

MY WORD

350

The arts are critical in a child's education

EVERY child has a story to tell, and in March throughout Alameda County, there were thousands of those stories.

Art IS Education showcased them at over 100 school sites as part of national Arts Education Month. In them, students celebrated learning achievements and excellent teaching. They also demonstrated the vital role of the arts in creating equal access to quality learning for all students.

Visual and performing arts are an essential component in a complete and meaningful education to which all children have a right.

When I was sworn in as county superintendent in 1999, I made good on my campaign promise to restore arts education countywide by forming the Alameda County Alliance for Arts Learning Leadership, which is recognized as a state-wide and national model.

Keeping arts programs alive and accessible is critical as our education system faces extraordinary pressures to work toward "one size fits all," which may fit no better for your child than mine, or the child down the street.

The delivery of arts learning programs (with their effective instructional strategies) is sporadic and inequitable as the state grapples with a massive budget deficit and educators focus on raising test scores.

A good education system lays the foundation for a healthy and equitable society. Students should leave school prepared to



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deal with and influence change, and contribute to a diverse, interdependent community.

Our communities are better places to live when all our young people have opportunities to practice and participate in the arts as a means to learn well and reach their own potential.

We know how to help children do better in school — they need opportunities to create, study, play, envision, reflect and practice applying what they learn. Research shows that studying the arts improves achievement in mathematics, reading and writing.

We know that the arts make students' understanding of facts and ideas tangible so that they can be responded to, evaluated, edited, reshaped and deepened.

Through Alameda County Alliance for Arts Learning Leadership partnerships, we have

committed to ensuring better educational experiences through arts engagement for every child.

We are also committed to a model of social change that asserts every child's right to equitable learning environments. In our desire for accountability, our understanding of the direct link between arts learning and our children's cognitive development is often lost.

Proven educational strategies in every classroom can engage every child meaningfully in learning. Arts learning strategies embrace learning differences and create opportunities for success for all students. Instead of "one size fits all," we are dedicated to "the arts as an essential ingredient to providing equitable, effective learning environments in every classroom and for every child."

So it's not a catchy slogan yet. We need more creative, dedicated minds to join us to revitalize equitable classrooms through the arts.

I invite you to join children, educators, artists, policy makers, business leaders and parents at the Art IS Education Web site at www.artiseducation.org.

See what's happening in your community's schools. Visit your local school, attend an event and learn what you can do to help every child's story be a successful one — every child, every day.

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