

Santa Maria school districts partner to launch Arts Now Community

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Members of the El Camino Ballet Folklorico troupe perform during the launch of Arts Now Community in Santa Maria on Thursday morning.

Though she can't do much with an instrument other than tune it, Robin Hampton knows the importance of arts education in schools.

Speaking to a crowd of more than 60 educators, elected officials and community members Thursday morning at the Abel Maldonado Community Youth Center, Hampton shared the experience she had with her son Jordan. Plagued by a fear of public speaking and lack of confidence, Hampton said Jordan — someone who could not even deliver a presentation in front of a class of 28 students — was able to overcome those barriers by playing the trombone in his school's jazz band.

For Hampton, her son's experience showcased the transformative, confidence-building nature of music and arts and prompted her to switch careers. Now, as a local advocacy field manager for the California Alliance for Arts Education, Hampton has dedicated herself to advocating for arts education in K-12 schools through community-based, district-level programs and initiatives.

"Every student in California should have a quality education that includes the arts," she told the audience. "It's a pretty lofty goal, but we know that good work starts at a local level."

Hosted in partnership with the city of Santa Maria and California Alliance for Arts Education, Thursday morning's breakfast served to launch of Santa Maria Arts Now Community. Designed as an alliance between the Santa Maria-Bonita and Santa Maria Joint Union High school districts, parents and educators, artists, advocates and community members, the group will discuss ideas regarding the growth of arts education for Santa Maria students and develop goals and strategies to get there.

"We're excited about creating opportunities for [students] to have a well-rounded education," said Mark Richardson, superintendent for the Santa Maria Joint Union High School District. "Oftentimes, these are not the kinds of programs that aren't necessarily measurable on a state standpoint, but we know they're important for students."

When California switched its school funding model to the Local Control Funding Formula in 2013, parents and community members became involved in the school districts' planning and decision-making process. Through each district's Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), supplemental funding for arts education was identified and disbursed, explained Nicole Wiseman, coordinator of curriculum and instruction for the Santa Maria-Bonita School District.

The district allocates \$25 per student for arts education for each student enrolled in transitional kindergarten through sixth grade. Wiseman said the funding provides various contract arts and music lessons, trips to museums, performances and other places. Students in seventh- and eighth-grade have the opportunity to enroll in elective music and art classes or participate in extended day programs.

In the Santa Maria Joint Union High School District, students are offered various courses in instrumental music, dance, theater, art and vocal performance. According to Richardson, the district has committed to financing and supporting arts education with construction or renovation of performing arts venues and invested in full-time band instructors at Santa Maria, Pioneer Valley and Righetti high schools.

Though investing in arts education is important, a large function of the Arts Now Community will be to develop a link between the elementary and high schools in the district for a seamless K-12 arts education. The goal is not just to enhance curriculum but establish the capacity for community improvement for subsequent generations of students and leaders, said Santa Maria-Bonita Superintendent Luke Ontiveros.

"We're here to prepare children to be successful citizens, [and] part of that citizenship is what you contribute to that community," he said. "The efforts of everyone here — not just in building a recognition and commitment to arts in our schools, but across our community — is what will make our community what we want it to be ... when we are no longer at these tables."