

Arts Obispo leads effort to bring art back to local schools

BY SARAH LINN

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As an art history major, Jenna Hartzell learned how the arts can shape a society.

“Every great community supported the arts, and it made their community better,” said Hartzell, executive director of [Arts Obispo](#), the San Luis Obispo County Arts Council.

With that in mind, Arts Obispo is teaming up with educators and community leaders to create the San Luis Obispo County Alliance for Arts Education, which will work to bring back visual and performing arts into local classrooms.



Jenna Hartzell

COURTESY PHOTO

About 60 people met Nov. 14 at an arts education advocacy breakfast at the Cal Poly Pavilion to launch the initiative. Speakers included Hartzell, county Supervisor Caren Ray, county Superintendent Julian Crocker and Cricket Handler, co-artistic director of [Canzona Women's Ensemble](#).

“Arts education squarely addresses 21st century skills” such as communication, critical thinking and problem solving, Ray said at the breakfast. “By educating our young people in the arts, we assure our best possible future.”

According to Sibyl O'Malley, director of communications and community outreach for the [California Alliance for Arts Education](#), student enrollment in arts programs has slumped statewide in recent decades, starting with the passage of property tax-reducing Proposition 13 in 1973.

Following the 2008 economic recession, 60 percent of California school districts shifted funding away from the arts, O'Malley said, while 20 percent eliminated arts programs altogether.

“If you were to visit any one of the schools in our county, you would see art in every classroom,” said Christine Enyart-Elfers, senior project coordinator for the county Office of Education. However, she added, the level of arts education varies greatly by site.

According to responses to a survey sent by Arts Obispo at the beginning of October, most local elementary schools provide their students with 30 minutes to an hour of arts instruction per week. Middle schools used a “Fine Arts Exploration Wheel” to introduce students to multiple media over a semester or year, while high schools offered choir, band, drama, photography, film and visual arts classes up to 30 minutes a week.

Funding came from a variety of sources including education foundations, parent-teacher groups, grants and donations, the survey found.

The 27 schools and districts that responded to the survey, which was sent to all 10 county school districts as well as Grizzly Youth Academy and county-run court and community schools, said a lack of funds, community resources and instructional time were among the barriers to more arts instruction.

Several respondents also cited a need for professional development linking the arts to [Common Core state standards](#).

Hartzell said the county Alliance for Arts Education will educate people about the importance of arts education while giving them “the tools and the resources and the empowerment” to work with school boards and administrators.

About 20 people expressed interest in joining the alliance’s leadership team, Hartzell said, including school administrators, teachers, parents and politicians. They likely won’t meet until February, when she returns from maternity leave.

Find out more

For more information about the San Luis Obispo County Alliance for Arts Education, contact Jenna Hartzell at 544-9251 or director@artsobispo.org.

Read more here: <http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2013/11/27/2806801/alliance-for-arts-education-slo.html#storylink=cpy>