

Arts Now Communities

Why Arts Education Matters. The arts have the power to transform young people's lives. They bring moments of joy, of creative self-expression, and have a unique ability to communicate the ideas and emotions of the human spirit. For many students, the arts are a lifeline in an educational system that has no meaning or connection to their lives.



Arts education also plays a vital role in preparing students for a successful future. Studies link student involvement in the arts to lower dropout rates, higher academic performance and increased standardized test scores across all subjects.

California's entertainment industry has inspired the imagination of people the world over, and innovative technologies developed here have revolutionized the ways people think, communicate and live. Our state boasts the eighth largest economy in the world and accounts for 13% of the country's gross domestic product. Arts education nurtures creativity and imagination in students, skills that are essential in an economy driven by ideas and innovation.

Yet, California is ranked 46th the nation for per-pupil funding in K-12 and years of budget cuts have left many schools with limited arts offerings or none at all.

A Historic Opportunity. Today, California is at a critical crossroads. The passage of the Local Control Funding Formula in 2013 quickly and dramatically changed the way local schools set priorities and are funded. Categorical funding, including funds earmarked for arts education, has been almost entirely eliminated. Now, school boards, in partnership with their local community, are empowered to set new, locally driven priorities aimed at improving outcomes for students who are often underserved in public schools. This presents an important opportunity for local community members to speak up in support of arts education in local schools.

Arts Now Communities. Anticipating the shift toward local control in school planning, in 2008, the California Alliance for Arts Education launched Arts Now Communities (formerly the Local Advocacy Network) to provide leadership training, strategic assistance and communications tools to support arts education advocacy in local communities.

Since 2008, the network has grown to include over thirty California communities, from Humboldt to Escondido. Each site has a unique set of circumstances, but all of them focus on the goal of ensuring that California public school students have access to a high-quality arts education.



Goals of Arts Now Communities:

Increase public funding for the arts
Ensure equity and access to arts education by closing opportunity gaps and eliminating inequities in access to arts education

Strategies of Arts Now Communities:

- * Undertake an assessment of district or county arts education resources and gaps
- * Pass or update a District Arts Plan
- * Advocate for inclusion of arts in district Local Control Accountability Plan

- Build relationships with superintendent and school board
- Survey school board candidates before an election
- Attend school board meeting, make a presentation, participate in public comment, or coordinate a student performance and/or testimony
- Partner with parent groups, local businesses and arts organization
- Participate in the Student Voices Campaign

In collaboration with members of your community and with guidance from your Arts Now Field Manager, new groups identify which of these goals and strategies are a good match for the specific circumstances of their school district or county. The California Alliance provides communications resources, training, and financial support for establishing a new Arts Now Community site. The Field Manager provides on-going coaching throughout the year related to developing an action plan, participating in the Alliance projects and strategizing next steps within your community context. Specific responsibilities of Arts Now Communities are to:

- Complete the Readiness Scale to establish what assets are in place at the start of your local effort, then
- Participate in the California Alliance’s annual Local Advocacy Retreat each September to learn about current policies, opportunities and strategies
- In collaboration with the local leadership team and the Field Manager, develop Action Plan that will be implemented by the end of the contract period
- Provide copies of the Action Plan and report on outcomes to the Alliance twice a year, in January and June
- Share information from the California Alliance with local constituents, including training opportunities and action alerts at the state and local level
- Maintain ongoing communication and coordination with Alliance’s designated Field Manager and with the California Alliance’s Director of Communications and Community Engagement regarding communications and media opportunities

Arts Now Communities' Accomplishments

- 78% of members' districts made investments in arts education programs or strategies in their 2015-2016 Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs)
- 67% of members' districts have adopted an arts plan or are working on one using a template originated by the California Department of Education and the California Alliance for Arts Education
- 68 California school districts undertook surveys of candidates running for school board, offering voters information about candidate views on arts education
- Arts education advocates were cited by California Department of Education as most numerous participants at regional public comment session on California's proposed new school assessment measures