

BENICIA HERALD

Launch event to highlight arts education tomorrow

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How important are the arts in education? That is a question that will be discussed at the Benicia Arts Now Community launch breakfast at Benicia Middle School.

The new local art education advocacy organization, in conjunction with the statewide California Alliance for Arts Education, will be hosting a special event to discuss ideas on how to grow art education in Benicia. Benicia Arts Now Community was formed last year by a group of parents who wanted further access to art education for their children. The group has expanded to include businesses, city officials, the Benicia Unified School District and local organizations such as Arts Benicia.

The goals are in line with those of the statewide California Alliance for Arts Education.

“At one time, every student in California was receiving arts education,” Sibyl O’Malley, the Alliance’s senior director of advocacy and communication, said. “Our executive director went to public school here and got to experience having access to music, dance, theater and visual art.”

However, O’Malley said policy changes were made over time that “diminished the overall state budget and education budget.” During that time, school districts were put in a position where they had to cut art education. As a result, the California Alliance for Arts Education formed to influence the budget and legislation to support the arts.

“We still do that work, but as decision-making has become more and more local in California we’ve gotten more involved in supporting local efforts to build strong, sustainable arts programs,” O’Malley said.

The organization was contacted by Jenny Manzo, a Benicia parent who helped found Benicia Arts Now Community. The Alliance has provided coaching and communication support to the Benicia coalition.

According to O’Malley, the benefits of arts education are numerous. Among these are skills in creativity, collaboration and critical thinking in education and the workforce.

“There’s also an abundance of research now that shows that the arts have secondary benefits,” O’Malley said. “Students that have access to the arts tend to do better

academically overall, they tend to come to school more often, they're far less likely to drop out."

The launch breakfast will bring community leaders such as Mayor Elizabeth Patterson and BUSD educators together to talk about the current status of art education in Benicia and opportunities for growth.

"There's a lot of great things happening," O'Malley said. "The gathering is an opportunity to build a coalition of people who value arts education and then move ahead together to advance arts education in the schools."

O'Malley hopes the event will inspire the community to further understand the vitality of arts education and work to support it.

"With these events, people are reminded of how important the arts are to our students," she said. "It is possible to build and sustain arts programs. For so long, the economy in California presented some challenges, but we're seeing really exciting progress happening around the state. Part of this campaign is communicating that."

The launch breakfast will take place from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m. Friday, May 18 in Benicia Middle School's Talk Town room, located at 1100 Southampton Road. A complimentary breakfast will be provided by Sprinkle's Deli. The event is free, but seating is limited. To RSVP, go to [eventbrite.com/e/benicia-arts-now-community-breakfast-launch-tickets-45529308387](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/benicia-arts-now-community-breakfast-launch-tickets-45529308387). For more information, email Manzo at BeniciaArts4All@gmail.com.