

ARTS EDUCATION IS NOT OPTIONAL.

IT'S ESSENTIAL.

Research consistently demonstrates the numerous positive impacts of arts education on students' lives, from improving academic performance, to preparing students to succeed in the 21st century workforce, to promoting lifelong social and emotional skills, including resiliency, collaboration, empathy and leadership.

We all are emerging from an unprecedented time, a time unlike any we have ever known, where every person's life, regardless of age or circumstance, has been disrupted by the pandemic. Arts education must be used as a pathway to provide students with the tools and understanding necessary in order to meet the challenges of this time.

THE ARTS AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

In May of 2020 the California Department of Education sponsored the "Advance SEL in California" Campaign. Hosted by State Superintendent Tony Thurmond, First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom, and State Board President Linda Darling-Hammond, the campaign published the report: "Advancing SEL Amid A Pandemic And A National Awakening To Systemic Racism." The document highlights the urgency of our current situation:

"We will not be returning to "Normal" and we shouldn't...Education systems have a responsibility to adapt to the changing society. Social emotional learning can lead the way to this new world of inclusivity and belonging for all."

Each student is dealing with their own unique experience of how the pandemic has impacted their lives: from the trauma of losing loved ones, to the loss of family income creating instability in the family structure, to the isolation of living without the constancy of social interaction with peers and reliable support from dedicated teachers. Every student has a story to tell and we must encourage and cultivate their voices to tell their unique stories -- Through the drama of a theatrical scene, the harmonious performance of a musical ensemble, the resilience of a painted image or sculpture, or the spontaneous freestyle movements of dance. In whatever form that expression takes, we need to encourage the confidence and social skills that will be required for our students to re-engage in their educational experience.

CREATE CA

During the pandemic deeply rooted inequities have surfaced in our social fabric, including inequities in access to arts education. Prior to the pandemic, statistics documented that

ONLY 38% OF OUR STUDENTS ARE ENROLLED IN ARTS EDUCATION COURSES

and that the absence of visual and performing arts is

MOST EVIDENT IN UNDERSERVED/ UNDER-RESOURCED COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

impacted by racial inequities in our educational system. All children deserve an education that inspires them to discover, to engage deeply, to think creatively, to hone their passion and skill, and to apply their skills in the real world. Too often factors like a child's skin color or neighborhood can predict their access to even the most basic educational opportunities and resources.

As we strive to provide students with what is necessary to thrive in school and in life, learning through the arts emerges as one of the essential ingredients of every student's education. Now is the time for our schools to provide students with the restorative power of arts education.

THE EVIDENCE

Many new resources, strategies, and data have emerged during this time, providing information highlighting how Social Emotional Learning can be built through arts learning. The links provided below offer evidence of arts education supporting SEL, student and family engagement, and a positive school culture and climate.

Investigating Causal Effect of Arts Education Experiences: Experimental Evidence From Houston's Arts Access Initiative¹

Study findings provide strong evidence that arts educational experiences can produce significant positive impacts on student academic and social success. For students in elementary schools, study finds that these arts educational experiences also significantly improve school engagement, college aspirations and arts-facilitated empathy.

"It Just Made Me Want to Do Better for Myself": Performing Arts Education and Academic Performance for African American Male High School Students (2020)²

Findings from this project indicate that immersion in school-based performing arts learning experiences strengthens academic skills development, improves overall school performance, and enhances post-school outcomes for African American male high school students. These findings suggest that bolstering arts-based school curricula and increasing access to performing arts learning experiences may improve school outcomes for African American males who attend U.S. public schools.

For more information, consult these resources which provide evidence of the practice of and rationale for arts education and social emotional learning:

- *The California Department of Education SEL Newsletter*
- *The Center for Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning*
- *Theory of Action for Arts Education and Social Emotional Learning Outcomes Among K-12 Students*

WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

As decision makers at the local level, we understand your first priority is to address the primary needs of the students in your school and district. Arts education has a role to play in addressing both short term and long term needs of students. To that end, we encourage you to address the following questions:

How can the arts support the healing of students in our district, including the mental health of students?

How do we increase the ongoing capacity of arts education to reach students within the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) of the district?

How will you use new sources of federal or state funding to support arts education in our district?

Are there additional community partners we can reach out to who relate directly to the experience of our students, who can convey culturally diverse aspects of arts education?

1) Daniel H. Bowen and Brian Kisida, "Investigating Causal Effect of Arts Education Experiences: Experimental Evidence From Houston's Arts Access Initiative," Houston Education Research Consortium 7, no. 4 (2019): 1-28.

2) Walton, C. W. (2020). "It just made me want to do better for myself": Performing arts education and academic performance for African American male high school students. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 21(13). Retrieved from <http://doi.org/10.26209/ijea21n13>.