

This study was commissioned by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.



This Summary Report was written to provide an overview of study findings. A more expansive report, with more detailed findings and information on research methods, is available, as is a report focused on California's court and community schools. Copies of all reports can be downloaded from <https://www.sri.com/education-learning/project/creativity-challenge-the-state-of-arts-education-in-california/>

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## Foreword

More than fifteen years ago, the Hewlett Foundation commissioned the researchers at SRI International to create the first comprehensive, statewide study of arts education in California. The resulting report, 2007's *An Unfinished Canvas*, revealed the degree to which California was failing to provide standards-based courses in arts education—a requirement then, as it is now, outlined in the state's Education Code. Advocates and practitioners were simultaneously unsurprised, frustrated, and emboldened by its findings, which galvanized the arts education field. The Hewlett Foundation wanted to understand what progress has been made since then, and again commissioned SRI International to study the status of arts education in California. This report, *Creativity Challenge: the State of Arts Education in California*, shows that while some progress has been made, much work remains

There is no question that many efforts aided by the research in *An Unfinished Canvas* have increased the quality and availability of arts education in California. Legislation establishing a theater and dance credential for teachers is improving the quality and availability of instruction in those disciplines. The shift to local control of educational funding decisions provides a tremendous opportunity for communities to steer resources toward arts education in their schools. And, as this new study shows, access to arts education, measured both by the proportion of schools offering instruction in at least one discipline, and by schools offering instruction in two and three disciplines, has increased by almost ten percentage points.

Nevertheless, as supporters of arts education in California for more than fifty years, the Hewlett Foundation had hoped to see more progress in this new report. Despite some successes, California still has a long way to go to fulfill its obligation to provide all California students with sequential instruction in four artistic disciplines, as required by the Education Code. Even more concerning are the inequities this new research reveals: schools working with students from lower-income households and schools serving predominantly students of color consistently offer less access to arts education than students from wealthier communities. These findings suggest that California's education system lacks either the will or the resources (or both) to fully incorporate the well-documented benefits of arts education—for young people's academic attainment, social and emotional well-being, and positive school climates—into its policies and practices.

In many ways, this report is galvanizing anew. It reminds arts education practitioners and advocates that, despite important gains, the work of ensuring every student in California has the opportunity to learn in and through the arts is not done. It also equips the arts and education fields with new data showing just how far we have to go, and for whom it makes the most difference. Finally, this report invites us to see that the advantages of an education rich with high-quality arts opportunities are not equally distributed and calls us to approach this persistent challenge in new ways.

Emiko Ono  
Performing Arts Program Director  
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation



# Creativity Challenge: The State of Arts Education in California

California has long maintained ambitious goals for arts education. The state Education Code requires schools to offer courses of study in four arts disciplines to all California K–12 students.<sup>1</sup> In 2005/06, with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, SRI Education researchers conducted a study of arts education in California. Our goal was to assess schools' arts programs relative to state goals, examine the systems of support for these programs, and identify ways in which state and local policymakers might improve conditions for young people to experience arts education in schools. In 2007, our study was published as *An Unfinished Canvas*, reporting the following:

*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.*

In 2019, the Hewlett Foundation engaged SRI to “refresh” the 2007 study. In most ways, the current study addresses the same research questions and relies on the same research design and data sources as the earlier report—a statewide school survey, case studies, and analysis of extant data provided by the California Department of Education, though the 2020 study includes more granular analysis of student coursetaking data. Another notable change was the addition of a focused study on arts education in court and community schools, published as a stand-alone report (see Benge et al., 2022). The context for the new study also changed. We examined arts education in California schools in school year 2019/20, a school year that ended with school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to pandemic-related delays, we interviewed educators throughout the summer of 2020 while an unprecedented number of Americans protested systemic racism and police brutality, events that led many educators to express an increased sense of urgency regarding equity in education and the need for supports for culturally responsive schooling. In the preceding years, the policy context also changed:

- In 2013, with the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), California radically changed its system for funding schools.
- In 2014, the California legislature enacted Assembly Bill 86, ushering in a new focus on career technical education (CTE) pathways, including the industry sector of arts, media, and entertainment (AME).

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<sup>1</sup> See California Education Code Sections 51210 and 51220.

- In 2016, Senate Bill 916, the Theatre & Dance Act, reinstated single-subject credential for California’s theatre and dance teachers.
- In 2017, Assembly Bill 37 established media arts as a distinct arts discipline for California districts and schools to offer, citing a growing creative industry in California.
- Coinciding with the launch of this study, the state approved new California Arts Standards in 2019 and the California Arts Education Framework in 2020.

*The data collected for this study reflect the status of arts education in California prior to the pandemic.* In 2021 and 2022, before the release of this report (but after data collection), California enacted a host of new policies—some in response to pandemic-related concerns—that may improve students’ opportunities to experience arts education in schools. Most recently, in June 2022, California passed a state budget that “increases the base funding for the local control funding formula, the mechanism through which most of the state’s public schools are funded, by \$9 billion, or 13%..., the largest single-year increase to the formula since its inception in 2013” (Hong, 2022).

Finally, in the 15 years since *An Unfinished Canvas* was published, arts educators, policymakers and advocates in California joined together in a collective impact coalition called Create CA to advocate for the arts at the state level and to establish a statewide infrastructure for collaboration. The member organizations include the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), the California Arts Council, the California Alliance for Arts Education, the California State PTA, and the California Department of Education.<sup>2</sup> These member organizations worked together to support the full inclusion of the arts into the California public education system and to build public will for arts education. Their collective work led to some of the policy changes and increases in access to arts education in local communities described in this report.

Overall, we found that, while much remained the same in 2020 as in 2006, some aspects of arts education in California’s K–12 schools had improved. More schools were offering a course of study in each arts discipline. Higher percentages of elementary school students were participating in arts education, and more students were enrolling in CTE courses in the arts. Despite declining overall enrollment, California employed more arts teachers. And more schools have equipped, dedicated spaces for arts instruction. These improvements coincide with funding increases associated with LCFF and CTE, coordinated advocacy efforts, changes to the state accountability system, and substantial increases in support from school districts, counties, and partner organizations.

Nonetheless, despite these improvements, California schools still fall short of state goals for arts education. Moreover, a persistent pattern of inequity emerges from our current data. Elementary

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<sup>2</sup> In 2021, the California Alliance for Arts Education merged with Create CA and now operates under the legal name of Create CA. The former Create CA member organizations continue to serve as leadership advisory partners to the new organization.

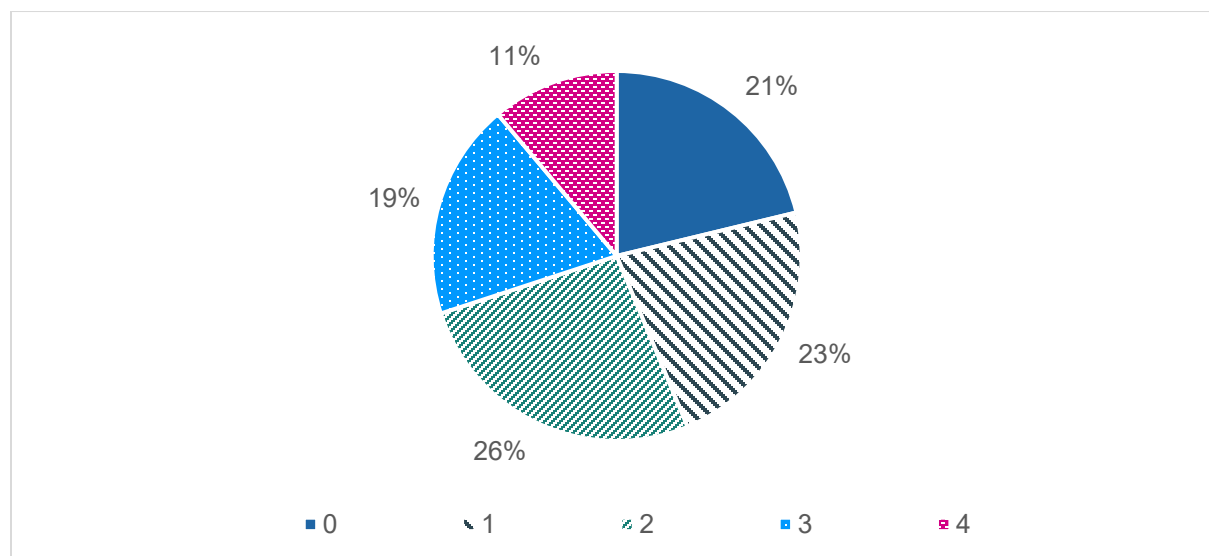
schools, court and community schools, and schools serving high proportions of children from low-income families have less access to arts instruction, face more barriers to increasing access, and are less likely to have dedicated rooms with specialized equipment for the arts.

## Overview of Arts Education in California

***As in 2006, only 11% of California schools offered a sequential, standards-based course of study in all four of the arts disciplines required by California policy.***

Although the state Education Code stipulates that all students should have access to sequential, standards-based courses in dance, music, theatre, and visual arts, only 11% of school leaders indicated their schools offered all four disciplines (Exhibit 1). This statistic exactly matches findings from the 2006 study.

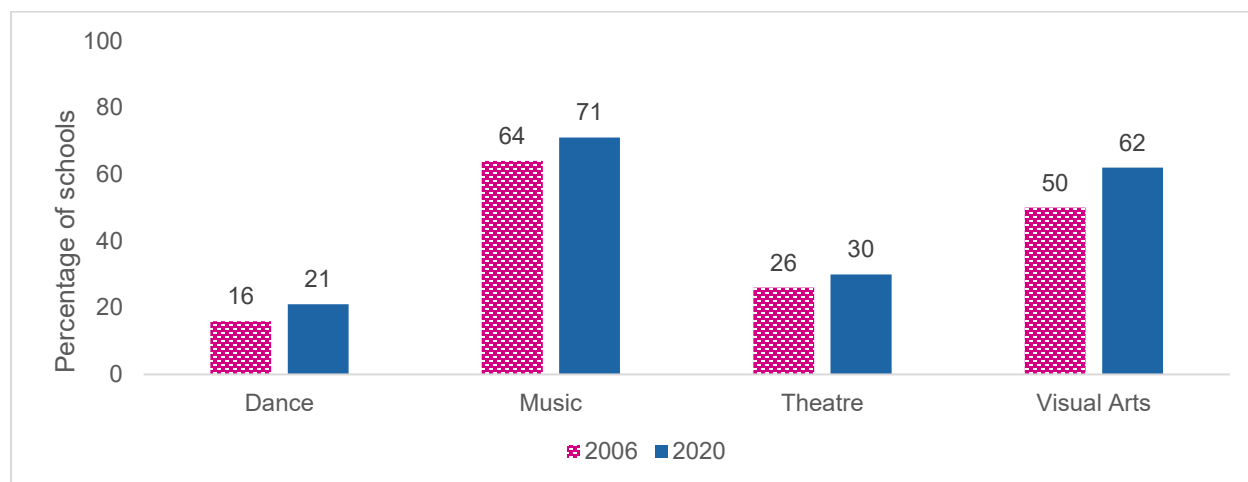
***Exhibit 1. Schools offering a sequential, standards-based course of study in zero to four of the four required arts disciplines in 2019/20***



Source: 2020 SRI School Survey.

However, most California schools provided some sequential, standards-based arts education. When asked which of the four required disciplines were offered at their school, 79% of school leaders indicated they offered a sequential, standards-based course of study in at least one (Exhibit 1)—an improvement compared to 71% in 2006. Likewise, the percentage of schools offering between one and three arts disciplines increased from 60% in 2006 to 68% in 2020. Both of these shifts accrue from increases in the percentage of schools offering each of the four arts disciplines inquired about in both 2006 and 2020 (Exhibit 2).

### Exhibit 2. Schools offering courses of study in all four required arts disciplines: 2006 and 2020



Source: 2020 SRI School Survey.

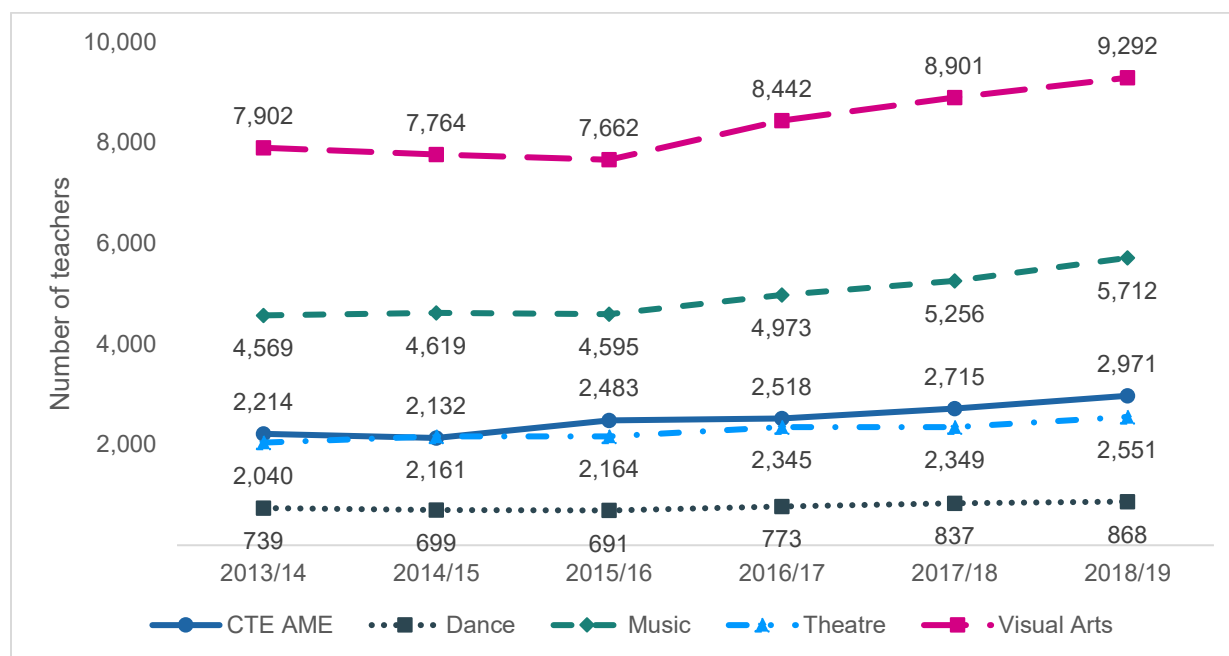
Note: Differences in the percentage of schools offering theatre are not statistically significant.

High schools were more than twice as likely to provide sequential, standards-based arts education in the four required arts disciplines than either middle or elementary schools. While less than a quarter of high schools offered all four required arts disciplines (23%), even fewer elementary and middle schools offered instruction in these disciplines (9% and 7%, respectively).

#### **Across all disciplines, the number of arts teachers in California was on the rise.**

In 2019, 17,897 arts teachers<sup>3</sup> were employed across California. Compared to 2014 (Exhibit 3), this is an increase of 2,622 arts teachers (17%), a significantly larger change than the 5% increase in the overall number of teachers during this time (273,977 to 287,043). Over this five-year span, the number of arts teachers increased across all disciplines, with the greatest increase in absolute numbers being among visual arts and music teachers (over 1,000 additional teachers in both disciplines), and the greatest rate of increase among CTE AME teachers (from 2,040 to 2,971, or 46%). The expansion of the CTE AME workforce occurred almost exclusively in high schools, whereas the increase in full-time equivalent (FTE) music teachers took place mostly in elementary schools. Notably, these increases occurred during a period when overall student enrollment decreased from 6,312,436 to 6,163,001.

<sup>3</sup> We define an “arts teacher” as a teacher assigned to teach one or more arts courses. A teacher assigned to teach in more than one discipline (e.g., music and CTE AME) would be counted in both discipline-specific groups, yet only once in the overall number of arts teachers.

**Exhibit 3. Arts teachers in California schools, by discipline: 2013/14 to 2018/19**

Source: SRI analysis of CDE Staff Assignment datafiles.

Note: Teachers are counted in multiple disciplines if they teach arts courses from multiple disciplines.

Overall, in 2019, slightly over half of all California arts teachers taught visual arts (52%, 9,292 of 17,897). In order of prevalence, 32% of arts teachers taught music, 17% taught CTE AME, 14% taught drama, and 5% taught dance.

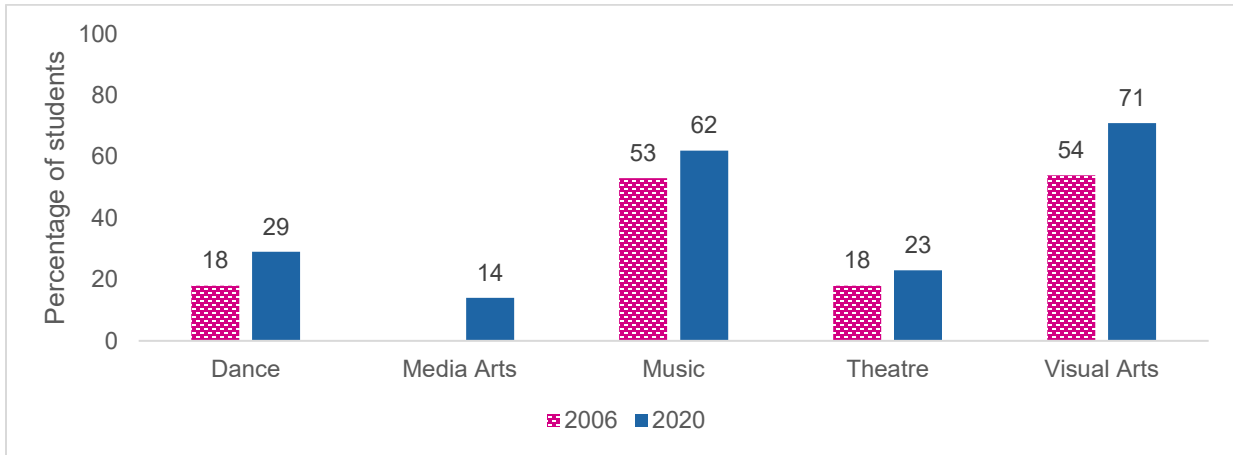
## Arts Education in Elementary Schools

**More elementary students participated in arts instruction in 2020 than in 2006.**

Most elementary students received some visual arts (70%) and music (62%) instruction, while relatively few received dance (28%), theatre (22%), or media arts (14%) instruction (Exhibit 4). Strikingly, compared with 2006, larger percentages of elementary students received some instruction in each of the arts disciplines. For example, the percentage of students receiving visual arts instruction increased from 54% in 2006 to 70% in 2020.



**Exhibit 4. Elementary students receiving arts instruction, by discipline: 2006 and 2020**



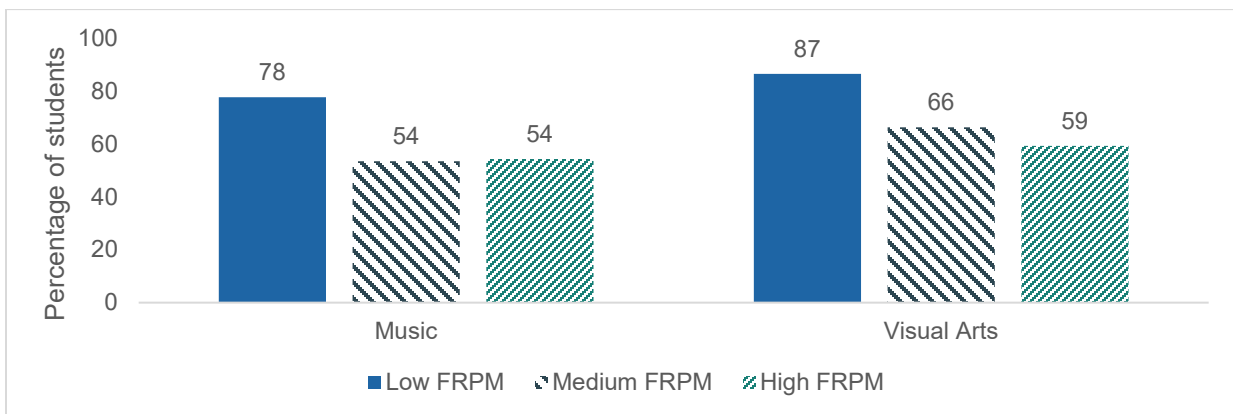
Source: 2020 SRI School Survey.

Notes: (1) The 2006 survey did not ask about media arts instruction. (2) Differences in theatre participation are not statistically significant.

**Despite increased participation among elementary students, significant inequities remained.**

The percentage of students receiving arts instruction in the two most common disciplines—music and visual arts—was consistently lower in schools serving low-income communities (Exhibit 5). The gap between the schools serving high and low poverty communities was 22 percentage points in music and 28 percentage points in visual arts.

**Exhibit 5. Elementary students receiving arts instruction in 2019/20, by school FRPM level**



Source: 2020 SRI School Survey.

Note: To examine the relationship between the socio-economic status of a school community and students' access to arts education, we relied on the concentration of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals, a proxy for a student's economic status, and divided schools into three equal terciles: low FRPM, medium FRPM, and high FRPM.

***Most elementary schools relied on classroom teachers to deliver arts instruction, but many classroom teachers lacked key expertise.***

In all arts disciplines except music, more elementary schools relied on classroom teachers than on arts specialists to provide arts instruction. Elementary students typically spend most of their day with one teacher who is responsible for teaching multiple subjects, including the arts. At the same time, elementary classroom teachers had received limited training in arts education from their teacher preparation programs.

Most California elementary school leaders (66%) cited insufficient arts expertise among regular classroom teachers as a moderate or serious barrier to increasing students' access to arts education, about the same percentage that identified this as a barrier in 2006. Professional development in the arts could help address the lack of arts expertise among regular classroom teachers, but it was in short supply in most California elementary schools. Six in 10 elementary school principals (60%) reported that a lack of teacher professional development in the arts was a moderate or serious obstacle to expanding students' access to arts education.

***Despite improvement since 2006, access to equipped, dedicated spaces for elementary arts instruction remained limited.***

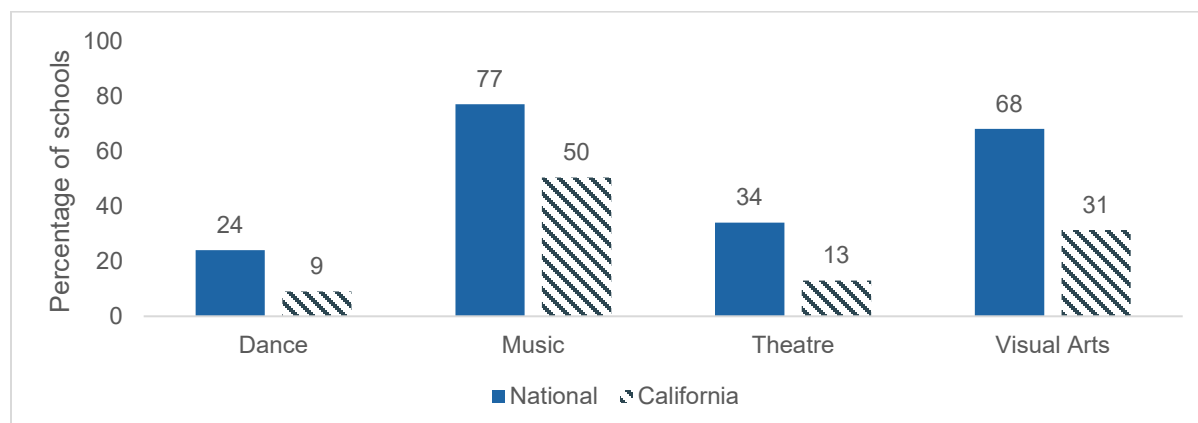
In 2020, dedicated rooms with special equipment (e.g., musical instruments) were reported as the usual location of elementary school music instruction in half (50%) of those elementary schools offering music instruction, up from 31% in 2006. Likewise, the use of equipped, dedicated rooms for elementary visual arts instruction increased from 13% in 2006 to 31% in 2020. However, dedicated rooms with special equipment (e.g., hardware and software for media arts) were still not the norm in elementary schools. Moreover, the percentage of California elementary schools providing arts instruction in dedicated rooms with special equipment was far smaller than the most recent national percentages (Exhibit 6).

The lack of dedicated, specialized spaces for arts instruction in elementary schools presents challenges for both teachers and students and can signal to students that arts education is not a priority at the school. Similarly, case-study districts reported that a lack of equipment can obstruct student participation, particularly in instrumental music. Some district leaders focused on reducing barriers associated with the high cost of musical instruments. One district included access to instruments in its LCAP.<sup>4</sup> The superintendent explained that if a student is unable to rent or buy an instrument, "We get that for them. We take away every barrier so that they can participate."

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<sup>4</sup> LCFF requires all districts to submit a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) that aligns district spending with achieving goals related to 10 priorities: Basic Services, State Standards, Parental Involvement, Pupil Achievement, Pupil Engagement, School Climate, Course Access, Other Pupil Outcomes, Expelled Pupils (County Offices of Education [COEs] only), and Foster Youth (COEs only).

**Exhibit 6. Elementary schools with equipped, dedicated rooms for arts instruction: California (2020) v. national (2010)**



Source: 2020 SRI School Survey and NCES survey (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012).

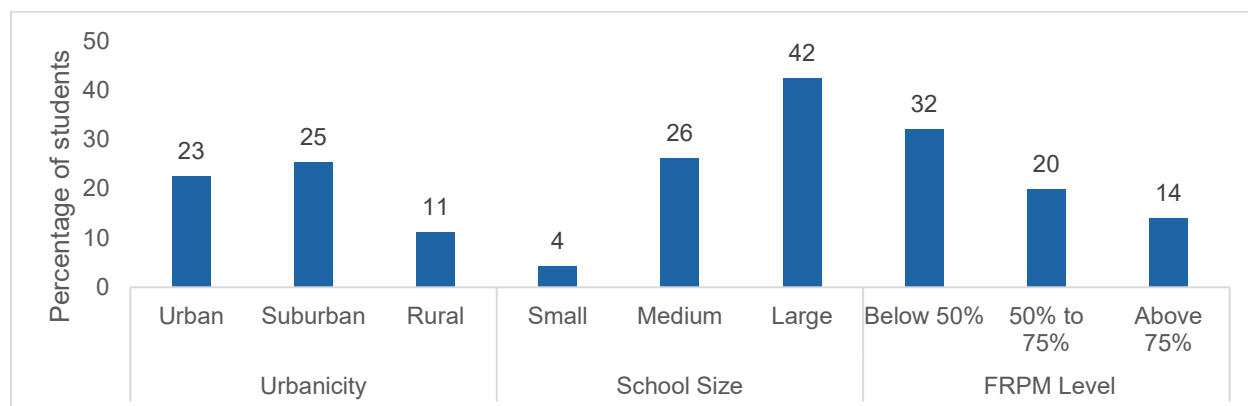
Note: Percentages are based on elementary schools providing instruction in each discipline.

## Arts Education in Secondary Schools

***In 2019/20, students attending larger high schools and schools serving relatively affluent urban or suburban communities had greater access to all four required arts disciplines as well as to advanced arts courses.***

Whether California high school students had access to at least one course in each of the four required arts disciplines depended on their schools' geographic location (11% of rural high schools offered all four required arts disciplines compared to 25% of suburban high schools), the number of students enrolled (4% of small high schools offered all four required arts disciplines compared to 42% of large high schools), and the poverty level of the community (32% of schools with fewer than 50% of students eligible for FRPM offered all four required arts disciplines compared to 14% of schools in which more than 75% of students were eligible for FRPM) (Exhibit 7). That high schools serving more affluent communities were more likely to offer arts course in all four required arts disciplines may be, at least in part, a function of parent fundraising (see funding discussion below).

**Exhibit 7. High schools offering a course of study in all four required arts disciplines in 2019/20, by school characteristics**



Source: SRI analysis of CDE course enrollment data for 2019/20.

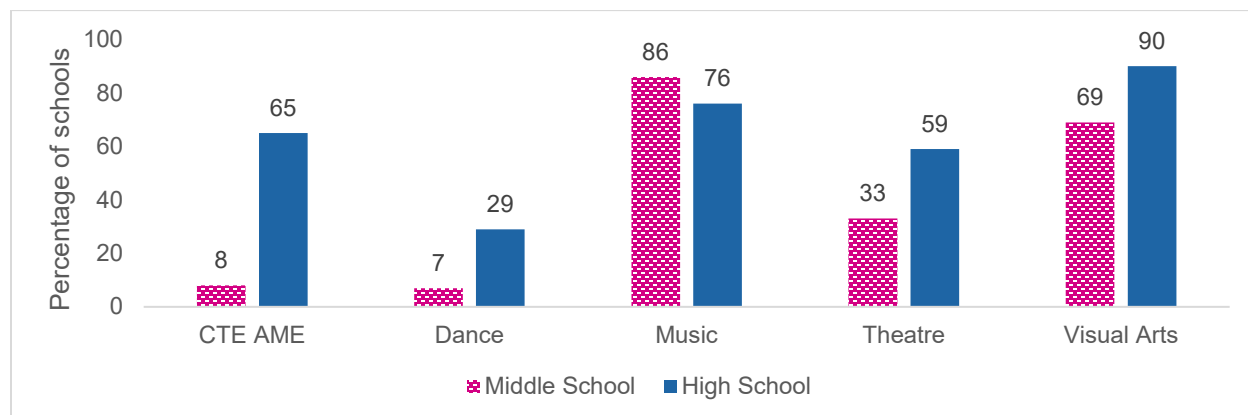
Offering advanced arts courses, such as International Baccalaureate (IB) or Advanced Placement (AP) courses, signals that a school is likely to offer a sequential course of study, because advanced courses typically necessitate pre-requisite courses. Similarly, the completion of a CTE AME pathway, as signified by completing a CTE AME capstone course (the final course in a sequence), certifies students as having completed 300 hours of sequential coursework aligned with “career ready practices.” The state incentivizes these types of course offerings through its College/Career Readiness Indicator on the California School Dashboard. This indicator evaluates high schools and districts based on the proportion of graduating students “prepared” for college and career as determined by a number of criteria, including passing two AP or IB tests or completing a CTE pathway (along with either passing Smarter Balanced Assessments or acquiring college credits). Among California high schools, 70% offered at least one advanced course, defined as an IB diploma, AP, dual-enrollment, or CTE AME capstone course. The schools most likely to offer advanced arts courses were suburban (77%), large (94%), or serving a student population in which fewer than 50% of students were eligible for FRPM (80%).

***In 2019/20, most middle schools and many high schools failed to offer a single course in dance or theatre.***

Among California high schools, 9 in 10 offered at least one visual arts course (90%) and just over two-thirds offered at least one music course (76%), while fewer than 3 in 5 offered a theatre course (59%) and fewer than 3 in 10 offered a dance course (Exhibit 8). For all disciplines except music, the proportion of middle schools offering at least one course in each arts discipline was smaller than for high schools. That more middle schools offered a music course may be related to the California Education Code requirement that schools include the arts as part of their course of study for students in grades 1 through 6, or it may be that district

leaders recognize the importance of sequential music instruction to ensure that students are prepared to participate in high school course offerings such as band, choir, and orchestra.

**Exhibit 8. Secondary schools offering at least one arts course in 2019/20, by discipline**



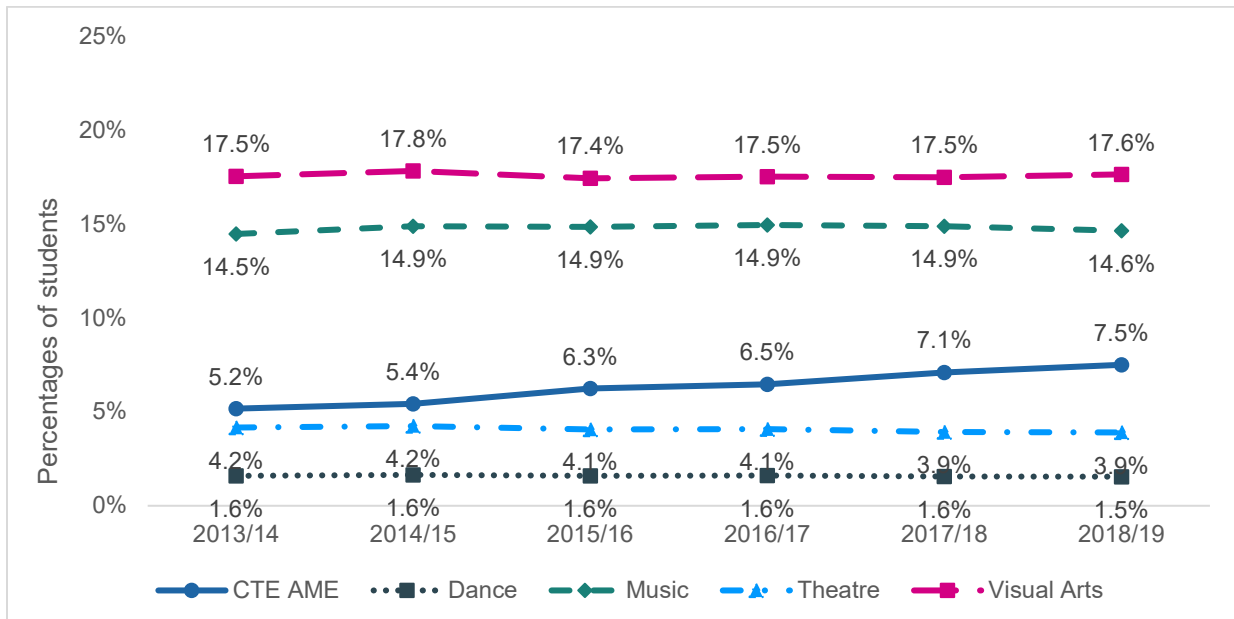
Source: SRI analysis of CDE course enrollment data for 2019/20.

In case-study districts, some students reported feeling uncomfortable signing up for arts courses in high school because they had had no experience with a particular arts discipline in middle school. For example, one student explained that she would rather sign up for a ceramics course than something like “choir or band” because “you kind of have to already know how to do it to be able to join.” In some middle schools that operate a six-period day, students with disabilities and English learners were not able to enroll in arts courses because their “elective” was taken up with additional math or language instruction. One middle school addressed this issue by providing universal access to the arts through its transition to an International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme.

***Student enrollment in grade 6–12 arts courses has not changed as a percentage of the California student population since 2013/14, with the exception of CTE AME.***

Over the five years from 2013/14 to 2018/19, enrollment in visual arts courses has remained steady at approximately 17.5% of secondary students (Exhibit 9). Likewise, enrollment in music courses has stayed near 14.5%. While much smaller percentages of students enrolled in theatre and dance, participation in these courses also remained consistent over time. In contrast, enrollment in AME courses increased by 50% during the same period (from 154,573 to 231,437 students). In fact, in 2018/19, at least twice as many students were enrolled in AME courses than in any other CTE industry sector courses (California Department of Education, 2019).

**Exhibit 9. Secondary student enrollment in arts courses, by discipline: 2013/14 to 2018/19**



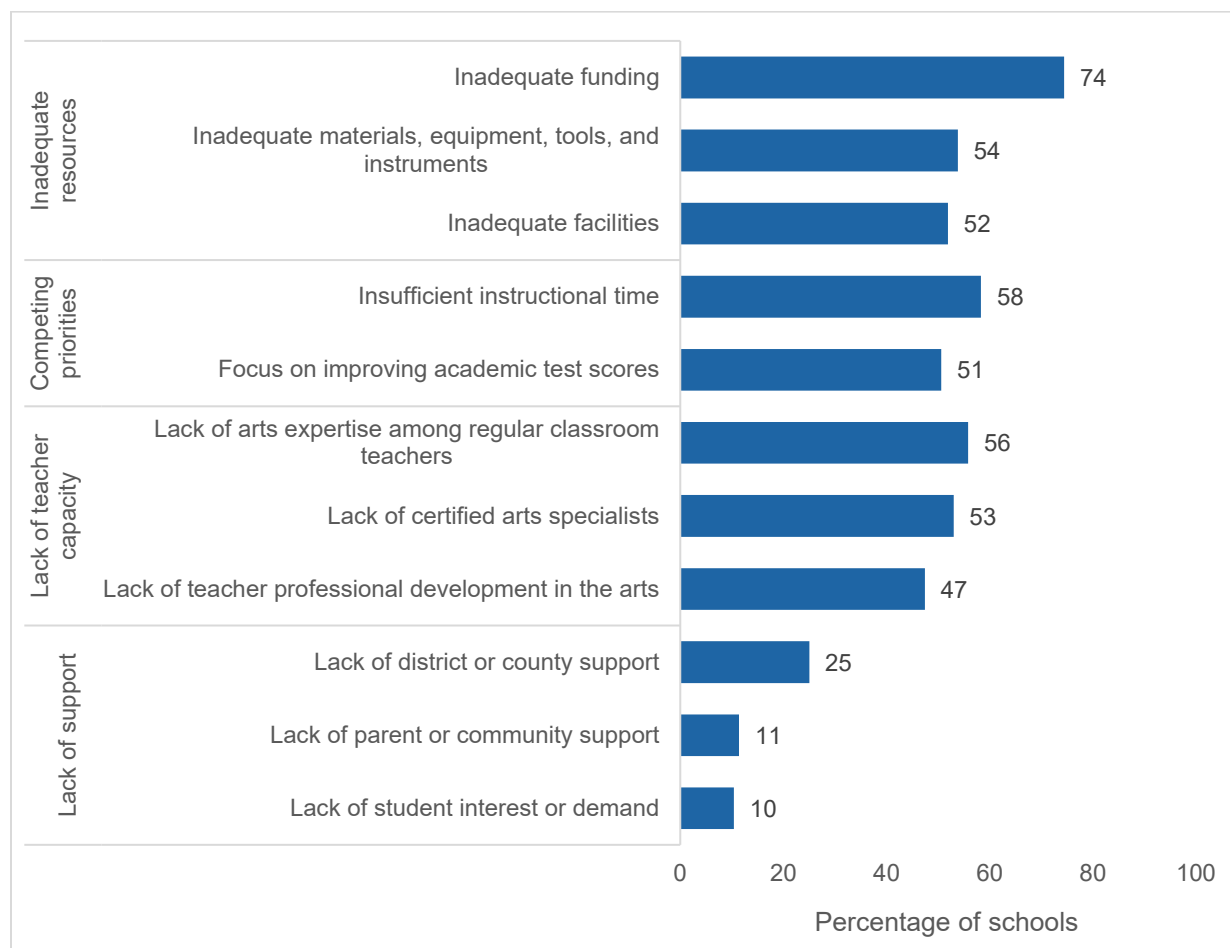
Source: SRI analysis of CDE school-level course enrollment data.

## Barriers to Arts Education

***In 2020, inadequate funding remained the most significant barrier to increasing access to arts education.***

As in the 2006 study, inadequate funding was the most-often-cited barrier to increasing access to arts education, with 74% of school leaders ranking it as serious or moderate (Exhibit 10). Inadequate funding was most likely to be cited as a barrier at elementary schools, schools serving low-income communities, and schools serving a majority of Hispanic and Black students. (Note: This survey was administered before the state significantly increased funding for education in 2021 and 2022.) Most school leaders further reported a lack of other resources, such as lack of teacher capacity and competing priorities as barriers to access.

### Exhibit 10. School leaders' perceptions of barriers to increasing access to arts instruction in 2019/20



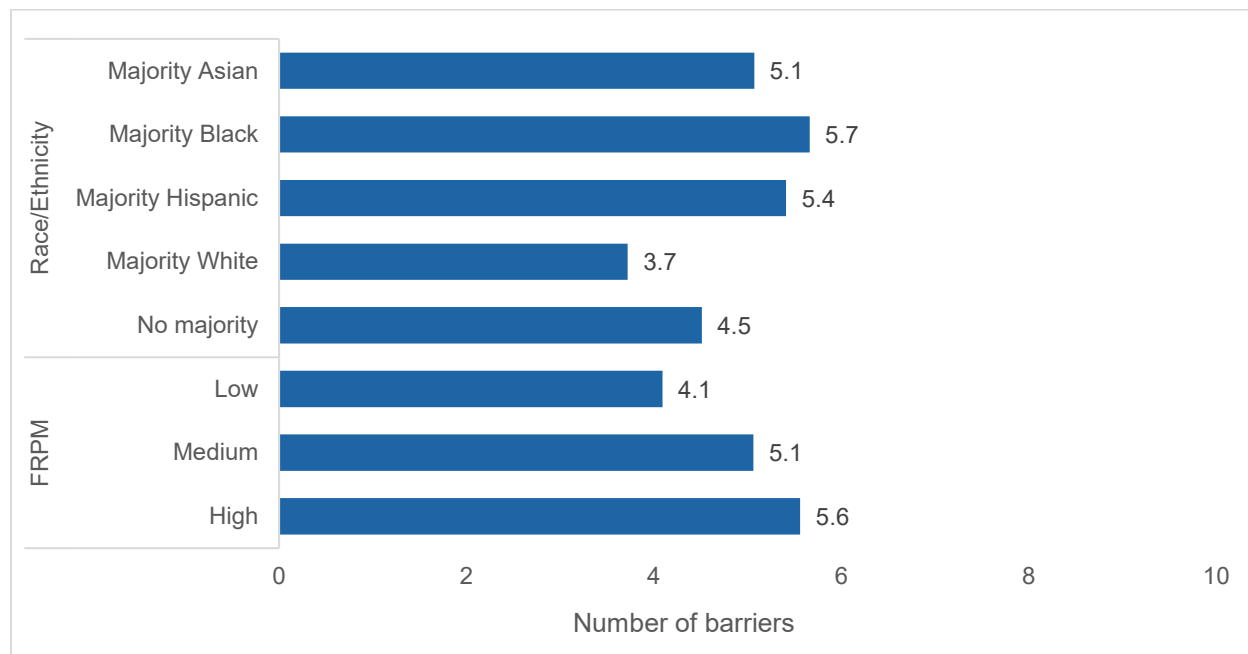
Source: 2020 SRI School Survey.

Note: "Lack of arts expertise among classroom teachers" was listed only on the elementary survey because much of the arts instruction at the elementary level is provided by regular classroom teachers rather than arts specialists. This is not the case at the secondary level, so this item was not included for secondary school respondents.

### **Schools serving higher concentrations of students from low-income families and schools serving majority-students-of-color populations faced more barriers to increasing arts instruction.**

School leaders at low-FRPM-eligible schools reported an average of 4.1 barriers as moderate or serious barriers, while schools at high-FRPM-eligible schools reported an average of 5.6 barriers as moderate or serious (Exhibit 11). Similarly, majority-White schools reported an average of 3.7 barriers as moderate or serious, while majority-Hispanic, -Asian, or -Black schools reported between 5.1 and 5.7 barriers as moderate or serious.

**Exhibit 11. Average numbers of moderate or serious barriers perceived by school leaders in 2019/20**



Source: 2020 SRI School Survey.

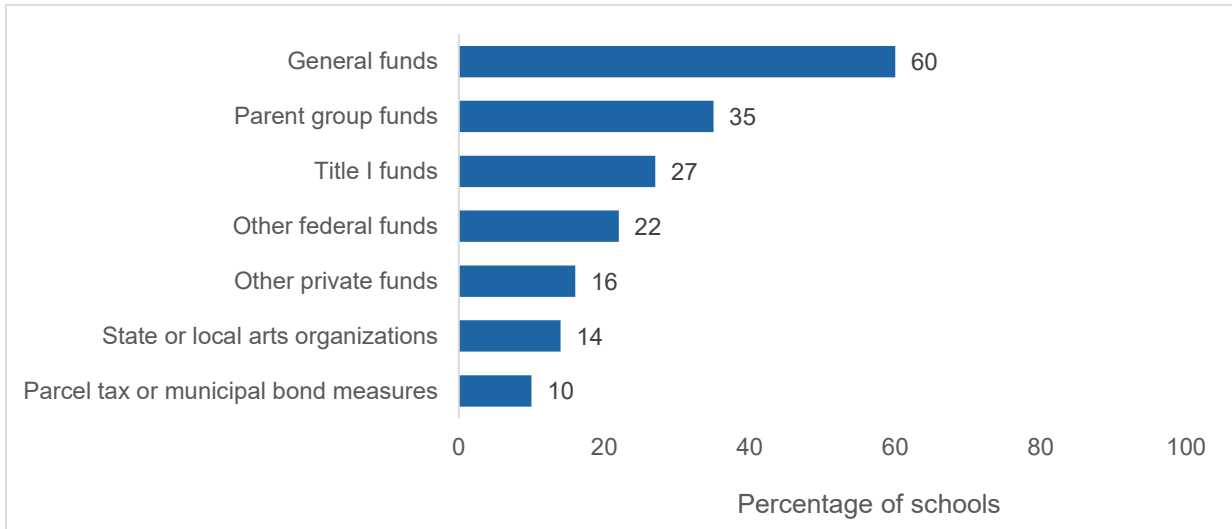
***Given insufficient state funds, California schools supplemented general funds to support their arts programs.***

The most-cited top or significant source of dollars for arts budgets was general funds (60%), while parent group funds and federal funds, including Title I, also played an important role for 22% to 35% of schools (Exhibit 12). Other sources, such as private funds, state or local arts organizations, and parcel tax or municipal bond measures, were cited as important contributors by fewer than one in 5 schools.

In interviews, local educators and policymakers indicated that state funds were insufficient to support the arts, providing insight into why the general fund was not cited more frequently as a top funding source. One school board member described giving up on relying on the state to provide adequate funds “years ago.” These educators’ attitudes align with research indicating that, in the late 2010s, the general fund, which is primarily state dollars distributed through LCFF, was not adequate to provide the level of instruction required by California’s Education Code (Levin et al. 2018).



**Exhibit 12. Top or significant sources of school funding for arts education in 2019/20**

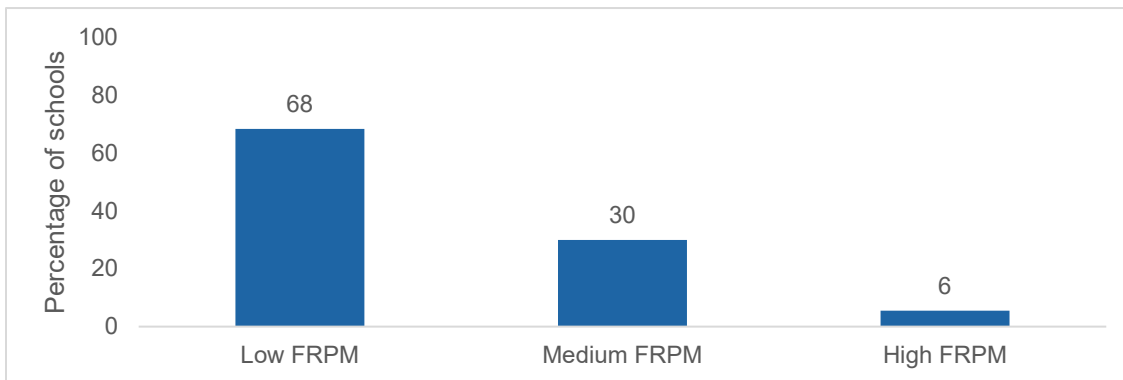


Source: 2020 SRI School Survey.

**Schools serving more affluent communities were more than 10 times as likely to rely on parent group funds to support arts education than schools serving California’s least affluent communities.**

The differences in schools’ reliance on parent group funds was stark: While only 6% of schools serving low-income communities relied on parent fundraising to supports arts education, more than two-thirds of schools (68%) serving more affluent communities leveraged these parent funds for the arts (Exhibit 13). These findings are consistent with 2006 findings—and with national research that documents how leveraging parent fundraising to support public education systematically privileges the schools attended by the children of California’s most affluent families (Brown et al., 2017).

**Exhibit 13. Importance of parent group funds in supporting arts education in 2019/20, by school FRPM level**



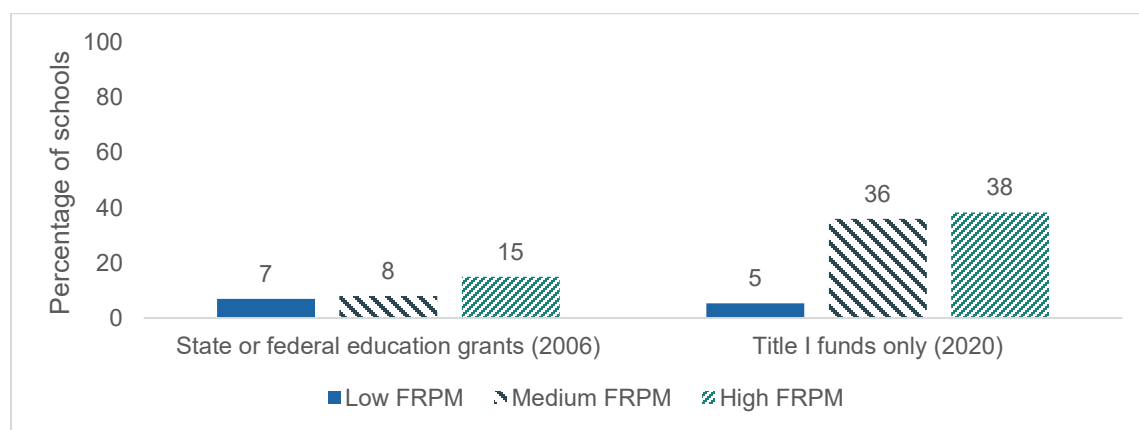
Source: 2020 SRI School Survey

### **Schools' use of Title I funds to support arts education appeared to increase substantially since 2006.**

Title I funds are allocated to schools based on the number of students from low-income families they serve. In general, schools serving larger numbers of students from low-income families have larger Title I allocations. Importantly, as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act, which includes the arts as part of a “well-rounded education,” Title I funds may be applied to arts instruction. While using Title I funds for arts education has been allowable for some time, school and district leaders were not consistently aware of this. For example, a principal in the Inland Empire mistakenly claimed that it was “very, very difficult to use Title I for the arts,” because “it has to be allocated for English language arts and math.”

Our survey findings suggest that this misperception of allowable uses of Title I funds has changed in recent years (see Spotlight describing related arts education advocacy efforts). In 2006, our survey did not ask about uses of Title I funds in particular; however, we did ask about “state and federal education grants” to support the arts. Assuming respondents had Title I funds in mind in 2006, the percentage of schools using Title I funds to support the arts was much greater in 2020 (Exhibit 14). In accordance with how Title I funds are allocated, this change is most evident in the schools serving the greatest proportions of students from low-income families: in 2020, 38% of schools in the highest-poverty tercile reported using Title I funds to support the arts, compared with 15% of schools in the highest-poverty tercile identifying “state or federal education grants” as a top or significant source of funding for the arts in 2006.

#### **Exhibit 14. Importance of federal / Title I funds in supporting arts education, by school FRPM level: 2006 and 2020**



Source: 2020 SRI School Survey.

**Spotlight: Advocacy at work**

In 2011, the California Alliance for Arts Education (now known as Create CA) launched an initiative to help schools and districts understand that using Title I funds for the arts was allowable and to help them make the connection between arts strategies and Title I goals. As told in a 2019 history of arts advocacy, “The California Alliance for Arts Education and Arts for LA recruited allied organizations including the California State PTA and the California Arts Council to pressure education officials at the state and federal level to issue clarifying letters about how Title I funds could be used. And once those letters were issued, these groups, and Americans for the Arts, did the follow-up work of disseminating them to superintendents across the state and country, leading to a positive shift in how money was allocated to support arts instruction” (Vogl & Varian, 2019). In particular, arts advocacy groups sought to help education leaders see connections between arts education and outcomes such as student engagement, family and community involvement, and positive school climate. Create CA hosts a website ([www.title1arts.org](http://www.title1arts.org)) that links to resources that school and district leaders can draw on to develop Title I plans that include the arts. This work coincided with the increase in schools’ reported use of federal/Title I funds for arts education.

## Sources of Support

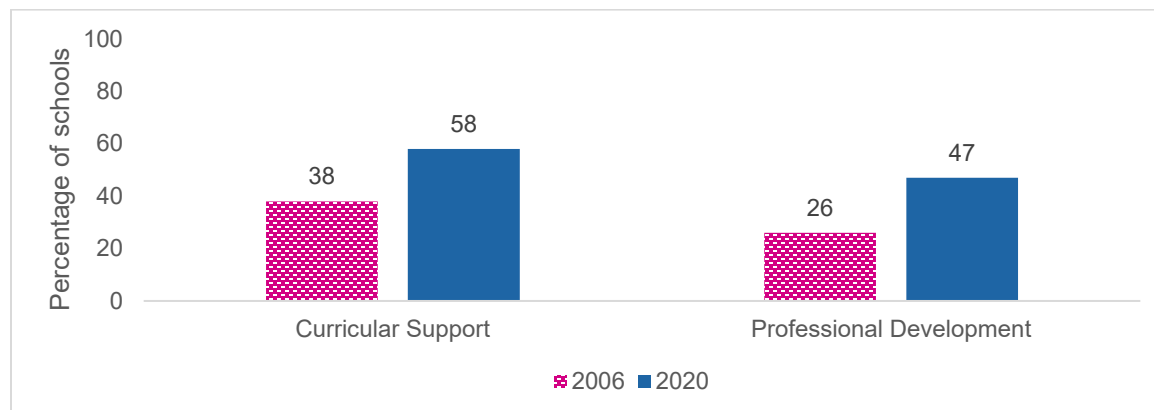
### *School leaders’ support is essential for sustainable arts programs.*

The case-study schools and districts were selected because they had prioritized arts education offerings and experiences. In some cases, the changes were part of a districtwide program. In other instances, school leadership was essential to the progress. Principals at these schools strategically promoted arts-themed events to parents, community members, and district leaders, to ensure continued support for the arts. An arts teacher and CTE AME program director at one of the schools accentuated the importance of the school leader’s commitment to the arts and securing the requisite resources: “It really relies on a principal who is willing to go to bat for me, and a superintendent who sees the value in the program.... You absolutely have to have administrators who are willing to take risks, creatively problem-solve, and advocate for you.”

### *School districts increasingly provided critical coordination, professional development, and curricular support for arts instruction.*

From 2006 to 2020, the percentage of schools obtaining curricular support from their school district increased 20 percentage points, from 38% to 58%, and the percentage of school leaders reporting that their teachers received professional development increased 21 percentage points, from 26% to 47% (Exhibit 15). (Despite this increased support, as noted above, 60% of elementary school leaders identified a lack of PD in the arts as a barrier to increasing student access to the arts.)

**Exhibit 15. Schools receiving curricular support and professional development from school districts: 2006 and 2020**



Source: 2020 SRI School Survey.

Some case-study districts leveraged the LCAP process to increase district support for the arts (see Spotlight on next page).

***Schools, especially in more rural communities, turned to county offices of education to provide them with curriculum specialists and support.***

Smaller, but still meaningful, percentages of California public schools relied on county offices of education (COEs) to support the delivery of arts instruction. From COEs, 18% of schools reported receiving support from program coordinators or curriculum specialists in support of the arts, and 17% received arts-related curricular support. Moreover, from 2006 to 2020, the percentage of schools obtaining curricular support from COEs increased 7 percentage points (from 10% to 17%), and the percentage of schools receiving professional development from COEs increased 10 percentage points (from 13% to 23%). Importantly, schools in rural communities were more likely than schools in suburban and urban communities to draw on arts-focused professional development and support from program coordinators or curriculum specialists from COEs.

***Three of four California public schools partnered externally to support arts instruction.***

In 2020, about three-quarters of California public schools (73%) reported partnering with external organizations to support their delivery of arts instruction—a 20 percentage point increase from 2006. Moreover, in 2020 compared with 2006, more schools reported partnerships with different types of organizations: cultural or community organizations, individual artists, museums or galleries, performing arts centers, and colleges or universities (Exhibit 16).

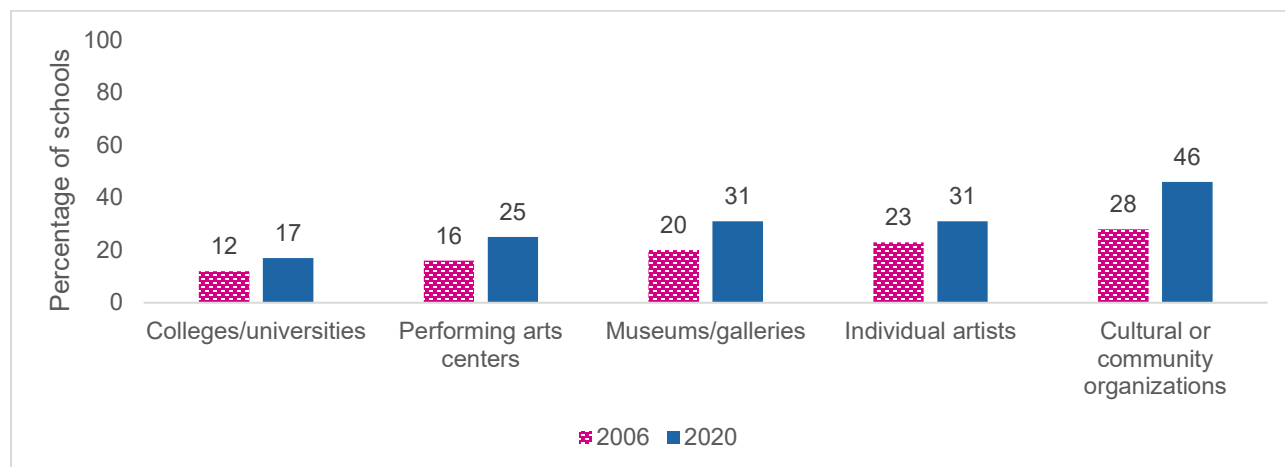
These partnerships provided a variety of supports to schools and districts, ranging from assisting with program development and strategic arts planning to providing professional development to placing teaching artists to hosting students and educators at concerts and

museums to securing instruments or other equipment. While curricular support and program coordination are more commonly provided by districts or county offices of education, the percentage of schools obtaining curricular support from partner organizations increased 9 percentage points since 2006 (from 5% to 14%).

***Spotlight: Case-study districts viewed LCFF dollars and the LCAP stakeholder engagement process as an opportunity to fund a previously aspirational commitment to arts education.***

One district visual and performing arts (VAPA) coordinator explained, “It was the one thing that we needed to make it happen.... Without this new type of funding, you really couldn’t do anything new or different.” Another VAPA coordinator said the introduction of LCFF changed the prospects for arts programming dramatically “because, for the first time, there was a real place [LCAP] to look at how to fund arts in a more dedicated way.” Interviewees in these districts identified several factors that facilitated their incorporating arts into their LCAP. These included:

- **Targeted resources from advocacy groups.** Several interviewees mentioned the importance of Create CA (formerly the California Alliance for Arts Education) for equipping stakeholders with resources to effectively advocate for the arts in the LCAP. Among other things, Create CA’s website offers a local advocacy webinar series and an LCFF toolkit that includes examples of arts education in district LCAPs, a customizable PowerPoint for school board presentations, and an LCAP template. Create CA also supports a network of local arts advocacy groups via the Arts Now Campaign, whose goal is to establish “the expectation that every district is responsible for providing their students with a high quality, comprehensive education that includes a robust arts program” (Arts Now California | Create CA, 2021).
- **Strategic arts plans.** Some district and community leaders developed a strategic arts plan, some with support from Create CA and, in one case, with support from the California Arts Project, a statewide network of K–12 and university-based educators that works to expand student access to the arts. The purpose of strategic arts plans is to create “a visionary, sustainable arts education plan to increase the quality, quantity and equity of arts education” in a district (Arts Now Planning Initiative | Create CA, 2021). One district VAPA coordinator explained that the district had developed a strategic arts plan that had “lain dormant for a little while” due to lack of resources, “and then all of a sudden, LCFF came in and that was like, here is the ticket. This is how we’re going to pay for it.”
- **Support from district administrators.** While LCFF is designed to increase the role of various stakeholders in shaping the budget, many interviewees credited district leadership with codifying a commitment to the arts in the LCAP. One district dedicated a certain percentage of federal grants, such as Title I and Title II, to arts education purposes and documented this set-aside in the LCAP. In another district, a school board member suggested that the handful of full-time arts teachers employed by the district be written into the LCAP as a means of documenting the district’s commitment to funding those positions.
- **A dedicated VAPA coordinator.** A couple of districts reported using LCFF funds to hire a district-level VAPA coordinator. These VAPA coordinators were active in engaging parents and teachers, rallying support for the arts in LCAP stakeholder meetings, developing strategic arts plans, and were described as critical to the success of the arts programs in those districts.

**Exhibit 16. Types of arts partnerships by organization type: 2006 and 2020**

Source: 2020 SRI School Survey.

The experiences of case-study sites with partnerships pointed to important characteristics of productive relationships that led to meaningful experiences for students.<sup>5</sup> One community arts leader discussed the advantages of each partner doing what it does best, calling this “alignment of resources.” Others spoke about sustainability. One external partner explained that the organization offers professional development for teachers while providing direct services to students, all with the goal of “putting ourselves out of business.” This partner noted, “[We] try and work to change the system, instead of just filling a hole.” Finally, partnerships can offer culturally relevant experiences that school-based staff lack the expertise or resources to provide.

## A Closer Look at Court and Community Schools

This “refresh” of the 2007 *Unfinished Canvas* included an examination of arts education in California’s district community day,<sup>6</sup> county community, and juvenile court schools (see Bengé et al., 2022). A core value of the Hewlett Foundation’s Performing Arts Program (William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2019) is equity and justice in California arts education. Since court and community school (CCS) students are disproportionately students of color, socioeconomically disadvantaged or foster youth, English learners, and students with disabilities, these schools provide an avenue to arts education for the state’s most historically underserved student populations. Moreover, most students in these schools are involved with either a district’s disciplinary system, the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, or a

<sup>5</sup> Meaningful student experiences are also dependent on the nature of the arts education practice available to them [a recent report by Stevenson and Crowell (2021) details “ten dimensions of powerful arts education practice”]. We did not have the opportunity to examine or observe community-based arts organizations’ arts education practices.

<sup>6</sup> What the California Department of Education (CDE) refers to as “community day” and “county community” schools is distinct from the “community school” reform movement. While the names are similar, there is no direct relationship between the CDE school types and the school reform strategy.

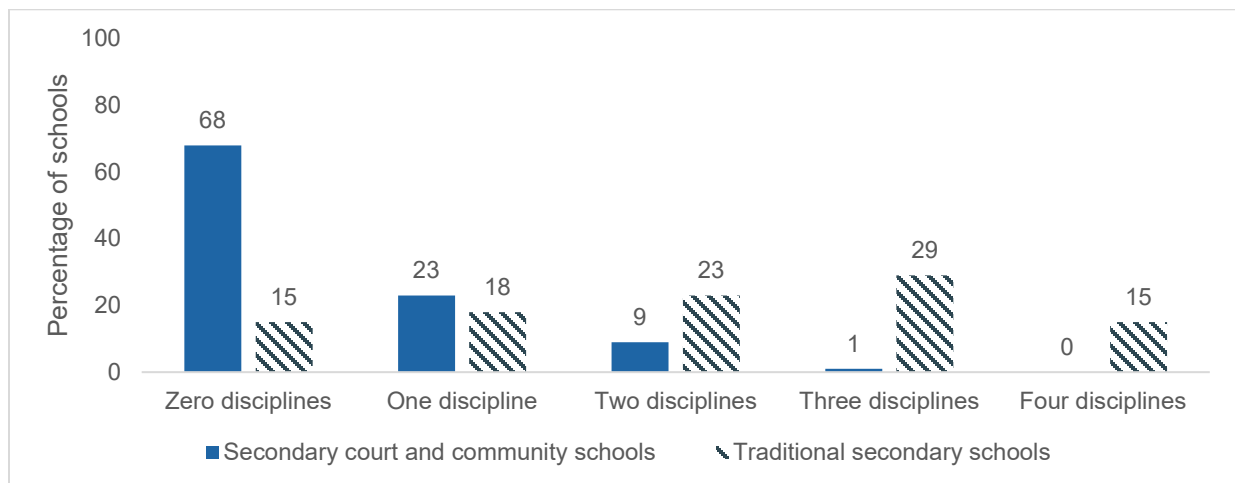
combination of these institutions. No prior statewide study exists on arts access for California students served by CCS.

**Two-thirds of CCS offered no courses of study in any of the four required arts disciplines.**

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of CCS offered no courses of study in dance, theatre, music, or visual arts, despite the Education Code requirement that secondary schools offer sequential, standards-based courses of study in these disciplines (Exhibit 17). When CCS did offer arts courses of study, it was most often a single discipline (23%), with only nine percent (9%) of CCS offering two disciplines, one percent (1%) offering three disciplines, and no CCS offering all four required disciplines.

Whereas only 15% of traditional secondary schools offer courses of study in all four required arts disciplines, traditional school students generally have more access to multiple disciplines. For example, twenty-nine percent (29%) of traditional secondary schools offered courses of study in three disciplines compared to one percent (1%) of CCS (Exhibit 17). One explanation for this disparity may be the high rates of student turnover, which make offering sequential courses of study challenging. A principal at a juvenile court school explained, “We gain anywhere from one to six students every week, and then we lose students. So, you never can really rely on having the same group to build upon skills.” An arts teacher at a district community day school reported similar challenges, sharing they were expecting 42 new students at the beginning of the next quarter and noting that students could be added to the school’s roster at any time. Furthermore, CCS have exceptionally small instructional staffs—on average 5.5 full-time equivalent (FTE)—which can make it very challenging to provide the breadth of offerings found in traditional secondary schools.

**Exhibit 17. Schools that provided a standards-based, sequential course of study in zero to four of the four required arts disciplines, by school type**



Source: 2020 SRI School Survey.

**CCS that did offer arts instruction relied heavily on regular classroom teachers and partnerships with nonprofits and teaching artists; few employed certified arts teachers.**

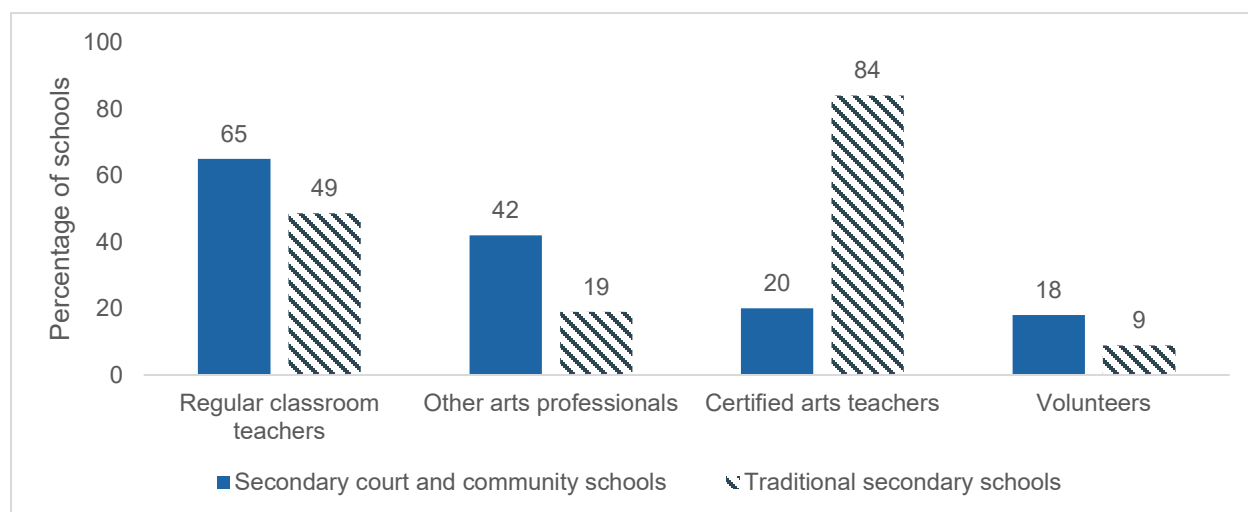
Since 80% of CCS have no certified arts teachers in any discipline, many CCS (65%) relied on regular classroom teachers—or teachers credentialed in another subject area—to provide arts instruction (Exhibit 18). For example, a county community school in Southern California with no arts teachers had a history teacher who taught improv comedy, a math teacher who taught guitar, and a Spanish teacher who incorporated visual arts into the lessons. Each of these arts experiences was teacher-initiated. The principal of a different county community school with only two teachers explained that arts programming “was really more student-generated” and the two non-arts teachers did their best in “providing an opportunity for that.”

Other CCS partnered with nonprofits or individuals (called “other arts professionals” in Exhibit 18) to bring in teaching artists or volunteers, but the degree to which these relationships translated to meaningful arts experiences varied. A few interviewees described robust collaborations with outside agencies sending in multiple artists on a continuing basis. More frequently, interviewees described smaller, individualized contracts or volunteer arrangements.

**Teaching artists and volunteers in CCS**

Many CCS bring in teaching artists or volunteers to work with students, especially if they lack credentialed arts teachers or want to offer a discipline outside staff expertise. Teaching artists are practicing artists who also work as educators; they are either employees of or contractors with community arts organizations or, less frequently, contract individually with a school. Similarly, volunteers may work with an arts nonprofit or have a direct relationship with a school. They are distinct from teaching artists in that they are not necessarily practicing artists and are not paid.

**Exhibit 18. Types of arts instructors in 2019/20, by school type**



Note: (1) Percentages add up to more than 100 because schools may have a combination of teacher types providing arts instruction. (2) Percentages are based on schools providing arts instruction. (3) Certified arts teachers include full and part-time teachers.



For those interviewees that described strong partnerships, lasting relationships stood out as the key to success. “You want to have programs that stay around for a while,” said one partner organization, “because when you stick around, you really learn how to communicate the best, you build relationships. The teachers know you, the kids know you, the staff knows you, and that’s really important.” An arts agency leader described relationships as the central purpose of their program, explaining that they use “art as a platform to develop mentoring relationships ... we help them to navigate systems of all sorts: juvenile justice systems and the educational system. That’s the primary mission is that relationship.”

***Promising Practice: County administrator played key role in facilitating community partnerships to support arts programming for county community and juvenile court schools***

In one county, principals, arts organizations, and teachers unanimously pointed to a single resource—a CCS-specific county arts coordinator—as critical for creating and sustaining arts partnerships. Though not the only entry point for arts organizations or schools to develop partnerships, this role served as an important node through which school staff and arts organizations could connect.

CCS teachers in this county interested in adding a teaching artist or with an idea for a particular arts project could reach out directly to the CCS county arts coordinator, who would then work with the school’s principal to coordinate and finalize a contract. One principal noted that the coordinator involved principals “to make sure what we are exposing the kids to is a good fit.” Multiple members of this arts partner ecosystem mentioned that the coordinator understands their budgets, so they were freed of the burden of allocating or procuring funds.

## Recommendations

The data presented in this report reflect the status of arts education in California schools during the 2019/20 school year, prior to the pandemic-related disruptions that began in the spring of 2020. We lack data on how the pandemic impacted arts education, but we have no reason to believe that course offerings, coursetaking, or the conditions for arts learning have improved.

However, since we collected data for this study, the *opportunities* for equitable arts learning have improved considerably (Fensterwald & Xie, 2022). After passing a record-breaking education budget in 2021, in June 2022, California’s governor and legislature agreed on a budget that “increases the base funding for the local control funding formula, the mechanism through which most of the state’s public schools are funded, by \$9 billion, or 13%..., the largest single-year increase to the formula since its inception in 2013” (Hong, 2022). This increase in LCFF funds is weighted to benefit districts that serve large numbers of students from low-income households and English learners, the children whom we found to have the least access to arts education. The 2022 budget also provides funds for districts to offer three hours of before- and after-school activities and six weeks of summer school to elementary school children, including a requirement that these services be offered to all low-income students and English learners, allocates general fund resources for school construction, and includes a one-time flexible \$3.6 billion Arts, Music, and Instructional Materials Block Grant (Fensterwald & Xie, 2022). These state resources are in addition to federal funds made available to schools in response to the pandemic. Federal funds include the \$15 billion allocated to California through the ESSER III Fund in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

To build on the incremental progress in arts education made since 2006, we make a series of recommendations aimed at increasing young people’s access to standards-based arts education, with a focus on equity and capacity-building. Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the new opportunities ensuing from increased state education funding, our recommendations call for leaders at all levels of the system to work together to ensure that California students have access to a robust, well-rounded education that includes the arts.

### State leaders and policymakers

To increase visibility into schools’ arts education programming, leverage California’s existing **data and accountability** systems by:

- Using CALPADS to collect data on and examine access to and participation in arts education, including at the elementary level, and ensure visibility into enrollment by student subgroups (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities)
- Offering a definition of Access to a Broad Course of Study (Priority 7) that requires districts to report on the extent to which they are meeting California Education Code requirements for the arts.

To build **county and district capacity** to support arts instruction, consider:

- Encouraging use of one-time block grant funds to support robust implementation of the new California Arts Standards and California Arts Education Framework
- Establishing an incentive grant program, modeled after the CTE incentive grant program, that prioritizes California's underserved communities and, to ensure that small schools and districts can benefit, allow applications from county and district consortia and partnerships with community-based arts organizations
- Developing or adopting instructional resources (including authentic assessments of student learning) that support learning goals in the arts and other core disciplines as well as recognize exemplary implementation for the purposes of establishing demonstration sites.

To support California's **creative workforce** priorities, consider expanding California's CTE AME demonstration program and workforce training initiative.

To ensure that California has the necessary **visual and performing arts teachers** to expand access to arts learning, reinforce and expand the teacher pipeline by:

- Supporting the development of teacher residency programs through which artists can gain the requisite knowledge and skills to obtain a teaching credential, including "grow your own" arts specialist programs that recruit and train arts education teachers from within local communities
- Expanding the number of California universities that prepare visual and performing arts teachers, with a particular emphasis on expanding training opportunities for dance and theatre teachers.

To expand equitable access to modern **school facilities**, encourage districts to use new construction funds to build specialized facilities that support access to the arts.

## County leaders

To build **school and district capacity** to provide standards-based arts instruction, continue to support robust implementation of the new California Arts Standards and California Arts Education Framework.

To increase school and district leaders' understanding of the role of the arts in a **comprehensive, well-rounded education** and support the appropriate **allocation of resources** to the arts:

- Educate school and district leaders about California Education Code requirements and how the arts can support the attainment of LCAP goals
- Inform school and district leaders about allowable uses of federal funds (i.e., the use of Title I and one-time Covid relief and block grant funds to support the arts)

- Engage in strategic arts planning at the county level and support district-level planning and the inclusion of the arts in school sites' School Plan for Student Achievement.

## District and school leaders

As a first step toward ensuring equitable arts learning experiences, collect and examine **arts course enrollment data by subgroup** (e.g., English learners, students with disabilities, gender, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status).

To expand equitable access to the arts, allocate resources—**money and time**—to arts education by:

- Including the arts in the district LCAP and in schools' SPSA
- Using Title I and general fund dollars to support arts instruction
- Using ESSER III funds to address the impact of lost instructional time in the arts through summer, after-school, and other extended school day and year programs
- Rethinking and, if needed, expanding the school day, especially for secondary schools operating a six-period day, to create space for the arts
- Building school schedules that include English learners and students with disabilities in arts programming
- With new funds to extend the elementary school day and year, integrating the arts into expanded learning time.

To begin to close the **equity gap in music**, consider using recent one-time state and federal funds to refurbish and purchase instruments and other needed supplies and equipment.

To ensure teachers have the knowledge, skills, and resources to implement standards-based arts instruction, including culturally responsive teaching and arts integration, invest in arts-focused **professional development**.

To ensure sufficient **visual and performing arts teachers** to expand access to arts learning, create a new teacher pipeline by establishing “grow your own” teacher education programs.

To provide **culturally responsive arts experiences** and build instructional capacity, contract with community-based arts organizations and draw on the expertise of families and community members.

To increase **home-school connections**, leverage the arts to engage parents/guardians and the community (e.g., through school and community-based performances and exhibitions) and conduct targeted outreach to ensure broad participation.

To refurbish or build **arts and CTE AME facilities**, tap new and existing state funds for school construction as well as develop and leverage local advocates to support local construction bond measures.

To expand **CTE AME** offerings, apply for state grants, such as the CTE Incentive Grant (CTEIG) program and the Specialized Secondary Program grant program, and the state-administered federal Perkins grants.

## Institutes of higher education and other partners

To expand **theatre and dance** education, establish additional teacher preparation programs in support of the theatre and dance credentials.

To expand the **arts teacher pipeline**, partnering with districts to develop new teacher residency programs for artists, including "grow your own" arts specialist programs that recruit and train arts education teachers from within local communities.

To build **instructional capacity**, prepare prospective multiple-subject teachers to integrate the arts with other core subjects and partner with school districts to provide ongoing teacher professional development.

To support students considering careers in the **creative economy** (including future arts teachers), expand dual-enrollment programs and provide work-based learning experiences, including internships, in support of local CTE AME programs.

## Parents, students, and community leaders

To develop **local support for arts education**, increase community and education leaders' understanding of the benefits of arts education and knowledge of best practices for arts education program implementation by:

- Advocating for resources (funding and instructional time) for arts education directly to school principals, superintendents, and school board members
- Joining a local parent or community group and sharing information on the role of arts education in increasing student achievement, engagement and sense of belonging, and preparation for the jobs of the future
- Joining your district's parent advisory committee to advise and provide input regarding LCAP priorities and resource allocation.

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