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Revive arts education in California schools

There was a time not so long ago when the arts were considered an essential component of an education every student was entitled to receive. As school spending declined and the focus on math and literacy narrowed the curriculum, access to arts education declined precipitously, particularly in California's underserved communities.

The adoption of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) offers an opportunity for the disciplines of arts education—including dance, theater, visual arts and music—to emerge as strategies districts pursue to enhance student learning and improve school climate. Research shows how arts education increases student attendance, lowers dropout rates, and increases parent and community involvement in schools. The arts decrease disciplinary problems and encourage positive student attitudes about their classroom.

The work of the California Alliance for Arts Education, along with Arts for All and Arts for LA, has established a strong body of evidence that can support school districts with examples of arts education strategies that might be part of their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs). Through webinars, an online toolkit and a sample LCAP template, districts are choosing new and innovative approaches to address LCFF priorities.

In the first year of LCAPs, a variety of approaches have emerged as districts reinvest in arts education. Pajaro Valley Unified, for example, is increasing access to arts education by 75 percent by hiring credentialed arts teachers. El Monte City Elementary School District is providing training and curriculum support in the arts to meet the needs of students with disabilities and English learners. La Habra City School District is investing in professional development to promote project-based learning plans, integrating the arts with Common Core Learning Standards.

Districts like these are showing what is possible within the context of the reforms currently underway in California.

What's required now is the kind of leadership that will prioritize arts education as an essential strategy to achieve student success and improve school climate. What we can do is work together to ensure that every school district puts arts education in its LCAP, bringing the arts back to the core of our students' educational experience.



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