



A push for the arts at Nevada County event

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When a school is falling behind, the first thing cut is often the arts.

Administrators, educators and nonprofit leaders in Nevada County are working to change that. Art, as many noted at Thursday's State of the Arts event, changes students' perspectives and opens a pathway for academic success.

"(The arts) foster imagination and creativity," said Scott Lay, Superintendent of Schools, adding engagement in such programs is linked with higher test scores, lower dropout rates, better attendance, higher grade point averages and fewer behavioral problems.

A slew of different arts organizations were present at the Miners Foundry event. The group was specifically discussing new data on arts programming.

In some ways, Nevada County schools are lagging behind in standard arts education, according to a report by the Nevada County Arts Council. The report states that in grades 7 to 12, 33 percent of county students are taking art courses, compared to 39 percent in the state.

Julie Valin, who works for California Poets in the Schools, teaches poetry in a number of Nevada County schools. She says arts programming builds confidence and public speaking skills.

"It allows for self expression," she said. "If you have a hard home life, or are shy, you can express yourself."

Nevada Union senior Jai Williams, who is competing in the Poetry Out Loud contest in the state capital next weekend, agreed. While not easily intimidated, Williams would

likely never have gotten into poetry if it weren't for his school, — and teacher — encouraging him to do it.

"We had to do it for English, and my teacher wanted me to do it for the school-wide competition," said Williams.

WORKING FROM BEHIND

Much of the focus now, according to the meeting's participants, is to revive arts programming.

California is recovering from "45 years of not having arts" programs in any robust or significant way, according to Robin Hampton, field manager for the nonprofit California Alliance for Arts Education.

One of the reasons arts classes have been cut, and have become difficult to reincorporate into schools, is because they are more challenging for policy makers to quantify and therefore appreciate, according to Vice President of the Nevada County Arts Council, Brian Buckley.

"The fault is not a local school district or even a local teacher, it's a whole culture and budget and training issue that started before most people were born," he said.

While art is often subjective, Buckley explains you can derive data from having children interact with the arts. That is, he says, although it is difficult to quantify art itself, one can quantify the consequence of having students paint a picture or construct poetry.

"We would have great data if we just analyzed the amount of time a student was exposed to the arts, how much time they are spending in visual arts," said Buckley.

The results of more robust arts programs, the nonprofit leader believes, are better adjusted students, who interact more easily in a world where things are not black or white, and clear answers are hard to come by.

"The arts are more reflective in the real world and adult lives," said Buckley.

Administrators and educators agreed, highlighting the importance of art to the human condition, providing people something that can't be quantified or made into an algorithm. It is, as Valin explains, simply part of what it means to be human, and experience the world as a sentient being.

"I think (art) is pure self expression in whatever form," said Valin. "It's an avenue to connect to the world in your own unique way."



California for the Arts and California Arts Advocates Executive Director Julie Baker addresses the crowd gathered for the State of the Arts presentation at the Miners Foundry.



Nevada County State of the Arts attendees listen to the updates given by administrators and Arts Council members. Nevada Joint Union High School District has a higher percentage of students enrolled in the arts (51 percent) than the state average (40 percent).



Nevada County Arts Council Executive Director Eliza Tudor addresses the crowd gathered for the State of the Arts presentation at the Miners Foundry.



Nevada County Arts Council board member and Vice President Brian Buckley addresses educators and other local stakeholders in the arts Thursday morning at the State of the Arts event at the Miners Foundry. Nevada County has approximately 33 percent of students taking art courses in grades 7 through 12, a number which administrators hope to raise.



The halls of the 1855 Miners Foundry building in Nevada City were filled with educators and other stakeholders interested in making sure every student in Nevada County has access to an education that includes the arts.



Student art took the place of the centerpiece for those in attendance of Thursday morning's State of the Arts address at the Miners Foundry.



Folks applaud the presentations given during the State of the Arts address, including Thursday morning's keynote speaker Donn Harris.