



---

Main Office: 495 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena CA 91101 P: 626-578-9315 F: 626-578-9894 [www.artsed411.org](http://www.artsed411.org)  
Sacramento Office: 1121 L Street, Suite 510, Sacramento, CA 95814 P: 916-440-1855 F: 916-448-7801

TO: Members of the California State Legislature

FROM: California Alliance for Arts Education  
Laurie T. Schell  
Executive Director

RE: THE STATE OF ARTS EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA- 2010

DATE: February 2010

As this new legislative year begins, the California Alliance for Arts Education wants to draw attention to the challenges we currently face as school boards throughout the state make difficult budget decisions for the coming year.

Since 2006, the Governor recommended and the California Legislature approved a categorical "Arts and Music Block Grant", which supported arts education in every school district in the state. This investment enabled schools and districts to begin to repair the infrastructure of an arts education system that had been in steady decline for the past thirty years.

During the past year, this opportunity became more challenging, as school districts were granted 'flexibility' in the allotment of those categorical funds. The Alliance gathered information from the thirty largest school districts in the state about the impact of local flexibility on the delivery of arts education. What we learned was that, as a result of that flexibility:

- Districts reduced their spending on arts and music by an average of 50%.
- Many Visual and Performing Arts District Coordinator positions at the district level have been eliminated.
- Any unspent block grant funds were swept into the district's general fund, eliminating the opportunity to build programs carefully by setting aside funds.

We were told that district programs are continuing 'bare bones', without additional support for supplies or equipment, with teaching positions in peril.

Since then the situation has only gotten worse. In addition to the block grant augmentation funds, the budgets for arts teachers, the bedrock of any

instructional program, are at severe risk. In Los Angeles Unified, 173 of 345 elementary arts teacher positions are on the chopping block, with the remaining positions slated for elimination in 2011-12. As advocates for arts education, we've been here before, and we know what's coming. In hard times the arts are always among the first to be eliminated.

Federal legislation includes arts education among the 'core' subjects that every student should be taught. The arts do more than enhance the educational development of the child. Instruction in visual art, music, dance and theatre prepare students with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the expectations of the twenty-first century workforce. Those skills include the innovation, discipline, creativity and collaboration, as well as the practical applications inherent in career technical education courses.

We know that students attending high poverty schools have less access to arts instruction than their peers in more affluent communities. We have a responsibility to ensure that every student benefits from arts education.

In our policy paper, [Accountability in Arts Education: Building a Statewide System of Reciprocity](#), the Alliance laid out a vision for providing quality arts education in California's schools. Its recommendations included:

- Establishing policies that ensure arts education for all students, including adequate funding, effective reporting mechanisms, content standards and instructional materials adoption by districts, qualified teachers, and equitable scheduling and enrollment of classes.
- Expanding practices that support arts learning, including needs assessment and strategic planning, quality curricula, professional development and instruction, and effective assessment of arts learning.

The Alliance believes that we must stand up for arts education in the face of the current crisis, and begin to build upon a vision for the future that will enable every student to receive the full benefits of arts education in their lives.

*The California Alliance for Arts Education is the only statewide organization that brings together all primary constituencies for arts education, K-12 teachers, professional teacher associations, state and local education departments, professional development providers, parents and PTAs, and interested community members in higher education and business. Our shared mission is to promote, support and advocate visual and performing arts education for preschool through post-secondary students in California schools.*