

MUSIC AND ARTS EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA/USA:

A Narrative of What Can Happen in Education When a Society Does Not Value Music for Its Children

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There was a time when the State of California, one of the leading states in the United States, had exemplary music and arts programs for most children in public schools. The decline in programs of music education did not happen all at once but developed over time as attitudes toward the importance of music and arts in education changed.

The downhill changes in curriculum and instruction in music and arts education began in 1970 with the passage of the Ryan Act, legislation that changed requirements for the preparation of elementary school teachers throughout California. In practical terms for music education, it meant that university students receiving credentials to teach in K-8 classrooms in California public schools no longer had to demonstrate an established level of proficiency in music and visual art in order to be awarded a teaching credential. In 1971, one outcome of a legal suit for the civil rights of students in poorer school districts, *Serrano versus Priest*, was that funding for more affluent school districts was beginning to be leveled at the state level to provide more equal access to education

for all students in California. In practice, the impact of this ruling resulted in a decline of funding for various school districts that had traditionally provided quality music and arts programs and some of these districts began to lower the number of music and arts teachers hired to serve K-12 students.

The most devastating assault on music and arts education can be dated from June 6, 1978, when Proposition 13, “People’s Initiative to Limit Property Taxation,” passed in a statewide election. “Proposition 13” slashed property taxes 57% across the state of California. Property taxes provide the basic funding for K-12 education in California. This “revolt” by taxpayers in the state had an almost instantaneous impact on music and arts programs. Within hours of this measure’s passage, a number of school districts cancelled summer school programs in music and the arts. Next, many academic year music and arts programs were diminished or eliminated as funding for schools greatly declined. Supporters of music and arts education were stunned with the number of programs that were suspended with the passage of “Proposition 13” and many of these programs have yet to be restored after more than 30 years. The successful political campaign for voting YES on “Proposition 13” was the result of formidable lobbying for lower taxes by conservative taxpayer groups.

Immediately after the passage of Proposition 13, concerned supporters of music and arts education for all students organized the Legislative Action Coalition for Arts Education. This independent organization lobbied the California legislature and the governor for legislation that would restore programs and provide systematic, predictable funding for music and arts in schools. These lobbying efforts in conjunction with conferences and publications to inform the public about the importance of arts in

education were supported and guided by the California Alliance for Arts Education. Much work was done in the 1980's and 1990's through collaboration of the Legislative Action Coalition for Arts Education (LACAE) and the California Alliance for Arts Education. One specific achievement was to develop and support a bill for the California Legislature that stated that a one -year course in the visual and performing arts would be required for high school graduation and to be eligible for freshman admission to the California State University or the University of California (two separate systems of higher education in the state). However, in order to pass this legislation; it was necessary to compromise the requirement for high school graduation and amend the bill to read that the requirement could be satisfied with a course in the visual or performing arts or in a foreign language. Now in 2010, California Assembly Bill 2446 is pending and if signed into law, will further weaken the visual and performing arts requirement for high school graduation by stating that it can be satisfied with a course in foreign language or with a course in career technical education. For University of California or California State University freshman admission, one year of an approved course in the visual and performing arts is still required.

Since the initial impact of "Proposition 13," there have been periodic developments that have encouraged advocates of arts education. Supporters of music and arts in the schools were heartened with the election of Delaine Eastin as California State Superintendent for Public Instruction (1995-2003). Superintendent Eastin was a passionate activist for arts in education and supported the development of Content Standards Pre-K through 12th grade in the Visual and Performing Arts (music, dance and theatre). These Visual and Performing Arts Standards were adopted by the California

State Board of Education in January, 2001, as a part of the Core Curriculum for public schools in California. In addition, Eastin assembled a taskforce of arts educators from around the state during 2002 to update the Visual and Performing Arts Curriculum Framework for K- 12 students for instruction in dance, music, theatre and the visual arts. Much time and thought were invested in developing both the Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards and the Visual and Performing Arts Curriculum Framework.

The content of what K-12 students in California should know and be able to do in music, dance, theatre and the visual arts was organized in the both the Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards and in the Framework in five strands:

Strand One: Artistic Perception (literacy) – Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information;

Strand Two: Creative Expression – Creating, Performing, Participating;

Strand Three: Historical and Cultural Context – Knowing and Understanding the role of arts in past and present cultures;

Strand Four: Aesthetic Valuing – (Critiquing) Responding to, Analyzing, and Making Judgments;

Strand Five: Connections, Relationships, Applications (among the arts, to other subject areas, and to careers.)

Both of these documents, The Content Standards for the Visual and Performing Arts (adopted 2001) and the California Framework for the Visual and Performing Arts (adopted 2004) can be downloaded from the California Department of Education website (www.cde.ca.gov).

Looking back, there were two developments in 2001 that seemed to be landmark achievements for arts in education. The first was the signing by the California State Board of Education for a measure that approved the Visual and Performing Arts Standards for pre-K – grade 12 students as a part of the California Core Curriculum. The California Education Code 51210 and 51220 reads, "The adopted course of study for grades 1-12 shall include visual and performing arts, including instruction in the subjects of dance, music, theatre, and visual arts." Advocates expected that this meant that music and arts instruction would actually be provided to all K-12 students but the words have not, in general, been brought to life in classrooms due to "local flexibility."

The second development in 2001 was related legislation, SB 2042, that re-established an arts requirement for obtaining a California multiple-subject teaching credential, the basic credential for becoming an elementary (K-8) classroom teacher. However, this legislation only stated that the Visual and Performing Arts must be addressed, there was no language about how, for how long, or what must be covered.

During this period of time, leaders in the field of arts education in California were convinced that with Delaine Eastin, a highly visible state leader, rallying support for music and the arts and by developing "cutting edge" visual and performing arts standards and a framework, school district policy makers would again support and implement rigorous music and arts programs for students. California was financially prospering. There was great hope that a portion of what had been lost in music and arts education stemming from "Proposition 13" could be regained.

Unfortunately, this did not happen. California leaders of music and arts education did not anticipate the tsunami force impact of federal legislation from Washington D. C.

that was soon to narrow the curriculum even further while subjecting schools and teachers to intense pressure for improvement of test scores in reading and math. “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001” was signed into law by President George W. Bush in January, 2002, reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This federal policy, which is still in place, carries such a powerful emphasis on reading and math that music and the arts are regarded by educational decision makers as lower priority subjects. In some schools, teachers are prohibited from taking time for singing or doing visual art, because these activities take away minutes that could be spent on reading or math.

What have we lost in the State of California?

Generally we have lost access to arts education for a majority of K – 12 students.

We have lost access to time for music and arts education in the school day as more and more programs are relegated, if they exist at all, to after school time periods. Access to a robust, qualified teaching workforce because “after school” programs are not regulated in terms of credentialed or certified instructors who have the recommended training and preparation for providing optimum instruction for students. Access to equitable funding is lost because the schools are looking for funding for the arts from any possible source.

Numbers can also indicate the magnitude of what has been lost. Based on records obtained from the California Department of Education and the California Alliance for the Arts, in 2000-01 school year during which of the more than six million (6,147,375) K-12 students were enrolled in California public schools, approximately 800,000 students were enrolled in music classes; approximately 550,000 students enrolled in visual arts classes; approximately 125,000 enrolled in theatre classes; and fewer than 75,000 enrolled in

dance classes. In 2005-06, the last year that arts education enrollment information is available, the total enrollment of students K-12 in California Public Schools was 6,312,436. Enrollment in music classes had dipped to approximately 550,000; enrollment in visual arts classes had actually risen to slightly above 600,000; enrollment in theatre and dance classes was virtually the same as in 2000-01. The drop in students in music classes is most dramatic and if we had numbers available for the 2009-10 school year, it would probably show a continuing loss of students enrolled in music classes.

What do arts advocates believe K-12 California students deserve?

The California Alliance for Arts Education has documented that arts advocates believe that pre-Kindergarten to 12th grade students deserve equitable access to quality programs in Music and Arts Education. These words are amplified by:

QUALITY: A comprehensive arts education fosters the creativity and innovation needed to create a workforce for the future.

EQUITY: Every child deserves arts education. Students' access to schools with quality arts education should not be predicated on where they happen to live.

ACCESS: All California students should have the opportunity to access arts learning opportunities as a critical component of a complete education.

What is needed in music education in California?

Research indicates that the cognitive and creative processes of every child's brain would benefit from instruction and experiences in music, dance, theatre and the visual arts.

Implementation of research-informed, child-centered curricula that includes music as a

central, essential component is urgently needed. Developing research indicates that quality music programs have a measurable impact on the brains of young children. There must be a dramatic increase in K-12 music instruction in California, if literacy in music in this state is to be brought back from the brink of extinction.

