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New Budget Puts Arts Education At Risk Statewide

Advocates face new "use it or lose it" reality

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The new California state budget, approved on February 19th, dictated scores of changes, including revisions to the regulations previously governing categorical funding for K-12 visual and performing arts education. These changes put visual and performing arts education at risk statewide.

Today, in response, the California Alliance for Arts Education released its analysis of the new budget and its implications for visual and performing arts education. The Alliance identified the following facts:

- The budget describes 3 tiers of categorical funding. The arts and music block grant falls in the 3rd tier, which means there will be a 15% reduction in 2008-09 and an additional 4.9% reduction in 2009-10.
- There is complete flexibility for the district to use these funds as the district wishes.
- There is, however, a public process that is required as a condition for transferring funds from categorical items. As a condition of exercising the flexibility provisions in Tier 3, the local governing board shall: "At a regularly scheduled open public hearing, take testimony from the public, discuss, and approve each transfer and the proposed use of funding."
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With schools statewide suffering cutbacks and shortfalls in many areas, there is sure to be pressure to transfer funding for arts and

music programs to other competing priorities. According to Laurie Schell, executive director of the California Alliance for Arts Education, "The categorical line item remains, but of course the distressing news is that districts will be free to plunder the proceeds. For that reason, we are activating our statewide network to prepare for a protracted public campaign to keep visual and performing arts in our schools."

The Alliance is working directly with educators, administrators, business and community leaders in districts across California to help them prepare for upcoming public hearings and an extended grassroots campaign to prevent visual and performing arts education from disappearing altogether from California K-12 public schools.

"Unfortunately, arts and music are often the first to go in times of crisis," says Schell. "But studies show time and time again that arts education is an integral part of a well-rounded education, teaching valuable 21st century work skills and reaching at-risk students who are not otherwise well-served by the school system. Should districts decide to rob arts programs to cover other expenses, we will be robbing our children of a full and complete education." Studies consistently demonstrate that visual and performing arts education encourages the development of effective communication skills, critical and innovative thinking, cooperation and flexibility – all crucial to jobs of the future.

In 2006, the Alliance spearheaded a campaign that led to \$105 million in ongoing block grant funding for visual and performing arts. Since then, the Alliance has worked to ensure that the Arts and Music Block Grants are allocated, implemented, and accounted for in a manner that ensures quality, equity, and broad access to arts education for all California K-8 students.

"With the change of direction dictated by the new state budget, in a sense we're back to square one," says Joe Landon, policy director for the Alliance. "But our grassroots work to pass the block grant funding a few years ago led to a very strong network of arts education advocates across the state. This is the ultimate test, as they prepare to do battle in their communities to make sure arts remain in our public schools."

For more information, visit <http://www.artsed411.org>.

CAAE is the only statewide organization that brings together all primary constituencies for arts education, annually serving over 100,000 arts organizations, K-12 teachers, professional teacher associations, state and local education departments, professional development providers, parents and PTAs, and interested

community members in higher education and business. Our shared mission is to promote, support and advocate visual and performing arts education for preschool through post-secondary students in California schools.