

SUMMARY REPORT

# An Unfinished Canvas



## Arts Education in California: Taking Stock of Policies and Practices



Research conducted by SRI International

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This Summary Report was written to provide an overview of study findings. A more expansive full report, with additional details and more technical information, is available. Copies of both reports can be downloaded from <http://www.sri.com/policy/cep/edreform/ArtsEd.html>.

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# Foreword

Could it be possible that California, of all places, is ambivalent about the role of arts in education?

On one hand, the state's policy-makers ratified the importance of arts education in 2001, when California enacted rigorous standards that outline what every student should know in four areas—visual arts, music, dance and theater—and at every grade level.

And on the other hand are the findings of “An Unfinished Canvas.” The report, the first comprehensive examination of whether California has acted upon its recognition of the importance of arts education, recounts the myriad ways in which the state has fallen short, not just of its own acknowledged goals, but in comparison to the rest of the nation.

While “An Unfinished Canvas” examines what California does—and, more often, does not do—to educate the next generation in the arts, it's also worth revisiting why the arts are so important in our schools. A 2002 survey of more than 60 research projects about the impact of arts education on student learning found numerous ways in which studying of the arts nurtures other learning, from music's role in cognitive development and spatial reasoning to the ways that drama fosters reading comprehension. The survey, entitled “Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development,” reviewed other research indicating that education in the arts not only fosters other specific skills, but also improves students' self-confidence and motivation to learn, particularly among poor and other at-risk students.

Our understanding of these effects remains provisional and further research still is needed, but the data needn't be conclusive to acknowledge that children have different ways to get excited about learning. Not all of them are in the classic mold of being excited by mastering reading skills and math facts. And we fail these children if we don't give them alternative ways to light and fan that first spark.

Of course, we value the arts for more than the utilitarian. We value them, too, for the unquantifiable ways they enrich us. “Moved beyond words” is no mere rhetoric. It's an experience that allows us to think, feel and learn in new ways.

And that brings us to California's future. Our state has long been described as an incubator of the new, whether it's the digital revolution bred in Silicon Valley or now the emerging bio-tech revolution. Artistic endeavor, by its nature, asks both that you bring the best of yourself to a task and that you seek creative new ways to engage the world. These are, as a growing number of business leaders have begun to acknowledge, precisely the skills California needs in its workforce, if it is to continue to point the way to the future.

California's goals for educating our children in and about the arts already are on the books. But as the new data from SRI make clear, we are not giving our students the kind of understanding of the arts that our own standards envision. So the question today for all Californians is this: Are we willing to lower our standards and view our goals as unreachable—or use this report to spur a commitment to provide high-quality arts education to all students?

## **Marshall Smith**

Director, Education Program  
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

## **Moy Eng**

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# An Unfinished Canvas

## Arts Education in California: Taking Stock of Policies and Practices

Over the last decade, California policy-makers have paid increasing attention to the importance of the visual and performing arts in public education (see below). However, beyond developing rigorous standards and calling for instruction in the arts as part of the required course of study, California historically has done little to develop, implement, and sustain comprehensive arts programs that provide all students with access to and opportunities in the arts.

Although some California schools have excellent arts programs in place, with well-trained teachers, standards-aligned curricula, and high-quality facilities and materials, most do not. Instead, arts education in California is plagued by a lack of funding, underprepared elementary-level teachers, and inadequate facilities. It suffers from uneven implementation and is often crowded out by other curricular demands. As a result, most students in California do not receive instruction at the level required under state policy.

Until now, the state has lacked comprehensive, reliable information to indicate whether it is meeting its goals for arts instruction. Relying on a statewide school survey (1,123 respondents) and case studies of 31 schools in 13 districts, conducted in 2005-06, this first-ever comprehensive study of the state of arts education in California has sought to fill that information gap by taking stock of arts education policies and practices.

### RECENT CALIFORNIA POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN SUPPORT OF ARTS EDUCATION

- 1999:** California's 4-year state universities adopt a new visual and performing arts requirement, adding 1 year of arts coursework for admission, beginning with students entering in 2003.
- 2000:** California State Legislature passes SB 1390 (Murray), which calls for the creation of content standards in the arts.
- 2001:** The State Board of Education approves, in response to SB 1390, *the Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards*, which set forth what students should know and be able to do at each grade level in the four arts disciplines: music, visual arts, theatre, and dance.
- 2001:** In response to legislation passed in 1998 (SB 2042, Alpert), the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing adopts new program standards that revise the subject matter requirements for the multiple-subject credential to include training in the visual and performing arts, beginning in 2004.
- 2004:** The state's existing *Visual and Performing Arts Framework* is revised to support curriculum development and instructional practices in the arts aligned with the standards.
- 2006:** California policy-makers commit an unprecedented level of funding to support arts education, including \$500 million in one-time funds (for the arts and physical education) and \$105 million per year in ongoing funds.

# Key Findings

## Overview of Arts Education in California

- ❖ 89% of California K-12 schools fail to offer a standards-based course of study in all four disciplines—music, visual arts, theatre, and dance—and thus fall short of state goals for arts education.
- ❖ Methods of delivering arts instruction vary by school level, often resulting in a limited experience at the elementary level and limited participation at the secondary level.
- ❖ 61% of schools do not have even one full-time-equivalent arts specialist, although secondary schools are much more likely than elementary schools to employ specialists.
- ❖ At the elementary level, arts instruction is often left to regular classroom teachers, who rarely have adequate training.
- ❖ Arts facilities and materials are lacking in most schools.
- ❖ Standards alignment, assessment, and accountability practices are uneven in arts education, and often not present at all.

## Arts Education in Elementary Schools

- ❖ 90% of elementary schools fail to provide a standards-aligned course of study across all four arts disciplines.
- ❖ Elementary students who receive arts education in California typically have a limited, less substantial experience than their peers across the country.
- ❖ Inadequate elementary arts education provides a weak foundation for more advanced arts courses at the secondary level.

## Arts Education in Middle and High Schools

- ❖ 96% of California middle schools and 72% of high schools fail to offer standards-aligned courses of study in all four arts disciplines.
- ❖ Secondary arts education is more intense and substantial than elementary arts education, but participation is limited.

## Change Over Time in Arts Enrollment

- ❖ Enrollment in arts courses has remained stable over the last 5 years, with the exception of music, which has seen a dramatic decline.

## Unequal Access to Arts Education

- ❖ Students attending high-poverty schools have less access to arts instruction than their peers in more affluent communities.

## Barriers to Meeting the State's Arts Education Goals

- ❖ Inadequate state funding for education is a top barrier to the provision of arts education, and reliance on outside funding sources, such as parent groups, creates inequities.
- ❖ Pressure to improve test scores in other content areas is another top barrier to arts education.

- ❖ At the elementary level, lack of instructional time, arts expertise, and materials are also significant barriers to arts education.

## Sources of Support for Arts Education

- ❖ Districts and counties can play a strong role in arts education, but few do.
- ❖ Schools are increasingly partnering with external organizations, but few partnerships result in increased school capacity to provide sequential, standards-based arts instruction.

# Recommendations

## State Policy-makers

- ❖ Increase and stabilize education funding so that districts can develop and support a standards-based course of study in each of the four arts disciplines.
- ❖ Strengthen accountability in arts education by requiring districts to report on the arts instruction provided, student learning in the arts, and providers of arts instruction, and by supporting the development of appropriate, standards-aligned assessments for use at the state and district levels.
- ❖ Rethink instructional time to accommodate the state's goals for meeting proficiency in English-language arts and math, while still providing access to a broader curriculum that includes the arts.
- ❖ Improve teacher professional development in arts education, especially at the elementary level, and consider credential reforms.
- ❖ Provide technical assistance to build districts' capacity to offer comprehensive, standards-based arts programs.

## School and District Leaders

- ❖ Establish the infrastructure needed to support arts programs by developing a long-range strategic plan for arts education, dedicating resources and staff, and providing for the ongoing evaluation of arts programs.
- ❖ Signal to teachers, parents, and students that the arts are a core subject by providing professional development for teachers and establishing assessment and accountability systems for arts education.

## Parents

- ❖ Ask about student learning and progress in the arts, and participate in school and district efforts to improve and expand arts education.
- ❖ Advocate for comprehensive arts education at the state and local levels.

# Overview of Arts Education in California

Across California, arts education falls short of the ideal envisioned by state policy-makers and described in the state's arts standards and framework. Most California schools do not offer sequential courses of study in the arts. Those that do tend to deliver instruction in ways that limit the duration and frequency (at the elementary level)

or limit the number of students who participate (at the secondary level). Schools frequently lack the teachers and facilities they need for high-quality arts instruction. And in many cases, arts instruction is not aligned with standards and is not assessed properly.

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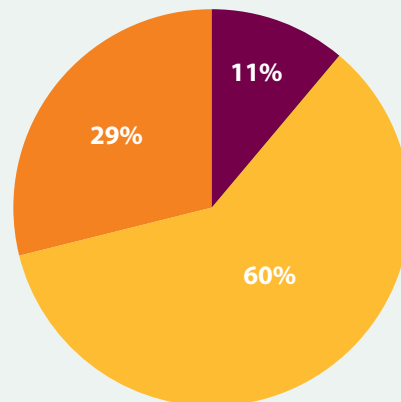
89% of California schools fail to offer a standards-based course of study in all four disciplines—music, visual arts, theatre, and dance—and thus fall short of state goals for arts education.

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State law requires that schools offer instruction in all four arts disciplines, yet 3 in 10 California schools (29%) do not offer a sequential, standards-based course of study in *any* of the arts disciplines. Most schools (60%) offer a sequential course of study in one to three

arts disciplines, although in many cases the course of study may not span all grade levels served by a school. Only 11% of California schools meet the state's goal of offering a standards-based course of study in all four disciplines (**Exhibit 1**).

**EXHIBIT 1: K-12 SCHOOLS OFFERING A STANDARDS-BASED COURSE OF STUDY IN THE ARTS**



■ Course of study offered in all four arts disciplines ■ Course of study offered in one to three arts disciplines ■ No course of study offered in any arts discipline

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Methods of delivering arts instruction vary by school level, often resulting in a limited experience at the elementary level and limited participation at the secondary level.

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Arts education in California is delivered in various ways. At the elementary level, where arts education is most often provided by classroom teachers, some teachers deliver lessons that integrate the arts and other core subjects, while others provide stand-alone arts instruction. As we describe in more detail below, although arts education tends to reach more students at the elementary level

than at the secondary level, it is limited in duration and frequency and often does not prepare students for more advanced arts courses in the higher grades. At the high school level, arts education is offered through formal classes, while middle schools typically offer a mix of formal arts courses and rotational electives. These delivery models provide more depth but generally serve fewer students.

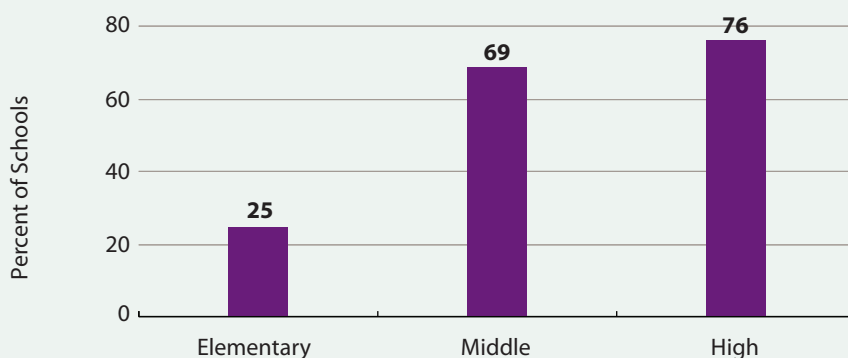
61% of schools do not have even one full-time-equivalent arts specialist, although secondary schools are much more likely than elementary schools to employ specialists.

Arts education may be delivered by classroom teachers or by credentialed arts specialists, who are specifically prepared to teach the arts and hold a credential in their respective disciplines. (California offers single-subject credentials in visual arts and music, but not dance or theatre.) Some schools (more often at the elementary level) also rely on professional artists and volunteers to supplement arts instruction; the prevalence of such external providers is low.

Across the state, just 39% of schools have even one full-time-equivalent (FTE) arts specialist across all disciplines combined. Secondary

schools are more likely than elementary schools to have one or more arts specialists—69% and 76% of middle and high schools, respectively, have at least one FTE arts specialist, compared with 25% of elementary schools (**Exhibit 2**). In contrast, a similar school-level survey conducted in New Jersey found that 95% of elementary schools, 88% of middle schools, and 94% of high schools in that state have at least one FTE teacher providing arts instruction (New Jersey Arts Education Census Project, 2006).

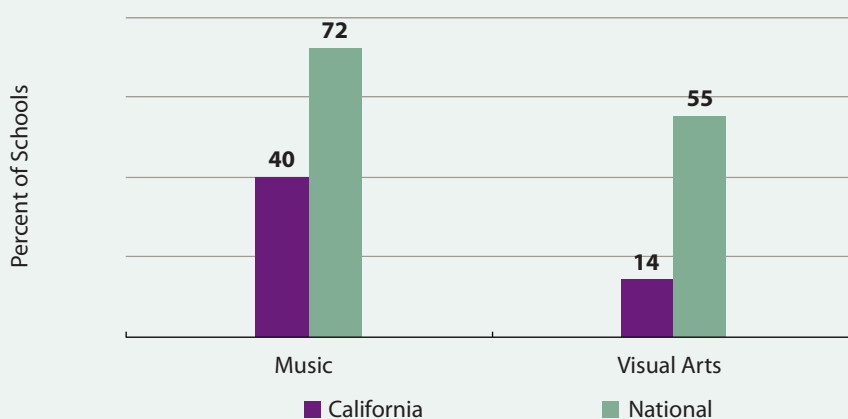
**EXHIBIT 2: SCHOOLS WITH AT LEAST ONE FTE ARTS SPECIALIST**



The lack of arts specialists in California elementary schools also stands in stark contrast to national statistics. Compared with the nation as a whole, California schools that offer arts instruction are less likely to rely on full-time arts specialists. In 2005-06, just 40% of California elementary schools that offered music relied on a full-time music specialist, and 14% of elementary schools that offered visual arts relied on a full-time visual arts specialist. According to the most

recent national study of arts instruction in public schools (conducted during the 1999-2000 school year), 72% of elementary schools that offered music and 55% of elementary schools that offered visual arts relied on full-time specialists in those disciplines (**Exhibit 3**). In dance and theatre, specialists are much less common, and state and national numbers are comparable.

**EXHIBIT 3: ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH FULL-TIME, CERTIFIED ARTS SPECIALISTS**



Note: Percentages are based on elementary schools providing instruction in each discipline. In California, 90% of elementary schools offer at least some music instruction, and 77% offer at least some visual arts instruction. Comparable national figures (from 1999-2000) are 94% for music and 87% for visual arts.



At the elementary level, arts instruction is often left to regular classroom teachers, who rarely have adequate training.

As noted above, elementary schools tend to rely on regular classroom teachers to provide arts instruction in their own classrooms. (Music is an exception and is frequently taught by specialists.) However, most elementary classroom teachers have received minimal preservice training in arts education and thus are typically not well prepared to provide standards-based arts instruction in the four arts disciplines. Those classroom teachers who feel most prepared to teach the arts typically have a background in one or more arts disciplines and/or have received some sort of external support, such as professional development in the arts. However, few classroom teachers receive

any such support—86% of elementary schools offered *no* arts-related professional development in 2005-06.

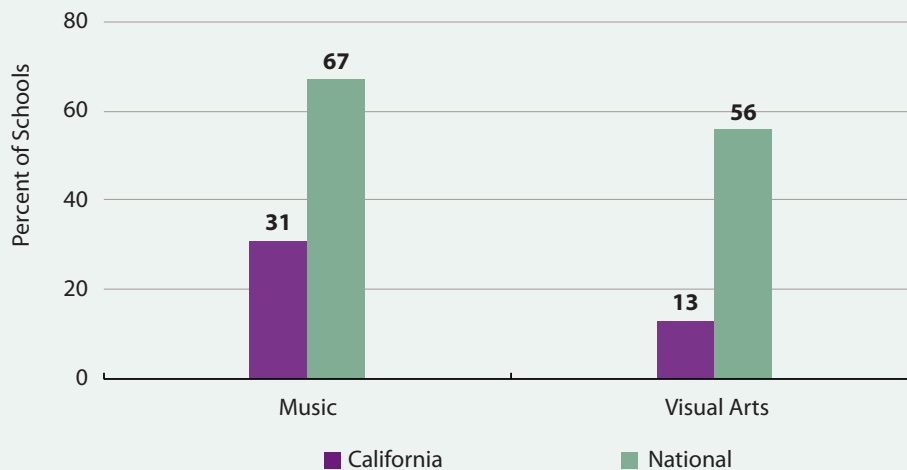
Even arts specialists have limited professional development opportunities. They may attend workshops and conferences in their disciplines and/or they may involve themselves in their respective arts communities through performances or exhibitions. However, these activities are based primarily on teachers' own interests and initiative; formal district support is typically limited. As one high school theatre teacher observed, "The district is good about professional growth. They're just not good about *our* professional growth."

Arts facilities and materials are lacking in most schools.

Along with trained teachers, many schools also lack dedicated space with special equipment (e.g., mirrors and bars in dance rooms, sinks and storage areas for visual arts) for arts education. In schools offering arts instruction, music is the discipline most likely to be taught in a dedicated space with special equipment (49%). Visual arts (36%), theatre (27%), and dance (21%) are less likely to have an equipped, dedicated space. *Note that these percentages reflect only those schools that actually offer arts instruction; the many more schools that do not offer arts instruction are also likely to lack adequate facilities.*

Elementary schools are far less likely than secondary schools to have dedicated space for arts education. Of those offering arts instruction, only 31% have dedicated, specially equipped space for music, 13% have it for visual arts, 10% have it for dance, and just 6% have it for theatre. This lack of dedicated, equipped space for arts instruction at the elementary level is not typical of the country as a whole. Compared with data collected as part of the most recent national study of arts instruction in public schools (Carey et al., 2002), far fewer of California's elementary schools than elementary schools in the nation as a whole have dedicated facilities for visual arts and music (**Exhibit 4**).

**EXHIBIT 4: ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH EQUIPPED, DEDICATED SPACE FOR ARTS INSTRUCTION**



Note: Percentages are based on elementary schools providing instruction in each discipline. In California, 90% of elementary schools offer at least some music instruction, and 77% offer at least some visual arts instruction. Comparable national figures (from 1999-2000) are 94% for music and 87% for visual arts.

In addition to inadequate facilities, inadequate materials are another obstacle. A majority of principals (56%) cite the lack of arts materials, equipment, tools, and instruments as a barrier to arts instruction. This issue also exacerbates inequities between schools. Lacking adequate funding, schools often ask families of participating students to help cover the costs of purchasing or maintaining the

materials and equipment required for instruction. Some higher-poverty schools realize that such contributions can be burdensome for their students' families and have tried to reduce or eliminate them, often leaving these schools with fewer and lower-quality materials and equipment for arts instruction.

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Standards alignment, assessment, and accountability practices are uneven in arts education, and often not present at all.

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Aside from lacking physical space and equipment, arts programs in many California schools also lack the coherence and rigor envisioned by the state's standards and framework. The state does not *require* schools to follow the standards for the various content areas identified in the Education Code, and the visual and performing arts content standards are no exception. These standards are recommended because they reflect "a strong consensus on the skills, knowledge, and abilities in dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts that all students should be able to master" (California Department of Education [CDE], 2001, p. ix) and they establish a consistent framework for instruction. Across the state, however, there is substantial variation in teachers' familiarity with, and use of, California's arts standards. In general, arts specialists are aware of the standards for their discipline, and most indicate that their curriculum is aligned with the standards. For example, a high school visual arts teacher said, "I know [the standards] well... The curriculum guide for this class is aligned with the standards. I had to write it that way for UC [University of California] approval." She added, "This is not an arts and crafts activities class." Overall, however, classroom teachers at the elementary level report that they are far less familiar than arts specialists with the arts standards.

Schools also vary in the extent to which they assess student progress. As stated in the *California Visual and Performing Arts Framework*,

"The assessment of student work in the arts helps students learn more about what they know and can do, provides teachers with information for improving curriculum and instruction, and gives school districts the data required for ensuring accountability" (CDE, 2004, p. 4). However, California lacks any statewide assessment or accountability system for the arts. In the absence of such systems, local educators determine how to assess and report on student learning and progress in the arts, resulting in uneven practices across the state. Moreover, there is little to no accountability for those who provide arts education. Classroom teachers are typically not evaluated on whether they provide arts instruction, and specialists report limited oversight.

At the elementary level, assessing and reporting on student learning and progress in the arts are often overlooked entirely. Among those elementary schools offering standards-aligned instruction in music and visual arts, approximately three in five assess student performance in these subjects and report it to parents. Of those elementary schools offering standards-aligned instruction in dance and theatre, just one in four assess and report to parents on student performance.

## Arts Education in Elementary Schools

Arts education at the elementary grades is markedly different from arts education in middle and high schools. It is typically offered to a whole class of students at a time, either in stand-alone lessons or integrated with other subjects. Besides the differences in type of instructor and assessment mentioned above, elementary and

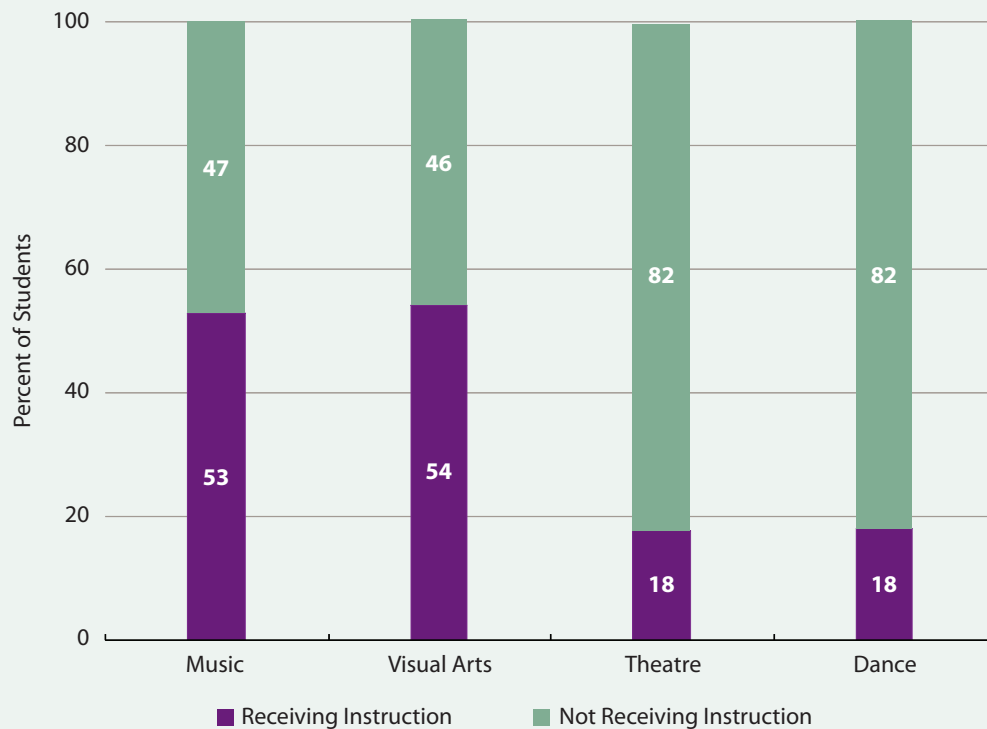
secondary arts education differ in the frequency and duration of instruction and in the proportion of students who typically participate. In general, arts education in California's elementary schools is not comprehensive and substantial enough to support high-level achievement at the secondary level.

90% of elementary schools fail to provide a standards-aligned course of study across all four arts disciplines.

State law requires that the adopted course of study for *all* students in grades 1 through 6 include instruction in music, visual arts, theatre, and dance, but only 10% of elementary schools meet this requirement. Moreover, across all arts disciplines, few elementary

students receive instruction. Nearly half of California's elementary students are not receiving any standards-aligned instruction in music and visual arts, and more than four in five are not receiving any standards-aligned instruction in theatre and dance (**Exhibit 5**).

**EXHIBIT 5: ELEMENTARY STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN STANDARDS-BASED ARTS INSTRUCTION**

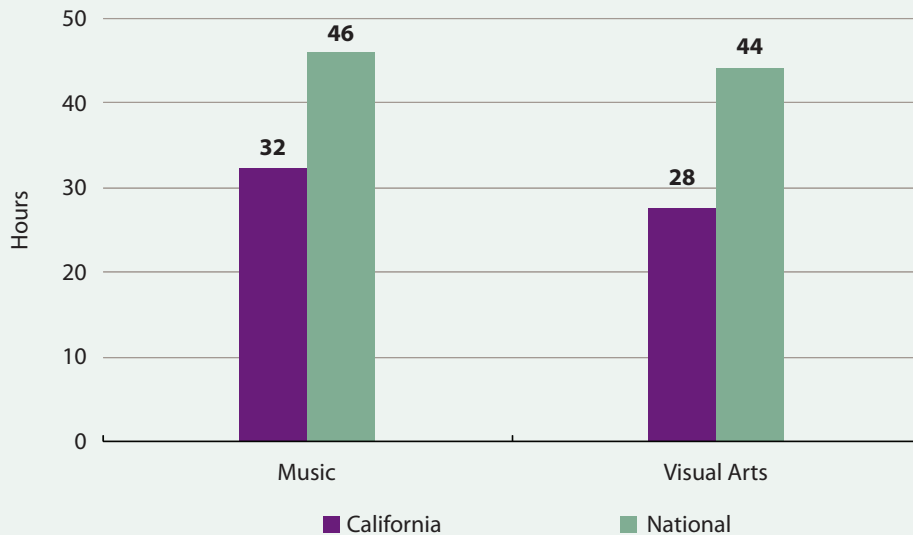


Elementary students who receive arts education in California typically have a limited, less substantial experience than their peers across the country.

In California, the actual time elementary students spend in arts education over the course of a year is quite limited in comparison with time spent by secondary students and, importantly, in comparison with time spent by other elementary students across the country. For example, of those students who receive music and visual arts instruction, California students typically receive only about 30 hours per year—or less than an hour a week—of instruction (**Exhibit 6**). In contrast, the most recent national survey found that across the country, the typical participating

student received about 50% more instruction—46 hours per year of music instruction and 44 hours per year of visual arts instruction (Carey et al., 2002). In dance and theatre, California students get far less instruction than in music and visual arts: those students who receive instruction (fewer than one in five) typically receive just over 10 hours per year—or about 20 minutes per week—of instruction in each discipline. National comparisons for dance and theatre are not available.

EXHIBIT 6: HOURS OF INSTRUCTION PER YEAR FOR MUSIC AND VISUAL ARTS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS



Note: Hours are based on elementary schools providing instruction in each discipline. In California, 90% of elementary schools offer at least some music instruction, and 77% offer at least some visual arts instruction. Comparable national figures (from 1999-2000) are 94% for music and 87% for visual arts.

**Inadequate elementary arts education provides a weak foundation for more advanced arts courses at the secondary level.**

California's arts standards at the secondary level are designed to "build on the knowledge and skills the student has gained in earlier grades" (CDE, 2001, p. x). However, when California students arrive in secondary schools, most have not received a standards-based course of study in each of the arts disciplines in elementary school. As a result, many secondary school arts specialists find that teaching in alignment with the standards is challenging and, in some cases,

"unrealistic" because, as teachers noted, the standards for upper-grades students assume that students have had the benefit of a sequential course of study in earlier grades. Moreover, limited access to elementary-level arts instruction may reduce student participation at the secondary level because California lacks the pipeline to generate increased enrollment in more advanced arts courses.

## Arts Education in Middle and High Schools

Arts instruction at the secondary level is typically offered via formal courses that support depth over breadth. Middle schools typically offer a mix of yearlong arts courses and rotational electives. At the high school level, arts instruction takes place almost exclusively

through formal arts courses. Because of the way arts education is delivered at the secondary level, it tends to be more substantial than elementary arts education. Still, secondary arts education in California suffers from limited availability.

96% of California middle schools and 72% of high schools fail to offer standards-aligned courses of study in all four arts disciplines.

State law calls for secondary schools (grades 7 through 12) to offer instruction in each of the four arts disciplines. However, most secondary students do not have access to instruction in all four

arts disciplines. Only 4% of California middle schools and 28% of high schools offer comprehensive arts programs that include all four disciplines.

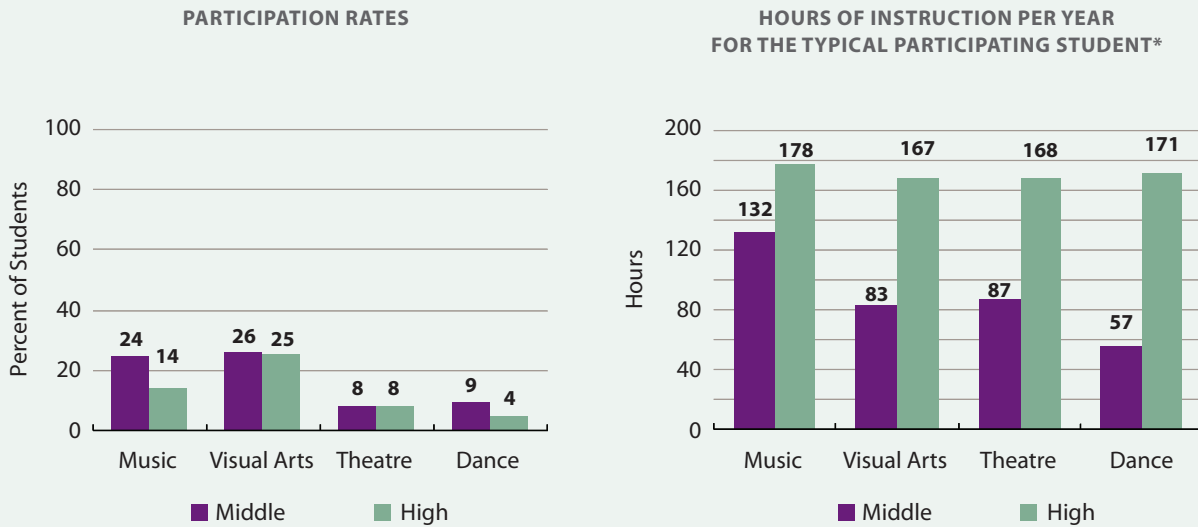
Secondary arts education is more intense and substantial than elementary arts education, but participation is limited.

The typical middle school student participating in music instruction receives about 132 hours of instruction per year—considerably more than the typical elementary school student. However, only about a fourth of middle school students in a given year receive music instruction. In visual arts, the typical participating student receives less than 90 hours of instruction per year, and again, about a fourth of students receive instruction (Exhibit 7). The difference between these two disciplines likely reflects different modes of delivery. The rotational elective model, used more often for visual

arts instruction, allows a higher proportion of students to access arts courses, but participating students typically receive less instruction than they would in a yearlong class.

At the high school level, arts students typically receive almost an hour a day of instruction, but again, participation rates are relatively low, ranging from about 4% of students participating in dance in a given year to approximately 25% of students participating in visual arts (Exhibit 7).

**EXHIBIT 7: SECONDARY STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN STANDARDS-BASED ARTS INSTRUCTION**



\*Note: Hours are based on middle and high schools providing instruction in each discipline. In California, 91% of middle schools offer at least some music instruction, 81% offer at least some visual arts instruction, 44% offer at least some theatre instruction, and 29% offer at least some dance instruction. High school figures are 92% for music, 95% for visual arts, 86% for theatre, and 51% for dance.

It is unknown, however, how much arts education a typical high school student receives over the course of a high school career, or what percentage of students take at least one yearlong course in a single arts discipline to achieve “proficiency” as envisioned in the

state’s content standards. These figures are not available because California lacks a student-level data system that permits tracking of students’ course-taking over time. Without such a system, only snapshots of student participation in a given year are available.

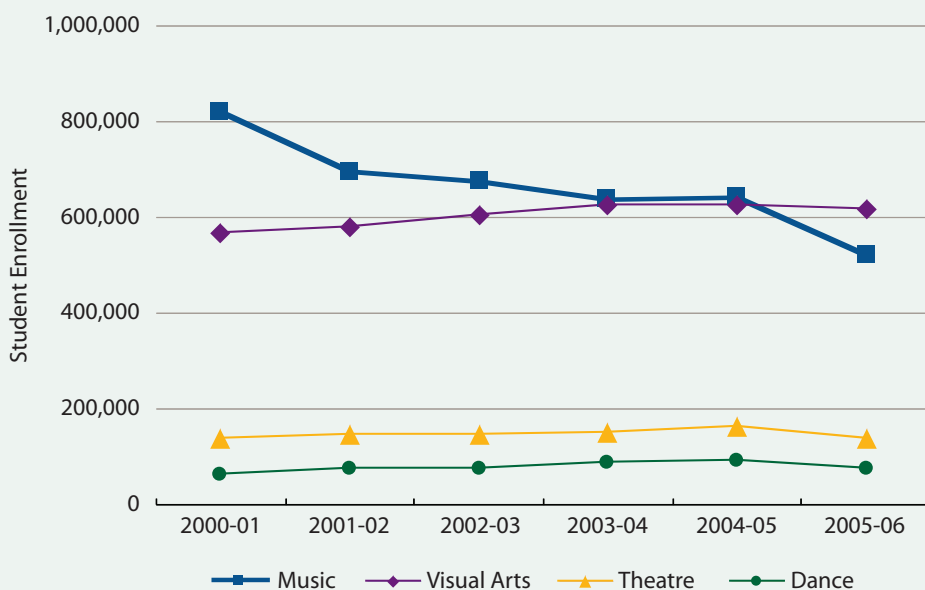
## Change Over Time in Arts Enrollment

Enrollment in arts courses has remained stable over the last 5 years, with the exception of music, which has seen a dramatic decline.

Data collected by the state reveal that student enrollment in arts courses generally remained constant over the last 5 years, except in music, where enrollment dropped from just under 820,000 students in 2000-01 to approximately 520,000 in 2005-06 (Exhibit 8). Although these data reflect K-12 student enrollment, most of the student

enrollment in formal arts courses occurs at the secondary level. The decline in student enrollment in music courses occurred over a span of years in which overall student enrollment in California increased.

**EXHIBIT 8: K-12 STUDENT ENROLLMENT IN FORMALLY DESIGNATED ARTS COURSES, 2000-01 TO 2005-06**



Source: California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS).

## Unequal Access to Arts Education

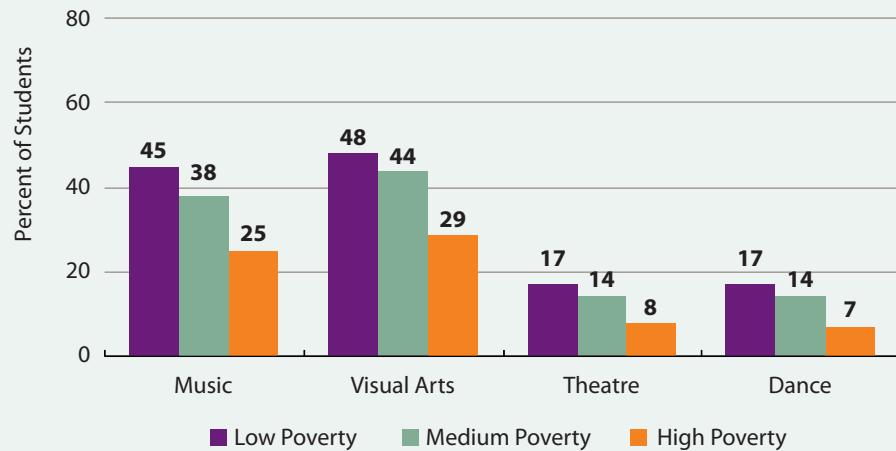
Students attending high-poverty schools have less access to arts instruction than their peers in more affluent communities.

Across California, access to comprehensive arts instruction is limited at both the elementary and secondary levels. This is especially true for schools serving disadvantaged students.

Fully 37% of high-poverty schools fail to provide a standards-based course of study in any arts discipline, compared with 22% of low-poverty schools. As a result of disparities in schools' arts programs,

fewer students attending higher-poverty schools receive standards-based arts instruction than their counterparts in lower-poverty schools (Exhibit 9). For example, nearly half of students (45%) attending low-poverty schools receive music instruction, compared with only a quarter of students (25%) attending high-poverty schools.

**EXHIBIT 9: STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN STANDARDS-BASED ARTS INSTRUCTION, BY SCHOOL POVERTY LEVEL**



As described below, these inequities between high- and low-poverty schools are exacerbated by a reliance on outside funding sources

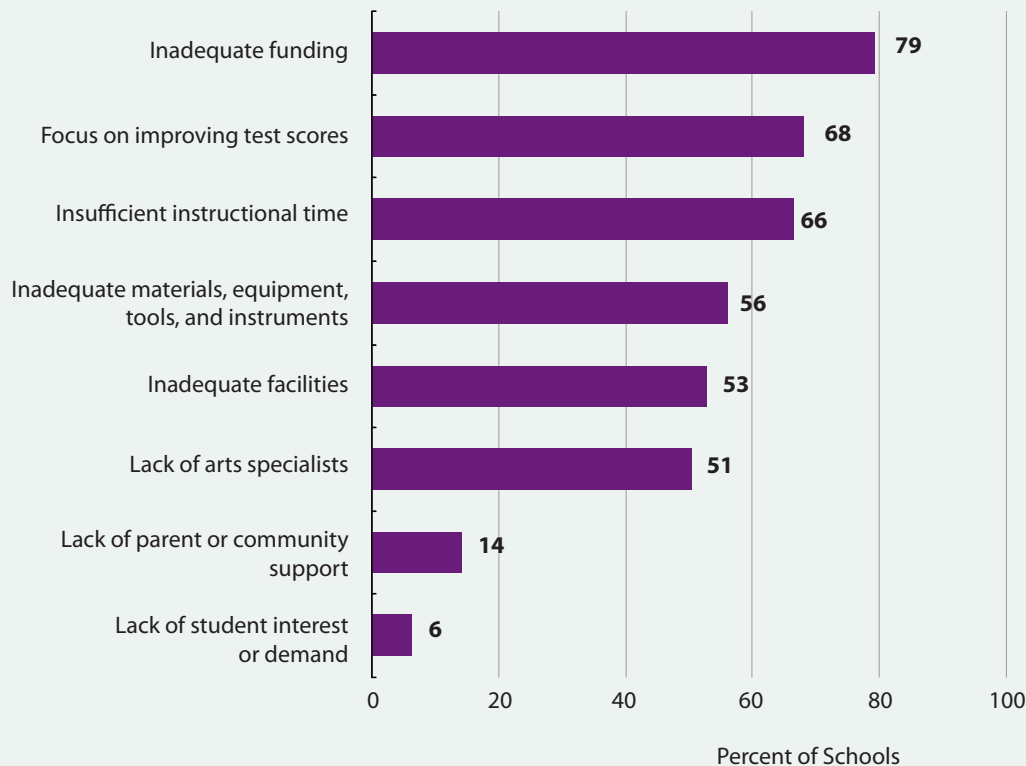
(e.g., parent groups) for arts education expenses and by pressures to improve test scores.

## Barriers to Meeting the State’s Arts Education Goals

Clearly, arts education in California is not serving students as policy-makers intended: few participate, and those that do often have an experience that lacks alignment with standards or is limited in

intensity. According to our statewide survey, a variety of factors contribute to these deficiencies (**Exhibit 10**).

**EXHIBIT 10: SCHOOLS REPORTING BARRIERS TO THE DELIVERY OF ARTS INSTRUCTION**



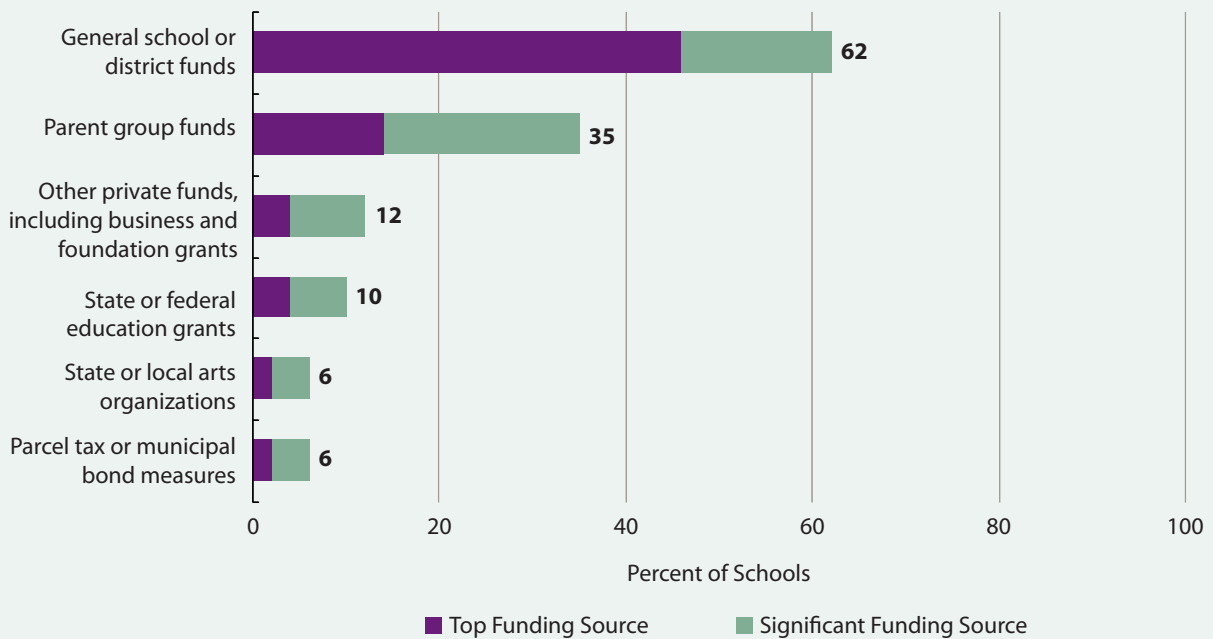
Inadequate state funding for education is a top barrier to the provision of arts education, and reliance on outside funding sources, such as parent groups, creates inequities.

Funding is considered a barrier in all schools, regardless of student poverty level. Four out of five principals (79%) report that funding is a barrier to delivering arts education (Exhibit 10).

General funds from the state are the most frequently reported “top” or “significant” funding source for arts education in California schools, especially at the secondary level (Exhibit 11). Over the past decade, however, California has consistently spent less per pupil than the national average (when regional cost differences are taken

into account). Given the competing demands for limited state funds, few districts and schools allocate state general funds to arts education at the level necessary to support comprehensive arts programs. As a superintendent in an affluent community explained, “The arts are so valued, but they are competing for resources.” A principal described it this way: “In tough times, when you cut back to essentials, the first things to go are the arts programs. It’s too bad.”

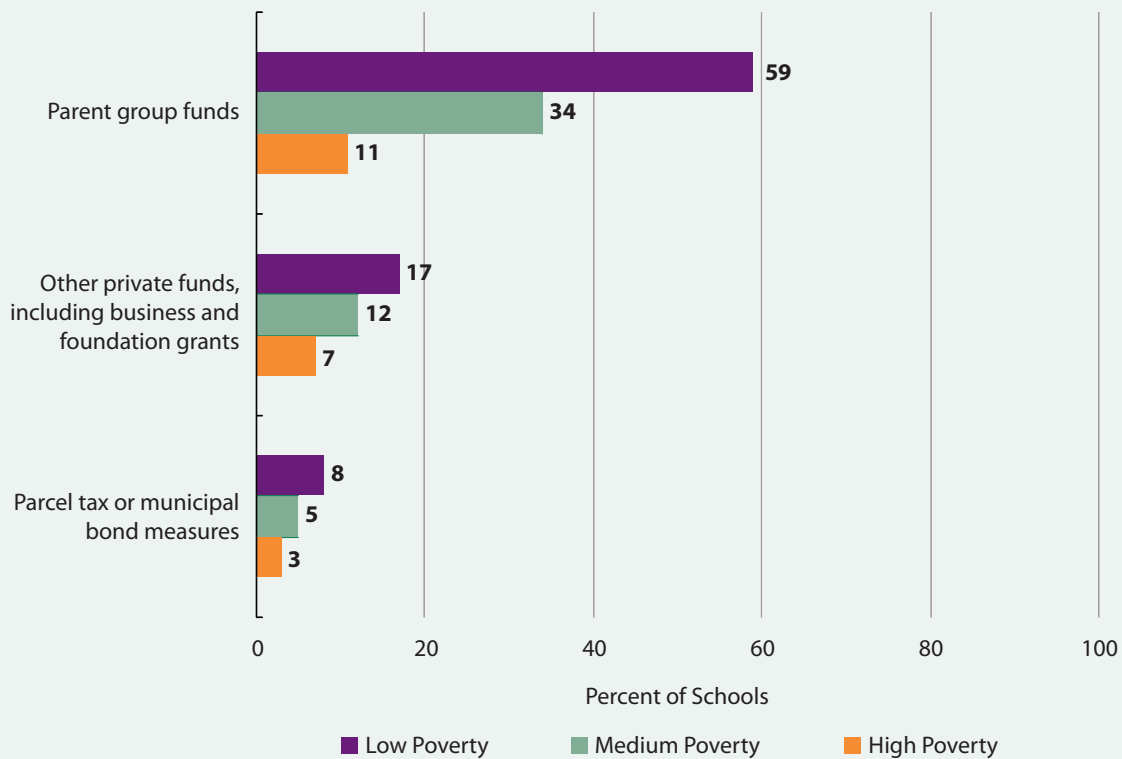
EXHIBIT 11: SOURCES OF FUNDING FOR ARTS EDUCATION



Although most California schools make use of general funds for arts education, many rely extensively on other funding sources; 53% of principals report that they rely “greatly” or “somewhat” on outside funds (e.g., from parent groups, foundations, or local businesses). In affluent communities, parent groups are a large source of funding for arts education, covering such high-cost items as teacher salaries and thereby having a substantial impact on the amount of arts education available (Exhibit 12). In higher-poverty communities, parent fund-raising is more modest and tends to pay for special events and arts materials.

Parcel taxes and municipal bonds can provide much-needed funding for high-cost items, like staff and facilities. However, successful parcel tax and municipal bond measures are rare, in part because they have to pass by a supermajority. Only 6% of principals characterize parcel tax or municipal bond measures as a top or significant source of funds.



**EXHIBIT 12: TOP OR SIGNIFICANT SOURCES OF COMMUNITY FUNDING, BY SCHOOL POVERTY LEVEL**

Pressure to improve test scores in other content areas is another top barrier to arts education.

The second most frequently cited barrier is the pressure to improve test scores in other content areas (Exhibit 10). Because of the significant pressures involved in meeting federal accountability targets in mathematics and reading, several recent studies have suggested that schools across the country are “narrowing the curriculum” to focus more and more on tested subjects, to the detriment of other subjects, including the arts, in which there is little to no accountability for providing instruction. This study reveals a similar trend. Across all schools, 68% of principals cite the focus on improving test scores as a barrier to arts education. Although higher-poverty schools are more likely than lower-poverty schools to identify this

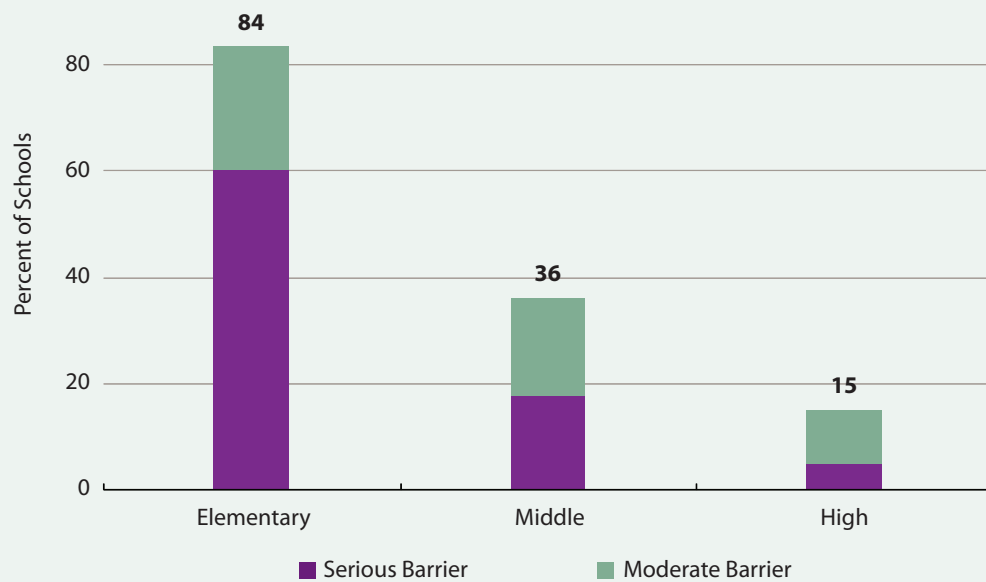
barrier, a majority of principals at low-poverty schools (57%) also feel that improving test scores is a barrier to arts education. Drawing a connection between the focus on improving test scores and insufficient instructional time (discussed next), many principals expressed opinions similar to this one: “The current emphasis on test scores at the expense of virtually everything else makes it difficult to spend time on arts within the school day.” Schools in Program Improvement may face the greatest challenges finding time to allocate to arts instruction as they respond to pressure to improve test scores.

At the elementary level, lack of instructional time, arts expertise, and materials are also significant barriers to arts education.

A vast majority of elementary principals (84%) view lack of instructional time as a barrier to arts education—more than five times the proportion of high school principals and more than twice the proportion of middle school principals (Exhibit 13). This difference is due in part to the way arts instruction is delivered at the elementary level: because

regular classroom teachers are often the providers of elementary arts instruction, other academic subjects compete with the arts for time in their daily schedules. In high schools and middle schools, the arts are more typically set apart as stand-alone courses.

EXHIBIT 13: INSUFFICIENT INSTRUCTIONAL TIME AS A BARRIER TO ARTS EDUCATION, BY SCHOOL LEVEL



Not surprisingly, given the staffing patterns described earlier, elementary principals are much more likely than their secondary school counterparts to identify the lack of dedicated arts specialists as a barrier to the delivery of arts instruction: 64% of elementary principals cite the problem, compared with 24% and 14% of principals at middle and high schools. Moreover, two-thirds (67%)

of elementary school principals describe the lack of arts expertise among regular classroom teachers as a barrier to arts education in their schools.

A lack of adequate materials and equipment is another barrier that is cited more frequently by elementary principals (60%) than by middle school (48%) or high school principals (46%).

## Sources of Support for Arts Education

Together, the barriers described above—inadequate funding, pressure to improve test scores, and a lack of time, expertise, and materials—represent serious obstacles to providing high-quality,

comprehensive arts instruction. Supports exist to help schools counter these various deficiencies, but they tend to be few and far between.

Districts and counties can play a strong role in arts education, but few do.

Districts with standards-based arts programs commonly have some level of district infrastructure in support of the arts. For example, some districts form district arts committees, dedicate staff to support arts instruction, and rely on strategic plans for implementing arts education in the district. A few districts develop lesson plans that map to the arts standards, and others provide professional development on standards-aligned arts instruction. These districts use their own staff to develop arts programs, and they often apply for grants or initiate relationships with partner organizations to bring arts resources into the district.

In addition to district-level efforts, some of California's most important initiatives in arts education have taken place at the

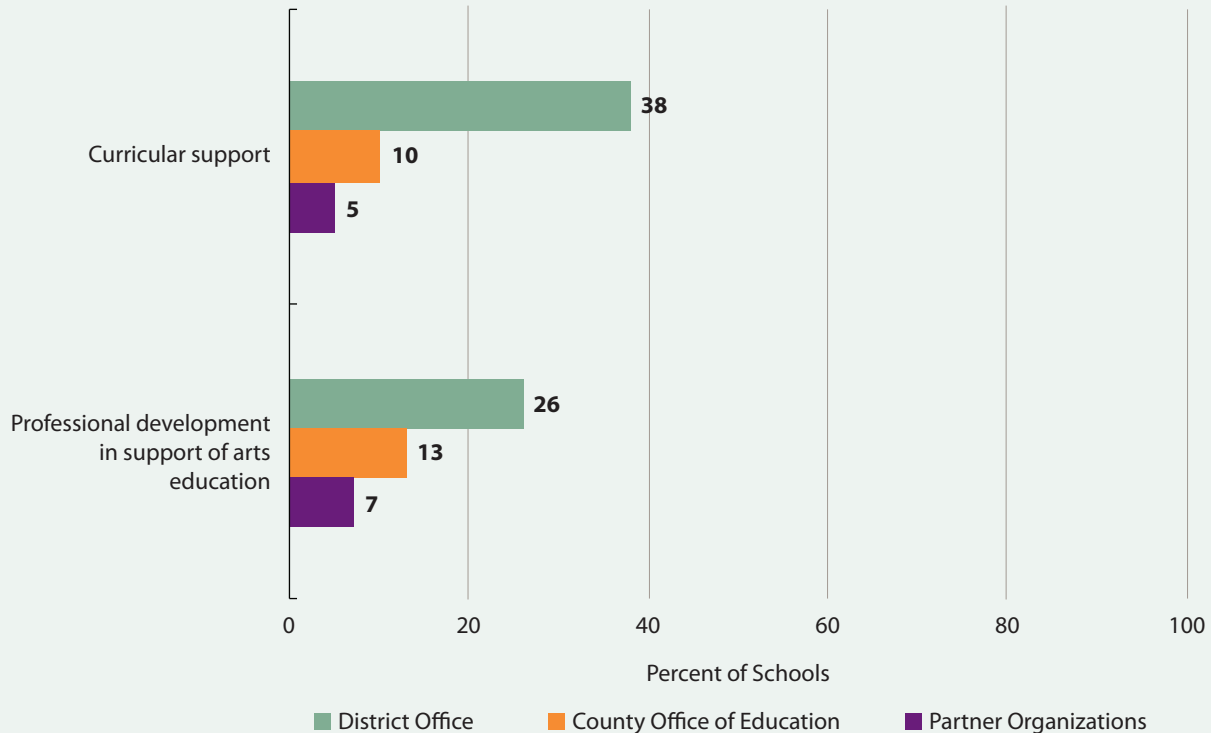
county level. Significant programs are taking place in several of California's urban counties, including Alameda, Los Angeles, Orange, San Francisco, and Santa Clara. These programs are unique, but each focuses on helping to build much-needed district infrastructure for arts education and bringing attention to issues of equity and access for all students. Efforts to build district infrastructure include supporting the development of policies and strategic plans for arts education and providing professional development for school and district leaders to familiarize them with what it means to provide a standards-based course of study in the arts.

Despite the important work of some districts, counties, and partner organizations, few schools receive formal curricular support and

professional development in arts education from any of these entities (Exhibit 14). This type of support from county offices and partner organizations is particularly rare. (By design, county initiatives often focus their efforts on developing district leadership so that the district in turn will be in a better position to support schools.) Those schools

that do receive curricular support and professional development are most commonly assisted by their district office. Across the state, 38% of schools receive curricular support from their district, and about a quarter of schools (26%) receive professional development in support of arts education.

**EXHIBIT 14: SCHOOLS RECEIVING CURRICULAR SUPPORT OR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FROM DISTRICTS, COUNTIES, AND PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS**



A key characteristic of districts providing this type of support is a district-level leader whose sole responsibility is to coordinate the arts program, or who has enough time and belief in the importance of arts education to champion the work. Across the state, few elementary schools benefit from a district-level coordinator or curriculum specialist who provides support for the curriculum and

instructional programs in each arts discipline: only 43% in music, 27% in visual arts, 18% in theatre, and 15% in dance. Importantly, these staff members are not necessarily dedicated to the arts. Arts coordinators are often charged with providing support in other disciplines as well; in one district, for example, the arts coordinator was also tasked with supporting foreign languages, health, and physical education.

Schools are increasingly partnering with external organizations, but few partnerships result in increased school capacity to provide sequential, standards-based arts education.

Though few schools receive curricular and professional development support from partner organizations, many schools do have some kind of arts partnership with an individual or organization that is external to the school, and some schools have multiple partners. Cultural or community organizations are the most common partners (28% of schools), followed by individual artists (24%), museums/galleries (20%), performing arts centers (16%), and colleges and universities (12%).

School arts partnerships differ greatly in the extent of support they provide to schools and in whether they support a standards-based

course of study in the arts. Some partnerships do lend support to standards-based arts programs—by offering professional development opportunities for classroom teachers and arts specialists, for example—but these are rare. Instead, many partnerships are limited in scope, involving, for example, students’ attending performances or taking a class with a visiting artist. Although such partnerships provide important opportunities for students to gain exposure to the arts, they tend not to support the development of sequential, standards-based arts programs.

# Recommendations

California has much work to do to support arts education for all students at the level envisioned by state policy-makers. The following recommendations are intended to suggest next steps for state policy-makers, school and district leaders, and parents in achieving the goals that have been set for California students.

## State Policy-makers

**Increase and stabilize funding.** California schools have a long way to go to achieve the goal of involving all students in a standards-based course of study in each of the four arts disciplines. For years, insufficient and unstable funding for education has forced districts to choose between the arts and other core subjects. Although the recently allocated funding provides critically important resources for arts education, it is unlikely that the ongoing funds, amounting to less than \$16 per student per year for most schools, will enable schools to meet the state's goals for the arts. California will need to increase and stabilize education funding more generally.

**Strengthen accountability.** Assessment and accountability systems in the arts are almost nonexistent. The state should require districts to report on the arts instruction provided, student arts learning, and providers of arts instruction. The state should also support the development of appropriate, standards-aligned assessments for use at the state and district levels.

**Rethink instructional time.** Many schools are overwhelmed trying to meet some of the most ambitious content standards in the country within the constraints of a relatively short instructional day. Schools that serve the state's neediest students—those in poverty and those who speak languages other than English at home—are particularly hard pressed to meet the state's goals for proficiency in English-language arts and mathematics while offering students access to a broader curriculum, including the arts. Looking forward, the state should increase instructional time to create the opportunity for students, particularly those who are farthest behind, to achieve the breadth and depth reflected in the state's standards.

**Improve teacher professional development and consider credential reforms.** Many of the teachers providing arts education in California's schools are not adequately prepared. As long as the primary arts delivery system at the elementary level involves regular classroom teachers, the state should strengthen preservice programs and support professional development initiatives aimed at increasing the capacity of those teachers. Furthermore, if the state is serious about increasing access to dance and theatre, it should consider offering single-subject credentials in these arts disciplines.

**Provide technical assistance to build district capacity.** New state resources for arts education are arriving in districts and schools that vary substantially in the infrastructure they have in place to provide standards-based arts instruction. Without the proper technical

assistance, including support for the development of arts education policies and long-term strategic plans, as well as professional development for district and school administrators, many schools and districts may not be able to develop the kinds of standards-based arts programs envisioned by policy-makers. To ensure that schools and districts can deliver high-quality arts instruction across all disciplines and school levels, the state should provide assistance directly or support counties and partner organizations in doing so.

## School and District Leaders

**Establish the infrastructure to support arts programs.** Districts that have well-developed arts programs have engaged in a strategic planning process, developed arts education policies, dedicated resources and staff (e.g., an arts coordinator) for the arts, and established district committees to oversee and evaluate arts programs. Districts seeking to strengthen their arts programs, and make good use of new resources, should consider taking these steps.

**Signal to teachers, parents, and students that the arts are a core subject.** School and district leaders should communicate to teachers, parents, and students that the arts are part of the required curriculum at both the elementary and secondary levels. To support the implementation of a standards-based program, school and district leaders should ensure that teachers receive professional development, and they should establish school-level assessment and accountability systems, including reporting to parents on student learning and progress.

## Parents

**Ask about student learning and progress in the arts.** Parents can ask their children's teachers, school principals, and district leaders for information about arts instruction and student progress in the arts. Using the information they gather, parents can join together, through parent associations, to initiate school-level efforts to build on existing strengths and fill gaps. Moreover, parents can encourage and engage in district efforts to develop and implement a strategic plan for arts education.

**Advocate for comprehensive arts education at the state and local levels.** School board members and other policy-makers are more likely to back policies that support the arts if they know that parents and the public value arts education and expect all of California's public school students to receive a comprehensive arts education. Parent groups can get involved in hiring arts-friendly superintendents and electing supportive policy-makers at the state and local levels.

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