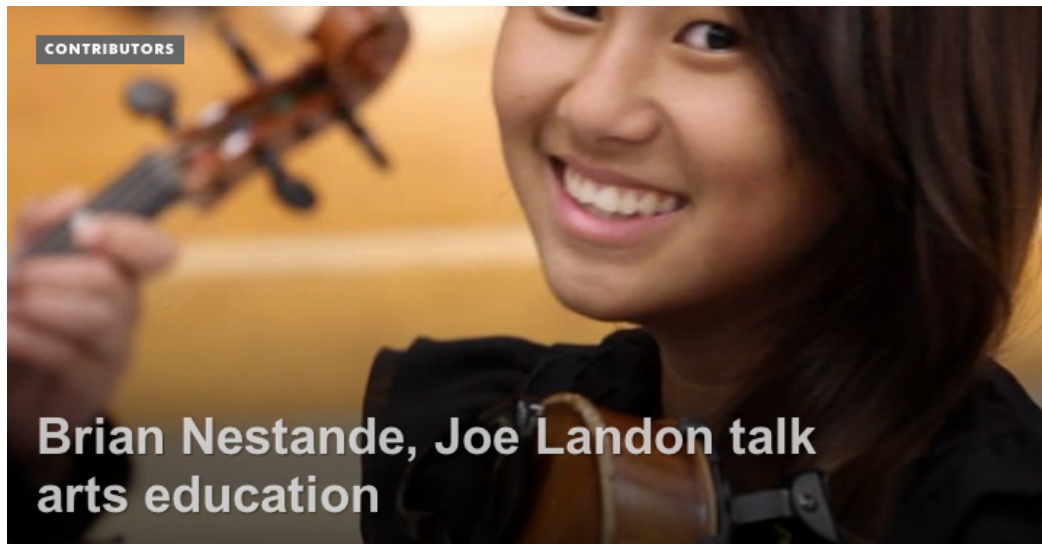




Local control is coming to a school district near you. With the enactment of the “Local Control Funding Formula” (LCFF), school boards around the state will soon be making decisions that will determine how schools provide a comprehensive educational experience for all of our students.

For school board members, it is a time of both great opportunity and considerable challenge. There are so many priorities that must be taken into account when determining how best to enable our students to succeed in school and to be prepared for entering the work force or continuing their education.

For parents and others concerned with the quality of education, it is a time to raise their voices, to advocate for what matters and bring solutions to the table that will make our schools better. Parents overwhelmingly support exposure to the arts throughout the curriculum because they witness firsthand the impact of the arts in the lives of their children, reaching hidden talents and building confidence. They recognize the way the arts open students to new ways of seeing the world.

In addition, the arts are essential for learning success because they build a creative, engaged, work-prepared and civic-minded student population.

In recent years, as school funding in California was drastically reduced, arts education programs were often the first to be cut. Where parents and communities could afford arts programs, those services limped along. In higher poverty areas where those resources didn’t exist, programs disappeared. Sadly, unequal access has become the new normal of arts education.

So why does all of this matter? California has a dropout rate of more than 13 percent, suggesting that too many students find no meaningful connection to their education. At the same time, our state’s economy relies on creative industries — they account for 8 percent of the state’s GDP and for one in seven jobs in Southern California.

According to Sarah Murr, a former global corporate citizenship community investor for Boeing Co., “The challenge is that we have a shortage of people with the creative skills for the jobs that are needed in an increasingly dynamic and competitive marketplace.”

We now have an opportunity to bring arts education back into our schools in a significant way. After years of focusing on standardized tests and a narrowing of the curriculum, the Local Control Funding Formula sets new goals for local districts that prioritize student engagement, parent involvement, school climate, student achievement, a broad course of study — all things that the arts are known to contribute to.

In the coming months, as school boards seek input and develop their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs), local advocates have an opportunity to provide a teaching moment about the benefits of arts education in their district. Restoring art as a priority provides us with an opportunity to provide a real solution to help deal with some of the problems facing our schools.

The California Alliance for Arts Education has created a toolkit to help local advocates be at the table for these conversations, which is available at www.artsed411.org. We encourage parents who believe in the value of arts education to advocate to your local school board using this toolkit.

Every child deserves the best education possible and every parent wants the very best for her or his children. It’s time to invest in students’ abilities and potential by investing in arts learning.

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