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Arts education will keep California students in school and prepare them for careers

By Ben Allen
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Research shows that students who participate in visual and performing arts in school do better academically, socially, emotionally and, eventually, economically. Despite a longstanding state law requiring California's public schools to provide arts education, only 38 percent of students have access to music, dance, theatre or visual arts classes. Compounding this injustice, students with little or no access live predominantly in low-income communities. This isn't right and it's time to fix it.

I have introduced Senate Bill 933, which would begin to close the access gap by creating a statewide grant program to help districts struggling to provide arts instruction. Through a carefully designed competitive process, this one-time investment of as much as \$50 million will also aid districts with a demonstrated commitment to arts education.

SB 933 would also better prepare our students for the 21st century workforce. Art can ignite the passion and instill the skills that students need for careers in California's creative industries.

We see it as a first grader proudly presents the collage depicting her family's journey from El Salvador to America; or as a high school dancer channels the energy and

frustration of the street, soaring through the air to express the world as he feels it; and as a middle school girl finds her own voice reciting the words of a pioneer in a class play.

Creative careers — computer games, music, publishing, film, fashion, advertising, architecture and performing — are powerful driving forces of California's economy, accounting for one out of every ten jobs and contributing \$273 billion to our state's economy each year. These jobs require persistence, problem solving, collaboration and innovation -- skills that will benefit students in any career they choose.

In schools where arts education is a core part of the experience, there are significant increases in student attendance, lower disciplinary rates, improved staff retention, increased parent participation, improved graduation rates, as well as more well-rounded children and adults.

Access to arts education instruction must not be determined by where a student happens to live. SB 933 honors California's promise to ensure that the arts are part of the education that every student receives.

Ben Allen, a Santa Monica Democrat, represents the 26th state Senate district and is chairman of the Senate Education Committee and the legislature's Joint Committee on the Arts. He can be contacted at senator.allen@senate.ca.gov.