

# The Montclarion

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## COMMENTARY

### Alliance stresses value of the art of education

By Sheila Jordan

All students deserve a high quality, well-rounded education. That much is clear. The question is, how can we be sure they receive it? And how can we hold ourselves accountable for it, and for the success of every child? Integrating arts into classroom learning is central to answering these questions. During March, which is Art IS Education month, we can see the strong link between quality education and learning through the arts. This is an important first step to understanding why art truly IS education.

The Alameda County Office of Education has formed an Alliance for Arts Learning Leadership (Alliance for ALL) composed of parents, teachers, students, artists, education activists and community members dedicated to bringing arts learning into all 18 school districts. Their guiding belief states that the purpose of education is to create a healthy and equitable society, and I embrace this belief. The arts are essential to the cultivation of self so that every student can grow into full citizenship and live a full, productive and participatory life.



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At any of the 16 Arts Learning Anchor Schools in Oakland, Berkeley and Emeryville, you will see children learning and understanding math, science, social studies and language through the integration of the arts.

You will see children who are engaged in school — the special needs child building vocabulary through visual arts; the gifted child challenged to think deeply through complexities of music or drama; the disconnected child struggling, succeeding and smiling through movement. Every child is exercising his or her right to learn in the way most meaningful for him or her. These are truly equitable classrooms. We know how to create these great classrooms by using the arts as a pathway for learning.

Public education is the most critical social issue before us today if we are to assure the future of a working democracy. And yet how we hold ourselves accountable for high quality education increasingly is debated.

Most measures we use are inadequate to tell us what children really know. A test score is a number, but the arts open windows to what children know now and can inform our thinking about what to teach next. The arts make children's learning visible. Alameda County school events during Art IS Education month vividly demonstrate how the arts engage the whole child, developing knowledge and skills for lifelong success.

As a leader for arts learning in school districts nationwide, the Alameda County Office of Education has situated the arts squarely in the center of our strategy to improve our schools. We are part of a national initiative to create public understanding of the role of arts in learning. Our strategic plan from the Alliance for ALL addresses the question of how we create equitable learning environments for every child in every school in every district in our county. I share the Alliance's vision of arts learning for ALL: every child, every school, every day. This is a shared vision we can realize together that can develop well-rounded youngsters prepared for success in the classroom and in life, ready to participate in a bright future that benefits us all. Art IS Education is something we believe in and celebrate year-round.

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