

OPINION

The arts heal and transform lives. All California students should have access.

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By Judy D. White and Martinrex Kedziora



Jessica Perez of Desert Hot Springs High School Jazz Band performs during the Helene Galen Performing Arts Center Dedication in November 2013 at the Rancho Mirage High School. (Photo: Omar Ornelas/The Desert Sun)

It was 4 a.m. on Jan. 1, 2019. While some were just getting to bed, nine students from Moreno Valley Unified School District were waking up with excitement, nerves and thoughts full of backbeats, drags and rolls. On this day, these nine students from

Canyon Springs, Valley View and Vista del Lago High Schools would perform in the 130th Annual Rose Parade.

That was two months ago and those students are still glowing.

The arts can be a powerful force of connection in young peoples' lives. We recognize it when a school comes together to create a mural that celebrates their shared heritage, a middle school student recites original poetry that expresses the grief and loss of a parent, or a high school student writes a song that becomes an anthem for classmates who have survived gun violence. We know that the arts have the power to heal and transform our schools and our communities.

In schools where arts education is a core part of the curriculum, there are significant increases in student attendance, a drop in behavioral issues, improved staff retention, and higher parent/family engagement.

Unfortunately, today this opportunity is not available to all. All too often access to the arts is determined by where a student lives. All of our students in California should have access to skill development, creative expression, and rigorous instruction; arts lead to a better future. Creative careers include video game design, music, publishing, film and entertainment, fashion, web and graphic design, and more. The Otis Report on the Creative Economy recently reported that 2.6 million jobs in California are in the creative industries, with \$504.9 billion in total creative economy output.

Research shows that students who participate in visual and performing arts in school do better academically, socially, emotionally, and in the long run, economically. California's Education Code requires that all public schools provide arts education; yet only 38 percent of students at the secondary level have access to dance, music, theater or visual arts classes. We know that students in high need areas have even less access.

That is why superintendents, visual and performing arts educators, principals, school board members, teachers, parents and, yes, students, will be coming together on Wednesday, March 6, 2019, in Palm Springs to discuss innovative solutions and explore promising best practices to better prepare our students for the careers of the 21st century. The "Arts Now Riverside Summit" presented by the California Alliance for Arts Education and hosted by the Riverside County Office of Education, Moreno Valley Unified School District, and the Palm Springs Art Museum will bring these voices together to plan how we can advance equitable opportunities for all students.

We know that employers want creative, innovative people who can find solutions to society's most pressing problems. The arts can spark the creativity that students need to be innovators in the creative industries and beyond. Please join us as we work together to provide high quality arts education for every single student in our schools.

Because, frankly, more than those nine students deserve an opportunity to shine, and it is up to each one of us to help make that happen.

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