

Art meets the classroom in Tulare County

Gary Garcia-LoBue Published 9:01 p.m. PT Jan. 19, 2017 | Updated 9:21 p.m. PT Jan. 19, 2017

The 1978 passage of Proposition 13 in California cut tax revenues for public schools and virtually eliminated arts programs.

Nearly four decades later, school art programs are still struggling. Between 2014 and 2015, there was a 9.6 percent decline in the number of students without access to any art instruction.

Recent figures indicate that 97 percent of students have access to some level of the arts. Of those students, only 26 percent of students participate in dance, music, theater and visual arts, as required by the state education code.

More than 85 percent of schools provide at least one of the required arts, but only 12 percent offer the full four.

For Pat Wayne, her passion for arts in education stems from being cast as Alice in a school production of Alice In Wonderland in second grade. The program director for Create CA said she had been an introverted student when her teacher cast her.

The play changed her life.

"Who of us can't relate to being given an opportunity to shine and have our creativity embraced by somebody," she said.

Thursday evening, The Arts Consortium of Tulare County teamed with California's leading arts education and advocacy organizations: Create CA, California Alliance for Arts Education and CCSESA Arts Initiative.

The organizations hosted a workshop specially designed for Community Arts Education Partners. The workshop was designed to pave the way for arts education for all students. Artists, advocates and educators from across the Valley participated.

Peggy Burt, a senior adviser for Arts Planning Initiative and California Alliance for Art Education, reminded the crowd of the importance of continuing the conversation outside the event.

"We really need the community to get involved," she said. "Engage school administration, the principal, school supervisor...ask what can we get done?"



Educators and artists collaborated during The Arts Consortium of Tulare County workshop on Thursday. (Photo: Calley Cederlof)

Representatives from the agencies were on hand to discuss recent changes in funding for education and their impact on the arts.

"The arts allow my students success in life; as life requires a sensibility about our world and a person's place in it," said Lori Negrete, an English/Intervention teacher with the Kings Canyon Unified School District for the last 15 years.

Negrete, who teaches in Reedley, also serves as the Drama Club's adviser.

"The arts are a wonderful way to provide my students with skills that they can use in multiple settings throughout their education as well as various future jobs," she said.



Art displayed during Thursday night's Arts Consortium of Tulare County workshop. (Photo: Calley Cederlof)

In its fifth decade, the California Alliance for Arts Education continues working to make the arts a core part of every child's education. The Alliance works with California's educators and other

experts in arts and culture to advocates for quality arts education for all students with focus on public advocacy, state policy and partnerships within many California communities and web-based advocacy groups.

Benefits of arts in the classroom show higher attendance rates and lower drop out rates. It also correlates to decreased disciplinary problems and encourages positive student attitudes. Test scores increase as well as achievements in literature, math and English language arts standards for English-learners and lower-income students.

Significant evidence also shows the positive impact of arts on social and academic development starting at an early age.

In the kindergarten classroom, art is essential.

“At such an early age, where students may not be able to fully express themselves verbally or in writing, art is so important,” said Sarah Silva, a Wilson Elementary kindergarten teacher. “It’s so vital.”