

# Time to embrace arts education as a priority

By Francisco Escobedo & Cindy Marten | 5:15 p.m. March 9, 2016



FILE - In this Oct. 29, 2011 file photo, conductor Gustavo Dudamel rehearses the Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles at YOLA EXPO Center Chamber Orchestra in Choral Hall at Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu, File) *The Associated Press*

Coldplay, Bruno Mars and Beyoncé were not the only musicians rocking out during the Super Bowl 50 halftime show this year. Members of the Youth Orchestra Los Angeles, led by Los Angeles Philharmonic Music Director Gustavo Dudamel, were also on stage, looking like true rock stars. Over 111 million viewers tuned into to watch Super Bowl 50, making it one of the most watched broadcasts in U.S. TV history.

While countless eyes were trained on the halftime extravaganza, many in the arts education community were focused on the teen musicians who were clearly having the time of their lives. Countless children dream of being

superstars. For the Youth Orchestra teens, that day, being on that stage — they were. Every young person should have the chance to shine and be able to express themselves just as these talented (and lucky) teens did.

Here in San Diego, our two school districts are leaders in the national effort to ensure every child benefits from having a well-rounded education that includes the arts. San Diego Unified School District and Chula Vista Elementary School District are creating arts education opportunities in our own unique ways so every child in our schools receives the unique benefits of learning in the arts.

With the passage of the new federal education law known as “Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA), leaders on both sides of the aisle have shown they recognize the importance of robustly returning the arts to our campuses for all our children to experience, succeed and grow.

As superintendents of two of the largest districts in San Diego County, we know that educating our children means more than preparing them to take tests. It involves cultivating their creativity, thoughtfulness and ability to collaborate with others to enable them to succeed, not just in school but in life. We know a well-rounded education includes the arts.

To that end, we have embraced arts education as a priority within our districts, and have begun to take concrete steps to ensure that every student receives access to arts education as a core part of their learning experience. With the active support of parents, teachers, students, nonprofits and administrators our two districts have been able to forge ahead. Our parallel investments in arts education have drawn national attention to San Diego County and the impact we are having on student learning.

Next week, the California Alliance for Arts Education — in collaboration with San Diego Youth Symphony and Conservatory, Arts for Learning San Diego, and the San Diego County Office of Education — is shining a bright light on the

programs in our schools and celebrating student achievement at the “Arts Education Learning Exchange.”

San Diego Unified’s “Learning Through the Arts” initiative is reaching students in 22 schools with a coordinated arts integration system that pairs nonprofits and teaching artists with classroom teachers. The program, funded by federal Title I dollars, is leading the national conversation on how to use arts education strategies to reach historically disadvantaged students.

Last summer, the Chula Vista Elementary School District culminated a five-year partnership with San Diego Youth Symphony and Conservatory by hiring over 70 credentialed visual and performing arts teachers. All 30,000 kinder through sixth grade students in the district now receive instruction in music, theater, dance, visual arts or media arts.

Our two district initiatives have clearly demonstrated arts education programs promote increased student engagement, parental involvement, improved school climate and significant student achievement.

Just as importantly, we are instilling dreams in these children and giving them the means to achieve those dreams. They need not reach an audience as large as Coldplay’s or Beyoncé’s to achieve their dreams. Simply performing in front of their family, friends and fellow students because they have arts education in school ensures they learn what it takes to share their talents with the world and the confidence to pursue their dreams. We all benefit when that happens.

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