



Advocating for Arts Education Policy and Equity: A District Board Public Comment

Shanna Tellez

March 27, 2016


Critical Intervention / Personal Voice Action Plan



Research Brief

“The breadth of art education--in school, communities, museums, and so on--is continually threatened by forces requiring that art educators advocate to maintain the opportunities for students that we currently have in place” (Freedman, 2011, p. 41). Every student deserves a complete education that includes the arts. It is integral to achieving a state’s education policy, and ensuring students’ success in school and work in today’s competitive world. The arts in school encourage collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, expression, and engagement. A quality arts education can transform students, schools, and communities. A 2005 Harris Poll shows that 93% of Americans believe that arts are integral to a balanced education. I want my local school district board to account for arts and arts education policy for all schools and students in their district in their accountability plans.


In my local school district, Pasadena Unified, which consists of 28 schools, the arts are present. Regular classroom teachers at the elementary level teach visual art. Professional development in art instruction is offered for classroom teachers, and a single part-time district visual arts coach is available for support. Visual arts are offered as elective courses in middle schools and a middle school arts magnet has been newly formed. The high schools have a small variety of arts electives and specialized career pathways in the arts. Music is taught starting in 4th grade. Some elementary schools have art rooms to support visual art instruction, and are run by parent volunteers, but those schools are in more affluent neighborhoods. As you can see the arts are present, but it is far from an authentic arts education, and the servings are not nearly enough. As well, the offerings certainly are not equitable across all grades and schools.



Prior to 2012, arts education had been decimated in the California public schools, because of reduced state budgets, but also because English and math testing outcomes had become the priority; there was basically no room for the arts. The California Alliance for Arts Education (2005) states in its research brief that, “Despite California’s reputation as an arts and cultural leader, it lags behind many other states relative to state-level arts education policy” (p.5).

In 2013 our Department of Education rolled out a plan called Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). This plan mandates three main areas of priority, further broken down into ten areas within those priorities, to be met by each school. The three main areas as cited by the California Department of Education (n.d.) are: student outcome, engagement, and conditions of learning. The first area, as cited on the department’s website, conditions of learning, consists of basic services or environments and materials and course access, such as access to courses that prepare students for college, among others. The next area, as noted on the site is student outcome, this consists of student achievement, and outcomes within other areas of study, such as P.E. and the arts. Finally engagement consists of implementation of common core state standards, student engagement, school climate, which for example is, promoting calm, positive learning environments, and parent involvement (California Department of Education, n.d.). The LCFF also prioritizes resources for students who need them most, and requires districts to increase and improve services for high-needs students. In turn each individual district has control over how school funds will be utilized in these areas of priority for student outcomes.


These individual schools must write and implement a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) which describes how they intend to meet annual goals for all students. It measures, and holds each district accountable for each of the eight areas of the LCFF. Because of this new



plan, in place for about three years now, each district has a real opportunity to write into the LCAP, measurable, accountable arts policy, offering districts a real opportunity to pursue arts education as a strategy for enhancing student learning, improving school climate, and increasing student and parent engagement. The documented benefits of arts education align with and can positively impact many of the LCFF mandated priorities and act as an equalizing power in education. There is currently no language regarding the arts and art education in my local district's current LCAP. This is what I hope to change by making a public comment presentation at my local school district's monthly board meeting.

In addition to our state's LCFF, California education code, sections 51210, 51220, 51225.3, among others, clearly defines visual and performing arts standards and policy for all grades. For example, section 51210 and 51220, states that the adopted course of study for grades 1-12 should include visual and performing arts, including instruction in the subjects of dance, music, theatre, and visual arts (California Legislative Information, n.d.). These codes clearly indicate the arts have been a valued part of our state's education, and a good reminder for our elected officials.

According to the California School Boards Association's (n.d.) website, school board members are locally elected public officials governing public schools, and are in place to ensure that their district is responsive to the whole of the community. It goes on to state that they set direction, establish structure, provide school support, ensure school accountability, and advocate for its students. According to the site, California has the largest public school system in the United States, with more than 6 million students. It is no wonder that school boards are often over-taxed with numerous school ideals and often overlook undocumented, non-mandated




essentials such as the arts as they are making policy. They also may not realize the important role arts play in education. Freedman (2011) says, “My experience in talking with hundreds of school and community administrators over many years is that they tend to be unaware of the larger aims and goals of art education and know little of what is actually learned through the study of the visual arts” (p. 45).

School boards must hold meetings open to the public, and all education issues are open for comment, whether your child attends a school in the district or not. How funds are spent in each district is a local decision, and because of this, advocacy, meeting attendance, and comment is key to arts education initiative and progress in policy and funding. That is why the school board should be the target for an advocacy presentation.

Critical Intervention

This leads me to the idea of being a voice for students, to advocate to those who have the power to create policy and real change for all children, in this case my local school district board. I may be one person, but if my voice can be heard by a few and if my plea resonates with even just one person, then just maybe I will have begun to affect change for the positive.

To start, I will create a public comment presentation for my local school board. In my school district a 3 minute public comment can be made on agendized and non-agendized items. To place an item on the agenda for special presentation I would need to send my request and materials in writing at least 12 days prior to a meeting; in my local district meetings are held once a month on Thursday’s starting at 4:00pm. The board may not address public comment, but may ask for clarification on presented material. Usually districts have all meeting information located on their website.



I will create a presentation that could be placed on the agenda or simply offered as a non-agendized comment. There will be 10 powerpoint or Prezi slides with simple effective language and impactful images. Joe Fusaro (2011) has great suggestions for photographing and documenting student work and arts engagement within schools. I think creating a digital portfolio of district images for use in my public comment presentation would be a powerful way to connect the passion and need for arts within our local schools.

My presentation outline is as follows:

- 1) In my **introduction** (presentation slides 1 and 2)
 - a) I will state my name and address, as per my local districts rules.
 - i) I will provide a printed version of my remarks for public record.
 - b) I will acknowledge the board and thank them for the opportunity to speak.
 - c) I will let my passion show and because storytelling is powerful I will personalize this section to illustrate my position on arts education within the district.
- 2) In the **main** portion of my presentation (presentation slides 3 through 9)
 - a) I want to remind my local leaders of the eight areas of priority implemented in the Local Control Funding Formula.
 - i) And how this specifically impacts or can be impacted by art education in our district.
 - b) I want them to remember the California Education Codes and research that place a long standing premium value on arts education within our school system.
 - c) I will outline the significance art education has in connecting students to 21st century career skills.

3) In **conclusion** (presentation slide 10)

- a) I will ask for allocated funding and the board's support in ensuring that special importance be placed on arts education across all district schools, and for all students through accountable, clearly stated LCAP language, guaranteeing educational equity.

I will also create a one-page leave behind with meaningful images, and key factual points with references, regarding art education and its impact on student learning.

All students have the right and deserve access to a creative, authentic, well-rounded arts education, regardless of their race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, or where they live and go to school. The arts and creativity are more than memorized facts, they are abilities that will last a lifetime and can positively affect school priorities as well as the larger national and global community for generations to come. Art education is crucial for giving children a voice, passion for learning, community participation, and cultural awareness. It can positively affect many of the priorities identified in the LCFF. Through the arts students will learn collaboration, problem solving, focus, confidence, and 21st century skills. I hope that I can affect change at the local level by voicing my opinion in a clear, educated, passionate voice.

References

Freedman, K. (2011). Leadership in art education: Taking action in schools and communities.

Art Education, 64(2), 40-45.

Fusaro, J. (2011). Document. *Art21 Magazine*. Retrieved from

<http://blog.art21.org/2011/09/21/document/#.VvQeJktwqno>

California School Board Association. (n.d). Governance and Policy Resources. Retrieved from <https://www.csba.org/GovernanceAndPolicyResources/EffectiveGovernance/RoleandResponsibilitiesofSBMs.aspx>

California Department of Education. (n.d.). State Priority Related Resources. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/statepriorityresources.asp>.

Americans for the Arts (2005). Press release archive: Harris poll results. Retrieved from <http://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/pdf/news/press-releases/2005/06/New-Harris%20Poll-Reveals-93-Percent-of-Americans-Believe-Arts-are-Vital-to-Well-Rounded-Education.pdf>.

The insider's guide to arts education planning. *California Alliance for Arts Education*. Retrieved from <http://artsed411.org/insidersguide/intro>.

California Legislative Information. (n.d.). California Law. Retrieved from <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codesTOCSelected.xhtml?tocCode=EDC&tocTitle=+Education+Code+-+EDC>.

California Alliance for Arts Education. (2005). *Quality, Equity, and Access A Status Report on Arts Education in California Public Schools Grades Pre-K through 12* [Briefing Paper]. Retrieved from <http://artsed411.org/files/docs/briefingpaper05.pdf>