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**SAN DIEGO ARTS EDUCATION PROGRAMS WIN NATIONAL AWARD  
DAYS BEFORE BEING CUT BY 93%**

SAN DIEGO, CA – MARCH 31, 2011 Just days before receiving national recognition for the exemplary arts education programs in their district, the San Diego Unified school board may be forced to cut these programs by 93%.

On April 11, the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network and the National School Boards Association will present the San Diego Unified School District's Board of Trustees with an award for their demonstrated commitment to high-quality arts education. The District, the second largest in California, competed with nominees from all over the United States to win. The award, which comes with a \$10,000 prize, arrives as the District struggles to avoid proposed cuts to the Visual and Performing Arts Department (VAPA) budget to help close a \$114 million budget gap for 2011-2012. Now with a proposed June ballot measure to approve tax extensions off the table, the district may lose another \$50 million.

Like most school districts in California, San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) has faced tough budget decisions because of the state's budget crisis. In 2009, when state legislators gave local districts the flexibility to spend arts and music education block grant funds on non-arts related line items, many districts, including SDUSD took them up on this offer. According to a survey by the Legislative Analysts Office, in 2009 60% of districts shifted Arts and Music Block Grant funds away from arts and music programs and 20% of those districts cut programs altogether.

SDUSD school board briefly considered eliminating VAPA department, but a community-wide effort changed their minds.

"Community support is critical to the sustainability of rigorous arts instruction for all students," says Karen Childress-Evans, Director of the VAPA Department at SDUSD.

Victoria Plettner-Saunders is a local advocate who spearheaded the community effort to retain the VAPA department in 2009. "We became a regular presence at school board meetings, and our message was clear: We want to be in partnership with the district on arts education, and we're not going away."

When the school board ultimately decided to protect the department, arts education advocates did not go away; they got organized. Plettner-Saunders launched the San Diego Alliance for Arts Education in 2010, part of an initiative by the California Alliance for Arts Education to support local advocacy efforts. The group remained committed to working in partnership with the school officials through monthly meetings and activities that include parents, teachers, students, business leaders and cultural institutions.

The Board has remained supportive of arts education as part of the District's core curriculum. In fact, by 2010, the District had included arts education as a priority in their priority-based budget plan. SDUSD avoided the cuts to arts education that were happening in districts across the state. Despite losing 25 percent (\$400 million) in state funding over the last four years, the district offers a robust array of classes and cultural partnerships, which include studio art portfolio classes, mariachi ensembles and playwriting projects.

All of this made them a strong candidate for the Kennedy Center Award, which requires applicants to document budgets, curricula and outcome measurements, long-range planning as well as school boards advocacy efforts at the state and national level. SDUSD competed with peers from California and then was chosen from among finalists across the nation.

Earlier this week, the Board met and was able to find alternatives to some of the proposed cuts to the VAPA programs. 200 pink slips will be rescinded saving several positions including music teachers' jobs.

But now, as the district prepares to accept this award, a new crisis looms. Budget negotiations between Governor Jerry Brown and Republican leadership broke down and the hope of a proposed June Ballot Measure to approve tax extensions that would keep K-12 education funded at current levels dimmed. Despite more than \$18 billion in cuts to state education in recent years, a further reduction of at least \$2 billion will occur unless state leaders can agree on a solution.

Even for a school board with a demonstrated commitment to arts education, in the face of these new, dire realities, it may be difficult to find an alternative.

*The California Alliance for Arts Education is in its fourth decade of working to build a brighter future for our state by making the arts a core part of every child's quality education. A statewide leader and convener, the Alliance focuses on state policy, building local coalitions and public advocacy. To learn more, visit [www.artsed411.org](http://www.artsed411.org).*