

Connecting Arts Education to

By Tina Petersen, Ed.D. Director of Educational Services

Student Success

SUMMARY:

This article aims to share Colton Joint Unified School District’s (CJUSD) approaches and experiences in creating a high-quality arts program and connecting arts instruction to other disciplines. It also highlights college and career readiness and their district goals—keeping students fully engaged, enabling them to see the relevance of their lesson content and empowering them for life after high school.

Expanding Opportunities for Students through Arts Education

After surviving the constraints of budget cuts made in the mid to late 2000s, the art programs of Colton Joint Unified School District (CJUSD) in San Bernardino County, California, have been experiencing an increase in funding. The first increase came as the district aligned its use of state funding with its CJUSD Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) during the 2014-15 school year. The second was the result of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, which aims to increase student access to arts education.

Because the CJUSD school board has always been supportive of the arts, the district did not have to start over in terms of arts education. Instead, it’s been a matter of focusing on how to improve existing programs and provide more opportunities for their students. This has not been the case for many districts across the United States due to an unintended effect of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. While NCLB included the arts in its definition of “core academic subjects,” many educators saw arts education as diverting time and resources away from instruc-

tion required to meet the legislation’s high-stakes English language arts and math testing requirements (Garcia, Jones & Isaacson, 2015). As a result, arts instruction became much less of a priority and was often marginalized (Meyer, 2004).

In fact, in its 2011 report, *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America’s Future Through Creative Schools*, the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities stated that “due to budget constraints and emphasis on the subjects of high-stakes testing, arts instruction in schools is on a downward trend ... this is especially true for students from lower-income schools, where analyses show that access to the arts in schools is disproportionately absent ” (p. vi).

The report also pointed out the short-sightedness of this trend by referencing a body of research revealing the strong positive educational outcomes that arise from the inclusion of arts education in schools’ curriculum. Two of the positive outcomes most commonly found by researchers are that students, including minority and low-income students, who have a high involvement in

DISTRICT INFORMATION

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Colton Joint Unified School District
in San Bernardino County

District Size



of Schools



of Teachers



ENROLLMENT BY SCHOOL LEVEL

Elementary

12,881

Middle/Junior High

3,773

Senior High

6,154



Student population that qualifies for free and reduced lunches



Student population that falls below the line of poverty

the arts “performed better in school and stayed in school longer than students with low involvement” (2011, p. 17).

Even more exciting for educators are findings that arts instruction can help them meet the new demands that students be college and career ready when they exit the K-12 system. A meta-analysis of more than 10 million American high-school students found that SAT scores increased linearly with the number of years of arts classes that a student had taken. Students who took four or more years of art classes showed the strongest linear relationship with SAT scores (Robinson, 2013). In addition, the arts has been found to contribute to the teaching of workplace skills such as the ability to work independently, self-reflection, adaptability, and of course, creativity (Hull, 2010), which increases art education value as a potential tool for college and career readiness efforts.

In Colton Joint Unified School District, a previous wave of instructional reform centered on integrating what had traditionally been classroom silos. Today teachers collaborate in groups such as co-teaching teams and professional learning communities, optimizing arts education’s potential for boosting academic achievement in other disciplines as well as college and career readiness. This requires not just increasing student access to arts instruction but also making these connections an integral part of their learning process. Additionally, educators invest a lot of effort in community outreach because, as the National Education Association states, “strong school-family-community partnerships foster higher educational aspirations and more motivated students” (2008, p. 1).

Rigorous yet Flexible Material

According to the National Center for Educational Achievement (2010), simply taking Advanced Placement courses is not related to college success; the real indicator of college preparedness is taking the courses *and passing* the exam. CJUSD used LCAP funding to pay students’ Advanced Placement exam fees for courses such as AP Studio Art; since

the district is in a low socioeconomic area, ensuring students do not have to pay for the exams out of pocket removes a significant barrier to their taking full advantage of the AP program.

In addition to rigorous courses, a primary key to an effective arts program is having the ability to continue developing the art curriculum so that it can meet changing federal, state, regional, and even local demands. Through LCAP, CJUSD has been able to fund the purchase of elective textbooks allowing art teachers to update their curriculum for Art and AP Art courses in the Spring of 2017.

In its 2004 report, *The Complete Curriculum: Ensuring Place for the Arts in America’s Schools*, the National Association of State Boards of Education noted that while an abundance of arts education materials are available online and through various community and philanthropic organizations, those materials may not always constitute an organized curricular program that is aligned to grade levels or state standards (Meyer, 2004). As CJUSD went through the process of looking for textbooks, they indeed found that there were not many options available from publishers.

Fortunately, teachers found, approved, and negotiated a 2016 pilot of five Art textbooks: *Communicating Through Graphic Design*, *Exploring Visual Design*, *Experience Clay*, *Discovering Drawing*, and *Beginning Sculpture* from Davis Publications for their Art I through IV classes. “One of the reasons we chose this material is that students have the opportunity to use both the hard copy textbook, as well as eBooks. Students who do not have Internet connectivity at home can use the textbooks rather than be restricted to accessing the content at school or another venue with online connectivity” stated Tina Petersen, Ed.D. Director of Educational Services (7–12) at CJUSD.

Connections for College and Career Readiness

Because CJUSD emphasizes college and career readiness, they spend a large amount of time talking to students about job skills. They have also allocated some of their LCAP funds for activities such as college field trips for high school students to investigate postsecondary art programs firsthand.

Additionally, the district began participating in the California Linked Learning District initiative in 2012. The Linked Learning program connects high school academics with real-world experience in a wide range of fields, including digital media arts. Working professionals provide teachers with input for weaving industry themes into their lessons, and help them reinforce the lessons with work-based learning based

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on real employers. This approach makes learning mirror the world of work, and helps students answer the question: “Why do I need to know this?”

CJUSD’s Grand Terrace High School provides an art-based Linked Learning program of study, which they call the A.R.T.S. Academy. Within that program of study, students can take Art I - IV courses, Art History, and, if they choose, AP Art. The school also partners with the Colton-Redlands-Yucaipa Regional Occupational Program (CRY-ROP) to provide hands-on career training programs in high-demand art career fields. Through this partnership, Grand Terrace has been able to provide for Game Design and Art of Animation classes as well as speakers to talk about different art careers and art types. The A.R.T.S. Academy is a relatively new program; it’s in its third year. The first graduating class for the program is the 2017-18 school year. They are currently focusing on providing those students with work based learning opportunities

such as job shadowing, internships, or projects with local businesses or artists.

Additionally, each pathway has an advisory group. The arts pathway group provides industry specialists or community members who have a background in the arts. The advisory group is designed to give feedback on courses, so that teachers always have a clear and up-to-date perspective on what the program offers versus what's new and emerging in the field.

However, not all art students want an art-related career. The A.R.T.S. Academy provides them all with general work skills through a sequence of work-based learning experiences that instill qualities such as responsibility, accountability, and time management. So, even when students may not want to be artists after graduation, the skills and experiences that they acquire

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within the program can be extended to any field. This also means that if a student needs to get a job while in college, which many do, that individual will have the necessary soft skills and general work skills.

Teacher Collaboration and Course "Cross Pollination"

The Linked Learning A.R.T.S. program at Grand Terrace High School incorporates teacher collaboration as part of the instructional process. For example, a ninth grade student would be enrolled in Art, English, and a basic computer class. The teachers for those three subjects meet periodically to talk about how students are progressing in the classes. If they find that some students are failing classes, the teachers can target those specific students for intervention, getting them to take advantage of tutoring services and other support

resources that are available through the A.R.T.S. Academy.

A. Helene Robinson (2013) states that high-quality arts integration is more than including artistic activities as an add-on. She describes it as a curricular (for call out only add "it is a") connection process that requires students to use "higher-order thinking skills and aesthetic qualities to gain further understanding of a particular academic concept." Accordingly, Linked Learning teachers are tasked with working together to devise at least one to two cross-curricular projects a semester. Each of the students has to work on the project and they get credit for all areas.

CJUS has found that this "cross-pollinating" between an art class and a language arts class or a computer class induces students to really apply their learning and helps them see what they are going to be able to do with the things they learn before they even exit high school. Their experience jibes with research finding that arts integration increases "the ability of students to identify, create, and apply authentic learning connections" (Richards & Treichel, 2013, p. 1).

Laying the Foundation for Future Successes

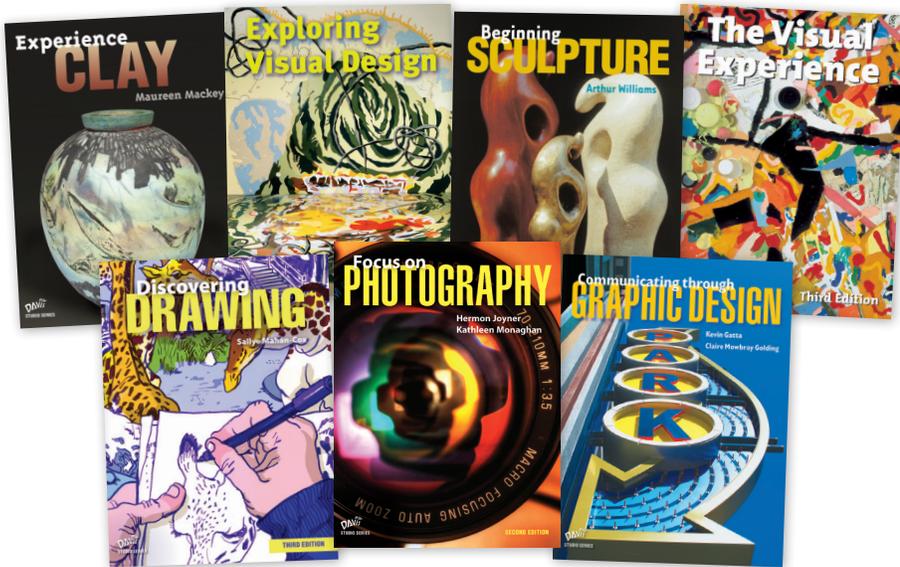
Since these programs are only a few years old, performance data is still coming in, but early results show improvements. For example, high school freshman classes have been the grade level that typically faces the most difficulty, with students in those classes showing the highest failure rates. While the ninth grade is not evaluated on the California Assessment of Student Progress and Performance, teachers are sharing anecdotal evidence that shows these freshmen are now passing their classes at a higher rate. In particular, the English Language Learner population is achieving higher grades as well as showing more overall engagement.

Teachers are seeing that when students have a well-rounded curriculum that includes art, they will indeed improve their performance in core classes. The benefits of arts integration, such as collaborative learning experiences, opportunities for developing autonomy and self-regulation, increased engagement and experimentation, as well as ongoing reflection and self-assessment individually, with peers, and with teachers (Robinson, 2013), are creating a solid foundation for future academic and work success.

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5 Misconceptions About Arts Integration



Rachel Wintenberg

By carefully aligning core subject lessons with arts standards, all teachers can reach and inspire students. Conversely, arts teachers can reinforce knowledge in core disciplines by finding and reinforcing the naturally existing connections between all areas of study. Teachers in all disciplines can benefit from arts integration, but they can't let common misconceptions hold them back. Here's how I make the case for non-arts teachers:

Common Misconceptions about Arts Integration

#1: The arts and core subject areas such as math, science, and social studies are best taught separately.

Fact: Throughout history, the arts have been an integral part of all disciplines; the separation has been made artificial. Teachers across all disciplines have reinforced learning through the arts for generations, and we need to return to doing interdisciplinary projects because they worked. Students love interdisciplinary projects, and because they are having fun, they learn more and retain more of what they learn.

#2: Integrating the arts into a common core lesson will waste time and decrease the rigor of the lesson.

Fact: By involving students in art production, teachers encourage whole brain learning, higher-order thinking, creative problem-solving, teamwork, active learning, and student engagement. Students learn best when they are having fun! Teachers who use project-based learning are also more likely to have fewer discipline issues.

#3: It isn't necessary to integrate art with other subjects at all.

Fact: Historically, the arts were not separate from other subjects. Art is an integral part of whole brain learning, and an art educator can help classroom teachers to incorporate art production into just about any unit of study.

#4: That's all very well for kids who are already doing well academically. My students are struggling and need to focus on drilling in the basic skills from other subject areas.

Fact: Students involved in the arts score an average of 100 points higher on the

SATs than students who do not have access to arts education. Denying students access to the creative and performing arts means denying them access to opportunities to develop basic skills necessary to succeed in the modern world.

Giving struggling students access to positive outlets for creative expression will also lead to greater engagement and motivation. If a student feels self-confident in one academic discipline, that confidence will inspire them to work harder in other content areas.

#5: It's too overwhelming and I have so much on my plate already. I wouldn't even know where to begin.

Fact: The first place to look is in your lesson plan book. You are probably already doing arts integration without even knowing it. In order to meet the National Core Art Standards, students in your classroom must engage in Creating, Conceiving, and Developing new artistic ideas and work; Present-

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ing, Interpreting, and Sharing artistic work; Responding, Understanding, and Evaluating how art conveys meaning; and Connecting and Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context. The most effective classroom teachers, like you, are already integrating the arts into their curriculums to increase student engagement and deepen understanding. 🌀

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