

THE BLOG

Concept of Creative Schools Taking Hold in California

🕒 01/23/2016 10:47 am ET | Updated 1 day ago



John M. Eger

Director of the Creative Economy Initiative at San Diego State University (SDSU) is also the Van Deerlin Endowed Chair of Communications and Public Policy



When it is becoming clear that creativity and innovation are the benchmarks of the new, global, knowledge economy, California is emerging as a leader in the effort to reinvent education.

Last year, the [California Arts Council](#) received a one-time \$5 million increase in its 2014-15 budget, bringing its total support from the general fund to \$6 million. This year, Governor Brown signed a state budget that included a \$7.1 million permanent increase in general fund support for the Arts Council, and the Council in turn, has funded more communities throughout the state, and, together with the California Department of Education, helped craft a "[Blueprint for Creative Schools](#)," which eventually will be adopted by all California schools.

This is not just another government report to gather dust. It is a well thought-out set of recommendations and an action-oriented directive. The Blueprint has recommendations that touch on every aspect of teaching and learning in all K-12 schools. But what makes this effort most attractive is the commitment to developing a long-term agenda, insuring sustainability and creating a program of assessment and accountability.

Significant, also, is the creation of [CREATE CA](#), a new non-profit coalition charged with ongoing convening of the California arts education community, coordinating action among the members of the coalition, and broadly marketing arts education advocacy to the greater public."

With a permanent staff, and a management structure, it is bringing all the major organizations together including the California Alliance for Arts Education (CAAE), the California Department of Education (CDE), the California Arts Council (CAC), the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), the California Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and representatives of other significant arts organizations and initiatives.

While the Blueprint and CREATE CA have not been the driving force in all of the schools, the idea of a well-rounded curriculum using arts and arts integrated techniques is taking hold and a movement is taking shape in education throughout the state.

Public broadcast station [KQED](#), reported, "in a first-grade classroom at [Peralta Elementary School](#) in Oakland, children concentrate on detailed pencil drawings of scenes from the underground railroad. Safehouses and trap doors appear on paper... (But) at Peralta, art is never just about art. These first-graders are learning about history, but they're also practicing math, measuring with their fingers to figure out where to draw horizon lines."

At [Twin Rivers Unified](#) in Northern Sacramento, Jacqueline White, Director, Arts and Career Education, says her district started to deploy arts integration with the help of a U.S. Department of Education grant 6 years ago to benefit 2nd through 6th graders in their English unit. Now, after partnerships with the Kennedy Center and later, the Mondavi Center, they have expanded the program in almost all disciplines and all grades and have inaugurated an artists-in-residence program which hires artists in the community to collaborate with other teachers, and the students. This year alone the district has 19 artists in residence.

[Chula Vista Unified](#), started 3 years ago with an after schools El Sistema orchestra program in partnership with the [San Diego Youth Symphony](#) but this last year announced \$15 million for the arts and art infusion-teaching all disciplines through the arts-over three years. Superintendent Francisco Escobedo said at the time, "As part of our initiative to infuse 21st Century skills into our learning outcomes, the arts are a perfect medium to enhance collaboration, creativity and critical-thinking skills throughout our system."

And [High Tech High](#), a charter school in San Diego, has been receiving a lot of attention for their decision to eliminate teaching specific disciplines per se in favor of practical real world problem solving, often in cooperation with businesses in the community.

According to Pat Wayne, Program Director of CREATE CA, "During the planning process, a key focus is curriculum which is a three pronged approach: credentialed art specialists where possible, teaching artists and the general classroom teacher integrating the arts."

Both the Anaheim City School District and the Riverside Unified School District are actively in the process of developing such a plan and in northern California, Pajaro Valley Unified School District, Santa Barbara Unified School District and the Napa Unified District are in the process of updating their district's arts plan. Most of these plans are a direct result of the program sponsored by California Art Alliance for Education (CAAE), a CREATE CA partner.

Clearly, some California schools are showing the way and, hopefully, CREATE CA will use these schools to help other districts too. There is no doubt that the educational curriculum must change and the use of the arts and arts integration is a method having significant results.

Last month both the House and Senate passed legislation, which the President signed, that according to [Americans for the Arts](#) significantly amended the so-called No Child Left Behind

act and provided support in favor of a well-rounded education through programs that "integrate academic subjects, including the arts, into STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) courses."

This should open the doors for more schools across the country to change their curriculum to include the arts and arts integration.

Follow John M. Eger on Twitter: www.twitter.com/jeger62

MORE: Innovation, California, Education Reform, Distilled Perspective, Arts, Arts Integration