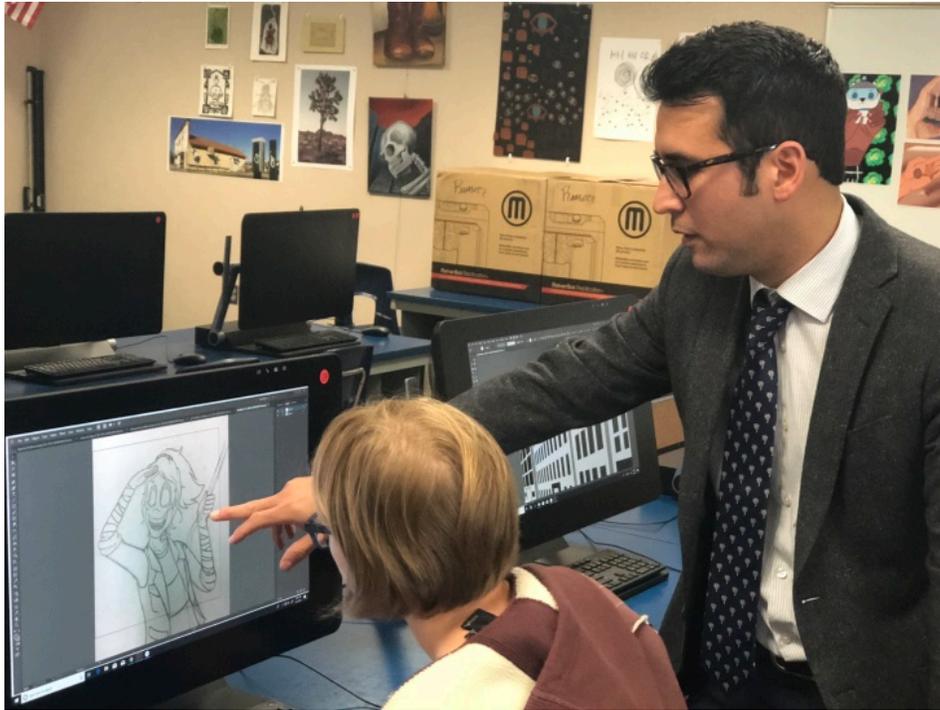




This School District Got An Unexpected \$2.4 Million This Year. Here's How They Spent It

by [Carla Javier](#) in [News](#) on May 29, 2019 6:00 AM



Art teacher Samuel Ramirez works with a student in the recently updated digital arts classroom. The upgrades, which included new computers, Cintiq tablets, and 3-D printers, cost the district about \$175,000. (Carla Javier/KPCC/LAist)

Last year, California set aside \$44 million for a one-time grant program to boost student health, technology, and educational opportunities — including the arts. Over 50 school districts and county offices of education got a slice of those funds to spend this year.

One of those districts was Beaumont Unified in the Inland Empire. In fact, the district got the second largest slice of the grant in the state — more than \$2.4 million.

To learn more about the rare funding opportunity — and what it was used for — I paid them a visit. Here's what I learned.

This story also aired on the radio. You can listen to it on [KPCC.org](#).

FIRST, WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM?

The conversation about a dedicated grant program for visual and performing arts in schools started with [SB 933](#), which was introduced by State Senator Ben Allen in January 2018 with the backing of the California Alliance for Arts Education.

The idea was a departure from how funding arts education usually works. In 2006, [then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's budget](#) did include over \$100 million specifically for arts and music in schools, but these days, there isn't a line item for arts education in the state budget. Instead, under local control, funds are given to districts based on a formula. Then, districts figure out how they need to spend that money to meet their school's needs. The

California Arts Council, which receives state funding, also offers some arts education grants that rely in part on [arts license plate sales](#).

"We knew that it ran counter to some of the policies that were going forward, particularly local control," California Alliance for Arts Education executive director Joe Landon said of SB 933. "But we thought it was worth a shot."

The state legislature passed it in August, but Gov. Jerry Brown, citing his belief that school spending should be decided at the local level, vetoed it in November.

"Nurturing creativity is certainly one of the most important responsibilities of teachers and local schools," Brown [wrote](#) in his veto. "But under our philosophy of local control, this is a matter best handled by individuals at the school level, not at state headquarters."

But that didn't mean support for arts education was off the table. Brown's 2018-2019 budget included a \$44 million [grant program](#) with a broader mandate than just the arts. The funding came from federal Title IV money. When the California Department of Education considered who would and wouldn't get the money — and how much they'd get — it prioritized applications that would expand access to physical health, mental health, and arts education opportunities for students.

It's difficult to say exactly how much of the \$44 million grant went specifically to the support of arts programs. The California Alliance for Arts Education compiled a [list](#) of local education agencies that received the funds, and estimated that \$26 million of the \$44 million went to the arts in some way.

Landon saw the grant program as an opportunity "to demonstrate what funding can do to change the system."

At Beaumont, that's exactly what happened.

SO WHY BEAUMONT?

A couple of years ago, Beaumont resident Pat Wayne reached out to the guy who oversees curriculum for the district, Dr. Mathew Barnett.

Aside from being a community member, Wayne is program director at Create CA, a group of leaders and organizations that advocate for the arts in schools.

But, at the time, the arts weren't the district's main priority.

"We were in the middle of piloting English language arts programs and math programs, and I said, 'Pat, to be perfectly honest, that is going to have to wait for a little bit, because we got all of these other things going on,'" Barnett recalled.

Wayne knew what he meant.

"His response was really a good indicator of what administrators are dealing with, how very full their plates are," she explained.

Some months passed — and so did the 2018-2019 state budget, which included \$44 million for a grant program.

Wayne told the Beaumont school board about the available money during its [July 24, 2018](#) meeting.

"The governor just signed a budget that includes \$45 million for the arts," she said during public comment. "... So I just wanted to offer my help."

That got their attention. Barnett and the district's leaders asked teachers and community members: What would you do if you could get the money, and how much would you need?

After adding up all of the items on their wish lists, they came up with a figure: \$2.6 million.

"A lot of times, you don't get specific funding, or sometimes it's not as much of a priority to think about the arts," Barnett explained. "With the grant funds, we're able to refocus and say, 'Okay, we know that reading writing is important, but how do we integrate visual and performing arts activities?'"

Barnett applied, although he didn't think they'd get nearly that much money. But in November, district officials got a welcome email. Beaumont Unified received almost all of the money it had applied for — over \$2.4 million.



Mathew Barnett

@mabarn

We are so happy to offer guitar as a course next year as a result of our SSAE grant! Who is next to be a Juke Box Hero?

youtu.be/fr6KVnt-1Ek @Beaumont_SD @tdav8

@HawkHammer53 #beaumontisbest #beaumontlearns

17 1:32 PM - May 3, 2019 · Beaumont, CA

HOW DID THE MONEY GET USED?

Some of it went to science, but more than half of it funded initiatives in the arts.

Because it's a one-time grant, Beaumont's \$2.4 million award has to be spent before Sept. 30. That means Barnett couldn't use the funds to pay instructors.

"We had to be thoughtful about, 'Okay, what's our plan? What materials can we buy that we can have on hand?'" Barnett explained. "How are we going to sustain this going forward?"

The final spending figures aren't exact, but Barnett broke down some of the arts budget for the grant funds:

- \$32,000 for elementary art supplies
- \$87,000 for elementary strings, brass, and woodwind instruments
- \$300,000 for middle school bands
- \$720,000 for high school band equipment
- \$175,000 for digital media arts equipment

"None of that stuff would happen if we didn't have this money," Barnett said.

Scroll through the pictures below to learn more about how Beaumont spent the money. **Digital Media Arts At Beaumont High**



Beaumont High digital art student Marriam Jawaid's piece "Confidence Beyond Doubt" won her district's congressional art competition. (Courtesy of Marriam Jawaid/Beaumont High School)

When her digital arts class got new computers, tablets, and 3D printers, junior Marriam Jawaid was pumped.

"I can't believe this is happening," she said. "Even a lot of colleges, they don't have computers like this."

Jawaid's digital arts teacher, Samuel Ramirez, said the school's old computers were slow and crashed frequently, frustrating students and hindering instruction. He's grateful for the new gear, but he worries about districts that didn't receive this money, and about the future.

"What would that look like if the grant wasn't available?" he wondered. "And what is it going to look like seven, eight years from now when this equipment becomes out of date ... is there going to be another grant?"

Instruments, Instruments, And More Instruments



With the new funding, Beaumont Unified bought over \$1 million worth of instruments, including these violins and cellos. (Carla Javier/KPCC/LAist)

Band instructor Victoria Batta said the school used the grant to purchase about 10 cellos, 40 violins, and 10 violas, which will be used to start an elementary strings program in the future.

"It's just really exciting because we can include more kids who maybe would've not been able to afford it before or for whatever reason couldn't sign up," Batta explained.

Training For Teachers



Debbie Nelson works with her first-graders on using theater skills to act out a version of "The Three Little Pigs," from the point of view of the wolf. (Carla Javier/KPCC/LAist)

In Debbie Nelson's classroom, students learned about perception. Instead of just reading a story to the students, she asked them to act out the Three Little Pigs from the wolf's point of

view, using theater skills. She attended visual and performing arts trainings, which informed her approach.

"As a child growing up, we were told to sit and listen ... and I struggled as a first-grade student," Nelson said. "I really think that it's important to introduce all different types of learning, because everybody learns differently."