

## Commentary

## Hold districts accountable for restoring funding for the arts

March 26th, 2013 | 8 Comments |

By **Mark Slavkin** / commentary



A well-rounded education that includes the arts is essential to prepare California students for college and careers. A year of fine arts is required for admission to the CSU or UC campuses. Further, the skills students gain in the arts – imagination, creativity and innovation – are essential for success in the California economy, no matter the industry or sector.

While the California Education Code has long established the place of the arts in the required course of study, actual implementation in California classrooms varies widely. Recognizing these disparities and understanding the need for additional resources, the Legislature in 2006 established the [Art and Music Block Grant](#), a \$105 million line item in the California Department of Education budget that provides every school district an allocation based on their total enrollment.

Just as districts began to gain traction in expanding arts programs, the state economic crisis threatened all school funding. In light of state budget cuts, the Legislature granted districts special flexibility, allowing many categorical funding sources to be used to sustain basic operations.

As the state emerges from the economic crisis and school funding begins to improve, it is time to turn back to the question the Legislature addressed in 2006: How can we best ensure all California students have equitable access to quality arts education?

The governor's [proposed 2013-14 budget](#) would eliminate almost all categorical programs in the name of local control and flexibility. We have strong concerns about whether all kids will have equitable access to the arts under this new funding model. Historically, students in high-performing schools in more affluent communities have had the greatest access to the arts. Sadly, those students in underserved communities who might benefit the most from a more engaging and well-rounded curriculum receive the least. We urge the Legislature to give careful thought to this issue and consider the options below to address it.

1. Establish "innovation matching grants" to encourage districts to invest in the arts. Perhaps half of the existing Art and Music Block grant could be set aside for competitive matching grants for districts that increase student access.
2. Require districts to publish an annual "arts education report card" documenting the current status of arts education in their schools. This could empower parents and other concerned citizens to understand current gaps and advocate with their school board to make arts learning a greater priority.



Mark Slavkin

3. Require districts to include their plan for arts education in the overall "[academic achievement plan](#)" called for in the governor's budget proposal.
4. Require that student learning in the arts be included in [the expanded Academic Performance Index](#) now being developed by the State Board of Education.

We look forward to working with the governor and Legislature to ensure all students gain equitable access to arts education.

•••

**Mark Slavkin** chairs the board for the [California Alliance for Arts Education](#), a statewide coalition working to strengthen arts education in K-12 schools. A former member of the Los Angeles City Board of Education, Slavkin directs education programs for [The Music Center](#) in Los Angeles.