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Compton Bulletin, The (CA)

Ensuring arts education for all CUSD teaming with civic leaders, community, state nonprofit to form local arts alliance

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COMPTON- School district officials joined with area movers and shakers last month for an inaugural meeting of the minds in a move to form a unique **arts education alliance** here. Facilitated by the California **Alliance for Arts Education (CAAE)**, the early morning March 20 breakfast meeting was attended by both Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas and Assemblyman Isadore Hall III in addition to a host of area activists and stakeholders.

Their goal: the formation of a local branch of the **alliance** that, in the midst of a state budget crisis and national and global economic meltdown, will ensure every child who attends public school receives instruction in the **arts**.

Compton is one of 10 communities selected to pilot the CAAE's community-advocate building and mobilizing program. Other communities include Bakersfield, Encinitas, Hayward, Twin Rivers, Saddleback Valley, Salinas and the counties of San Mateo Sonoma and Tuolumne.

"We invited Compton to be a pilot site **for** a number of reasons," said Laurie T. Schell, CAAE's executive director.

"The bottom line is, there's something going on here. ... We want to work with you (Compton Unified) and support your efforts." CAAE is a statewide nonprofit organization with just four full-time staff members that advocates **for arts education**.

It aims to promote systematic change in policy and practice relative to the availability of **arts** curricula in public schools. As Schell puts it, it "is no easy feat." "It's our job to work at both the state and local level to ensure that every child enjoys the **arts**," Schell said.

"We're here as advocates of the future.

"The theory is that by bringing communities (stakeholders) together that represent our constituency, we'll begin to see more ... activism at the local level, which will translate into activism at the state level." Ridley-Thomas described the formation of a local **arts alliance** as "an important way of pulling things together." "I understand the central, integral nature of having a holistic **education**," said the former educator-turned politician.

He linked studies that show **arts education** as key to developing critical and creative

problem-solving abilities in students - the workforce of tomorrow - to the county's need **for** a highly skilled workforce to staff King-Harbor Hospital upon its return to full-service status.

"When you walk into that facility, you'll see **arts education**" at work, he said.

He also linked **arts education** to ceasing violence within the community.

"**Arts education** is essential to that agenda. ... Compton has a clear role to play in advancing this agenda." Schell agrees.

"We know the **arts** are fundamental to a well-rounded **education** and help students develop vital 21st-century workforce skills that will serve them **for** decades to come," she said. According to CAAE, the benefits students draw from **arts education** include better attendance, overall improvement in performance in all academic disciplines, lower dropout rates and the development of critical thinking, flexibility and innovation skills that are necessary now more than ever **for** future economic success.

Hall noted that "given the financial crisis at the state level," forming a local **arts alliance** is critical at this juncture.

"We're cutting everywhere, so it's important to have organizations who will advocate like this," he said.

CUSD Superintendent Kaye Burnside Ed. D. said that regardless of the district's current budgetary woes, the **arts** are not going anywhere as far as their current place in the classroom.

"There is nothing more beautiful than sitting down next to a child and witnessing them experiencing the **arts**," Burnside said.

"I believe that it's out there on the edge that you dance ... where you really create," she continued, describing the extraordinary efforts all involved in local **arts education** efforts are making, and must continue to make, as an **art** in and of itself.

"**Art** manifests itself in all kinds of ways," Burnside said.

Lanette White, who oversees Compton Unified's Visual and Performing **Arts** (VAPA) programs in addition to a host of others aimed at higher achieving students, was lauded **for** her efforts since joining the district several years ago.

"She's done wonders **for** the district since she's been here," school board President Marjorie Shipp said.

It was White's accomplishments that first caught CAAE's eye, leading to its selecting Compton to participate in the pilot program.

CAAE said that by the end of May, all 10 participating communities will have met and laid the groundwork **for** getting their own **alliances** up and running.

Moving forward, it will be up to member business, community, **education**, parent and **arts** organization leaders to identify common concerns and goals relative to enhancing and stabilizing **arts education** in their communities.

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