

California Blueprint for Creative Schools Unveiled

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After two years of debate and discussion by artists and art teachers, school principals and administrators and public policy gurus, Tom Torlakson, California Superintendent of Education, released California's "Blueprint for Creative Schools."

It is a present to the state, to schools across the state and to the children who will be the beneficiaries of this momentous effort to give them the thinking skills they need to succeed in a new and very different economy, an economy where creativity is vital. Indeed, California children most likely will prosper, as they become the inventors, innovators, and creators of this new-truly global-economy.

This is not just another government report to gather dust. It is a well thought out set of recommendations and an action-oriented directive. Special thanks to the hard work of the task force's leadership and the philanthropy of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation this report has real meat, structure and direction.

Together with what California has already accomplished the last two years, this effort to fashion a "robust 21st century model of arts education (which) will become the center for creative education K-12." Citing an 18-month major report by President Obama's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, CREATE CA recognized that "The arts embody creativity and, as such, are taking a central role in many national studies."

The Blueprint has recommendations that touch on every aspect of teaching and learning in all K-12 schools, but what makes this effort most attractive is the commitment to developing a long term agenda, insuring sustainability and creating a program of assessment and accountability.

Significant also is the creation of a permanent staff, and a management structure bringing all the major organizations together (the California Alliance for Arts Education (CAAE), the California Department of Education (CDE), the California Arts Council (CAC), the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), and the California Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and potentially 4 representatives of significant arts organizations or initiatives), and redefining "Create CA as an independent coalition charged with ongoing convening of the California arts education community, coordinating action among the members of the coalition, and broadly marketing arts education advocacy to the greater public."

The new organization has already advertised for a "Project Manager (who will be) responsible for planning, coordination, and support of the entire CREATE CA coalition and its efforts under the direction of the CREATE CA Leadership Council chair and vice-chair."

But one of the most exciting and promising efforts, which the Blueprint" understands well, is how the recommendations in the report coincide with the Creativity at the Core initiative, adopted by the state, as it "place(s) discrete arts education and arts integration at the forefront during the implementation of the Common Core for all California K-12 schools -- specifically, through the creation of teacher professional-development modules that incorporate dance, music, theater, visual arts, and other arts forms into Common Core instruction."

The California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) has held several arts training events based on a groundbreaking program called "Creativity at the Core" in advance of the broader vision.

Developed as a result of a grant from the California Arts Council and supplemented by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, CCSESA has modules created by Regional Arts Leads, a member of the Association's Visual and Performing Arts subcommittee, as part of CCSESA's Statewide Arts Initiative. The event will be held at the Sacramento County office of Education's Leadership Institute to focus on ways to "build Artistic Literacy through Common Core State Standards," and Employ techniques to use the arts -- art integration -- "as a Model of Rigorous Instruction."

Recently, the California Arts Council received a one-time, \$5 million increase in its 2014-15 budget, bringing its total support from the general fund to \$6 million. This kind of funding by the State Assembly, according to Craig Watson, Executive Director of the Council, represents a significant "commitment to arts education and California's young people, and a desire to stimulate economic development in communities around the state through the arts and creativity." Hopefully this just the beginning of the legislature's awareness that the arts are crucial in our schools and our communities. We are fast becoming an economy in which the most successful nations are deploying every means available to produce a workforce that creates and innovates.

As the demand to meet the challenges of a global knowledge economy is rapidly increasing, few things could be as important in this period of our nation's history than art and art-infused education.

For all of the above, this is another auspicious effort by California which should lead to a renaissance in education.