

## What parents know: The arts matter

By Joe Landon and Colleen You

The new [Local Control Funding Formula](#) (LCFF) recognizes the critical role parents play in the education of their children – and embeds it into law by requiring parents’ input into local school district budgets and accountability plans.

We are excited about the opportunities for parents, educators and school board members to talk more frequently with each other, listen to each other, and work more collaboratively to help all students succeed.

Parents understand how their children learn and what motivates them to succeed. Through the new funding formula, parents now have a true opportunity to articulate what matters to them to their local school boards, as well as to inform the school districts’ goals for all students, and the programs and services they’d like to see to help achieve them.

And what matters to parents? For one thing, parents overwhelmingly support exposure to the arts throughout the curriculum because they witness firsthand the impact of the arts in the lives of their children, reaching hidden talents and building confidence. They recognize the way the arts connect people more deeply to the world and open them to new ways of seeing.

We believe the arts are essential for a creative, engaged, work-prepared and civic-minded student population. The arts are a critical link to learning success.

That sentiment of parents is echoed by business leaders who understand the needs of the workforce. Joseph Calahan, Vice President of Xerox Corporation, observed: “Arts education aids students in skills needed in the workplace: flexibility, the ability to solve problems and communicate, the ability to learn new skills, to be creative and innovative, and to strive for excellence.”

In the coming months, as school boards seek input and develop their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs), parents will be raising questions: What is a quality arts program and do our students have access to it? Are the arts included in professional development for Common Core State Standards? How can the district use its additional LCFF money to provide access to arts education for low-income students, English Language Learners and foster youth?

Districts will have much to accomplish and address in their LCAPs across the eight identified state priority areas, but we know the arts can and should factor into most of those areas.

There is evidence throughout the state that districts are already responding to the voice of parents. Earlier this year, Michael Hanson, superintendent of Fresno Unified School District, wrote, “The arts are essential to a well-rounded education for our students, expanding their thinking and experiences in ways that simply cannot be achieved by any other avenue.” The school board responded by allotting an additional \$1 million investment in the arts, which has yielded more than 1,000 new musical instruments, new equipment for visual and performing arts, as well as new arts teaching positions and professional development in schools throughout the district.

We are entering a new era in education with greater parent engagement and more local decision-making authority. It’s an opportunity for parents to communicate what matters to them and their children – including access to the arts – and an opportunity for local school board officials to receive that input and to integrate its perspective into the specifics of their local plans. When parents have more of a say, that’s good news for the future of the arts in our schools.