

# Art, music give students skills to succeed in tomorrow's world

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Budget cuts. Teacher layoffs. In this time of budget crisis, can our public schools really afford to continue funding arts and music education?

The appropriate question is: Can California schools afford not to?

The Dana Arts and Cognition Consortium recently identified a direct correlation between arts experiences and both academic achievement and personal development. The research shows that students who are exposed to the arts demonstrate increased overall academic success beyond just test scores, are connected to the world outside of school, and have more self-confidence.

What's more, the report found that training in the arts leads to higher levels of reading acquisition, motivation, extended attention spans, information recall in long-term memory, and understanding of geometric representation. For example, specific pathways in the brain can be identified and improved during performing and visual arts instruction.

Not convinced by the academic research? Then look at the economics.

Americans for the Arts, the nation's leading non-profit for advancing the arts, released its Creative Industries 2008 report. It found a direct correlation between arts-related businesses and employment, identifying the arts as a formidable economic growth sector. In San Jose alone, more than 1,708 arts-related businesses employ more than 6,000 residents. These businesses play an important role in building economic vitality. They are the cornerstone for the tourism industry and sustain jobs that pay well.

Given the facts, can we really afford to not invest in arts education? If Silicon Valley hopes to remain the global center of innovation, it must rely upon a steady supply of highly skilled and creative workers. Ideas drive innovation. Silicon Valley needs more than the technological know-how to lead the economy of the future. We need dreamers, problem solvers and creative thinkers. Ask yourself, was it the technology or the creativity in design that led the iPod to change the way the world buys and listens to music?

The arts develop creativity and skills applicable in the "real world," such as flexibility, positive attitudes toward work, and adaptable knowledge. Businesses demand the skills in order to compete in today's economy.

The academic research and economic data clearly point toward the importance of arts education in our classrooms. And the public agrees. A recent survey by the Public Policy Institute of California, "Californians and Education," noted that 88 percent of all respondents felt that art and music are important parts of the curricula in their local public schools.

This year, the Santa Clara County Office of Education gathered a team of Silicon Valley educators, elected officials, parents and community members to provide input into the creation of a countywide Arts Education Master Plan. Every corner of the county was included in this process and the message was clear: Arts education should be a priority throughout our region, regardless of the wealth of students and districts. No child should be without art.

As school district and state budgets are finalized this year, it may seem easy to cut arts-based programs in favor of the fundamental subjects which our schools' standardized tests are based on. That viewpoint is shortsighted.

If we hope our children will prosper in tomorrow's knowledge economy, we must provide technological and creative foundations in their education. Arts education is good for a child's learning and development. It's good for the economy. And overall, it's good for our future.

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