



# An Unfinished Canvas

California policymakers have established ambitious goals for arts education, calling on schools to provide a standards-based, sequential course of study in dance, music, theater, and visual arts. Yet *An Unfinished Canvas*, a report by SRI International, revealed that an overwhelming majority of California schools fail to meet these guidelines and that key barriers include inadequate and unstable funding, insufficient instructional time, and limited teacher capacity.

New studies look more closely at these barriers, finding that to reach the goals we've set, we need to make significant changes in the overall level and stability of funding, increase the amount of available instructional time, and invest in building the district infrastructure and teacher capacity to deliver standards-based arts instruction.

The budget realities that drive policy discussions may make the arts seem like a luxury. However, California has very clear goals for arts education, and there is a tremendous gap between what's happening in schools and what is called for by state policy.

## WHERE WE ARE TODAY

### California's schools are failing to meet state arts standards.

- Almost nine out of 10 California schools (89 percent) fail to offer a standards-based course of study in all four arts disciplines: dance, music, theater, and visual arts.
  - More than one in four schools (29 percent) do not offer a standards-based course of study in any of the arts disciplines.
  - 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.
  - Standards alignment, assessment, and accountability practices are uneven in arts education, and often not present at all.
- Other states may have more time for arts instruction because they have longer school days. California's school week is two hours shorter than the national average.

### California's elementary schools lack full-time arts specialists, and regular classroom teachers are unfamiliar with arts standards.

- Only 36 percent of California classroom teachers reported that a credentialed arts teacher provides music instruction to the students in their class. In the other arts disciplines, the percentages were much lower: visual arts (16 percent), dance (9 percent), and theatre (7 percent).
- In the absence of credentialed arts teachers, the arts instruction in elementary classrooms is not likely to be aligned with the state's standards. In fact, 65 percent of classroom teachers are not familiar with the VPA standards in any discipline.

### Funding for education is insufficient and unstable, adversely affecting spending on the arts.

- California lags behind the national average on per pupil funding for education and also appears to spend less per pupil on elementary arts education.
- Without sufficient general funds, California schools rely on outside sources of funds for arts education, creating significant inequities in California students' access to arts education.
- Without stable funding, it is impossible to develop and support a standards-based course of study in each of the four arts disciplines or make investments in arts education that require stable funding, such as hiring full-time arts specialists.

- Elementary classroom teachers are not well supported to teach the arts, with teachers in poor, lower-performing schools reporting lower levels of support from district leaders, principals, colleagues, and parents than their counterparts in more affluent, higher-performing schools.

### California elementary schools spend less time on the arts than other states.

- Schools in other states dedicate sufficient time and resources to offer both music and visual arts instruction to 100 percent of students, beginning in kindergarten.

### California districts lack the infrastructure to support arts education programs.

- California school districts do not have strategic arts plans, district arts committees, and arts coordinators to build towards implementation of state arts standards.
- Higher-capacity districts are more likely to take a systemic approach to arts education.

## WHERE WE NEED TO BE

*Our schools need stable funding in order to make time for the arts, hire arts professionals and support the classroom teachers needed to help students meet state standards and achieve a comprehensive education.*

### Recommendation: Stabilize education funding and make long-term investments.

- General funds should be sufficient and predictable enough to use for arts teachers' salaries and other core program elements.

### Recommendation: Make more time for arts instruction.

- Longer school days, and supporting the integration of arts instruction and other subject areas, may be necessary to meet the state's requirements for arts instruction.

### Recommendation: Full-time arts teachers, or well-trained and supported classroom teachers, should deliver arts instruction.

- Classroom teachers can deliver arts instruction if they receive adequate pre-service training, professional development, and support from arts teachers or other professionals.

### Recommendation: District capacity and principal leadership is critical.

- Districts need support, including professional development for district leaders, to establish the infrastructure — for example, long-term plans, accountability mechanisms — to plan and oversee arts education programs. With increased capacity, counties could be in a position to provide this support.
- Principals need to be equipped to serve as leaders of instructional programs that include the arts.