacted in recent decades by initiatives such as Proposition 13 and the Ryan Act, and how California once slid from leading all states in public education to ranking 48th as a result.

According to CAAE statistics provided at the event, student enrollment in music education declined by 47 percent statewide between 1999 and 2004.

She explained that the future of arts education is on the rise, however, and applauded Burton School District for making it a priority in their local funding plans.

Attendees then saw firsthand the fruits of arts education in Burton schools as they were treated to two monologue performances by 8-year-old Itzayana Quintero and 9-year-old Aymen Alhadrami. Both demonstrated showmanship, style and confidence well beyond their years as they earned laughter and enthusiastic applause from the audience. After the two adorable performances, BSD visual and performing arts coordinator and first grade teacher Daniella Lovato pointed out another important role the arts play in young lives.

“Art helps to create our characters,” said Lovato. “It’s something that our kids deserve to have and experience for themselves.”

The program then turned to table discussions, during which attendees were asked to share with those seated next to them why arts education is important and how the community can work together toward sustaining it in the future.

Those ideas were then shared with the entire audience. Attendees pointed out that the arts promote individuality, break down walls of segregation, and bring people together. Some noted that the creative process is used in every field, and that arts experiences in the classroom make long-lasting memories and promote good student behavior. The audience also gave several ideas for community arts support. Pastor Pitcher expressed interest in making Port Naz facilities more available to showcase local art, some recommended having more local artists visit classrooms and share about their

skills, and others suggested creating more performance opportunities for local bands and dance groups at public events around town.

Event coordinators jotted down thoughts from the audience on a large flipboard at the front of the room as a representative from each table spoke.

“We need to take away the stigma that there’s no future in art education,” said one audience member, who added that she has used her love for the arts to establish a successful photography business.

Attendees were also given the opportunity be part of an arts leadership team that will work with the district going forward on arts education ideas and activities.

“This conversation has to continue. Please stay engaged,” said Hampton. “Every one of you is a dignitary, and every one of your voices is important.”