

The Role of the Arts in the Expansion of California's Early Learning and Care System

The California Alliance for Arts Education sets forth recommendations to ensure the arts are explicitly included and supported as a core part of the complete early learning experience for California's young children.



A tremendous opportunity is at hand to ensure the arts are embedded in the current work of transforming California's early learning and care system.

Opportunity for Arts in Early Education

Our state is experiencing unprecedented attention and investment in early education, through Governor Newsom's establishment of both the Early Childhood Policy Council and the Early Childhood Action Research Team, as well as the commitment to creating and implementing a Master Plan for Early Learning and Care, along with recent increases in early childhood investments through the state and federal budgets. A tremendous opportunity is at hand to ensure the arts are embedded in the current work of transforming California's early learning and care system.

The arts are uniquely poised to support the goal of inclusive, equitable, high-quality early learning programs for California's young children and their families. Numerous studies point to the benefits of arts integration in the early childhood curriculum -- especially for children from low-income families or otherwise considered high-risk -- to positively impact school readiness, including oral language development and emergent literacy skills as well as social-emotional development and self-regulation. Visual and performing arts offer preschool children many ways to experience playful exploration, self-expression, creativity, and the joy of learning, while serving as a strong vehicle for academic learning.

Arts in the early learning curriculum is of particular benefit to dual language learners and children who have experienced trauma or other risk factors, by providing opportunities for children to draw upon their interests, experiences, and personalities as they express themselves, create with others, and participate in the preschool community. Participation in the arts helps all children develop language skills, and the social context of arts activities support dual language learners, who are able to participate with peers as

language skills develop. Opportunities for self-expression and community connection are elements of a trauma informed – or healing centered – approach to supporting children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

The arts also provide authentic opportunities for family engagement and community building. The value of arts extends beyond the classroom, as a way to connect with families' unique histories, experiences, and cultures. The arts provide myriad opportunities to welcome and engage families, promote and appreciate diversity, and acknowledge the connection between children, their school, and community; families are encouraged to participate in their children's learning and school experience in ways that are comfortable, familiar, and accessible.



The importance of the arts is evident in California's existing early learning and care system, including the Infant/Toddler and Pre-school Learning Foundations, Curriculum Frameworks, and Desired Results assessments. The visual and performing arts are one of nine domain and content areas identified, which lay out benchmarks of children's development, formative assessment, and information for teachers on how to support development. Additionally, the California Arts Standards for Public Schools, Prekindergarten through Grade Twelve, adopted by the State Board of Education in 2019, provide a continuum of expectations across grades. The California Early Childhood Educator Competencies specifies educators' use of the Learning Foundations and Curriculum Frameworks, including the arts, as well as the ability to engage children across domains and content areas.



We also note that specific approaches to providing arts education to young children have yielded powerful outcomes. Exemplary arts integration programming that includes a training component and coaching model for teachers by artist educators has demonstrated significant gains for participating teachers as well as their prekindergarten and kindergarten students, specifically in mathematics development. This is particularly compelling, when considering that most other early childhood math interventions that have been studied have not shown significant findings of positive outcomes. Coaching for early educators is an important component of arts education professional development programs, with particular impact on teacher confidence, use and frequency of arts integration activities, and higher quality implementation.



Now is the time for the arts to be placed on equal footing with other areas of early learning.



Current Challenges

Although the importance and benefits of the arts are acknowledged, in the current early childhood system, the arts are not effectively supported in the same way that other domains and content areas are. The existing resources and structures made available to the field do not currently convey a prioritization of arts and/or arts integration, through professional development or other means. For example, California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN) workshops across the state include few offerings on the visual and performing arts content area and tend to focus instead on other domains of the Learning Foundations. The Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Online Learning Pilot provides free online courses for early learning providers, none of which include arts or arts integration. Further, opportunities through Quality Counts California and other CDE-funded quality projects for coaching capacity-building or train-the-trainer offerings do not typically include the arts as content areas. Current initiatives funded by the State to identify proven models of instruction focus on dual language learners and early mathematics, but not arts or arts integration to support these same areas. Now is the time for the arts to be placed on equal footing with other areas of early learning.

Reflections and Recommendations

We envision an elevated role of the arts in California's early learning system, as a means to meet California's promise of high-quality early learning and care programs for all our children. Although the arts are currently acknowledged and included in California's framework for early learning, opportunities remain to elevate the attention on the arts through the current work toward systems-building along with focused investments. Our recommendations are made with consideration for working within existing systems, structures, and funding sources and to identify areas for integration and alignment of goals and resources.

As California's early learning and care leaders are engaged in systems change, we recommend embedding the arts in existing and developing structures by:

- Including considerations and recommendations specific to the arts in high-quality early learning and care programs in the California Master plan for Early Learning and Care.

¹ Brown, E. D., Sax, K. L. (2013). Arts enrichment and preschool emotions for low-income children at risk. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, (28)2, 337–346.

² Brown, E. D., Benedett, B, & Armistad, M. E. (2010). Arts enrichment and school readiness for children at risk. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25, 112-124.

³ Moreno, S., Bialystok, E., Barac, R., Schellenberg, E. G., Cepeda, N. J. & Chau, T. (2011). Short-term music training enhances verbal intelligence and executive function. *Psychological Science*, 22, 1425-1433.

⁴ Phillips, R.D., Gorton, R.L., Pinciotti, P., & Sachdev, A. (2010). Promising findings on preschoolers' emergent literacy and school readiness in arts-integrated early childhood settings. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 38, 111 – 122.

⁵ Yazejian, N., Peisner-Feinberg, E. (2009). Effects of a preschool music and movement curriculum on children's language skills. *NHSA Dialog* 12(4): 327-341.

⁶ Burnaford, G., with Brown, S., Doherty, J., & McLaughlin, H.J. (2007). *Arts integration frameworks, research and practice: A literature review*. Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership.

⁷ California Department of Education. (2010). *California Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 2*. Sacramento, CA. California Department of Education.

⁸ Ginwright, S. (2016). *Hope and healing in urban education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

⁹ Sikes, M. (2007). *Building parent involvement through the arts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Publishing Group.

¹⁰ Ludwig, M., Marklein, M., Song, M. (2016). *Arts Integration: a promising approach to improving early learning*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

¹¹ Goldberg, M.R., Hall, B., & Saraniero, P. (2014). Unlocking my creativity: Teachers learning in arts integration professional development. *Journal for Learning through the Arts*. (10)1.

- Including positions on the Early Childhood Policy Council specific to the nine domain and content areas, including the arts, specified in the California's early learning system, to ensure the full-range and integrated nature of children's growth and development are considered in ongoing planning, implementing, and assessing of the Master Plan and initiatives.

Investments toward building the capacity of early educators to provide high-quality programs for young children should include the arts. We recommend to explicitly promote the arts content area in professional development opportunities made available or funded by California Department of Education, First 5 California, and partners by:

- Incorporating arts integration delivery and professional development models into existing and developing initiatives, such as First 5's Dual Language Learners Pilot and CDE's California Statewide Early Math Initiative.
- Increasing professional development opportunities in the arts and arts integration, including capacity-building of coaches and trainers as well as specific professional development and resources to support the important role of artist-educators.
- Working with teacher preparation programs at community colleges to include arts integration strategies into coursework.

The California Alliance for Arts Education makes these recommendations in the spirit of collaboratively providing the best opportunities for California's young children and their families. We hope to inform and participate in the effort to build a strengthened system of early learning and care that includes the arts as an integral component.

To continue this conversation with the California Alliance or Arts Education, please contact caae@artsed411.org.

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