

In “Steel Pan Alley,” a small room behind the stage at J.W. Fair Middle School, 21 students play an enthusiastic version of “Margaritaville” on their steel drums. As the band of mostly eighth-graders pounds out the Caribbean melody, music teacher Deborah Prieskop beams her approval from under a lavender hat and claps along.

The song’s lyrics, made famous by Jimmy Buffett, are about “wasting away” in a tropical resort. And Prieskop finds that somewhat ironic because her music program is also wasting away — unbeknownst to most of the young musicians happily rehearsing for an upcoming performance at the San Jose Civic Auditorium.

“It’s pathetic,” says Prieskop, a member of the Franklin-McKinley Education Association. Because of dwindling funds and the need to raise test scores, her district is cutting the music program from nine classes and two teachers to five classes and one teacher. “The elementary feeder music program has been eliminated completely.” Since learning she had been assigned to teach only one period of music next year and spend the rest of her time teaching scripted math and English, Prieskop has decided to retire.

“We might be educating students,” she says, “but we’re preventing them from expressing themselves or having any joy — or soul — in their school day.”

“School would be really boring if they took music away,” says eighth-grader Westley Cai. “I don’t think they should do that.”

What’s happening to art and music education in San Jose is typical throughout the state. California ranks 50th in the nation in the ratio of music teachers to students, according to a report from the California Superintendent’s Task Force on Visual and Performing Arts.

There’s been a 50 percent decline in the percentage of music students in California public

schools over the past five years — from 18.5 percent in the 1999-2000 school year to 9.3 percent in 2003-04 — according to the Music for All Foundation study “The Sound of Silence.” The greatest decline was in the area of general music, which suffered an 85 percent decrease in student enrollment. The number of music teachers declined by 26.7 percent during the same period, representing an actual loss of 1,053 teachers.

“The decline has been so significant that music education has suffered the greatest losses in percentage enrollment, actual student enrollment and teachers than any other academic subject. These losses are clearly disproportionate to those in any other academic subject,” notes the study, which blames the decline on the budget crisis and the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Arts advocates and educators say that the situation has been made worse by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s cuts. “As of fall 2004, California has no dedicated source of state funding for arts education,” reports the California Alliance for Arts Education (CAAE). “From 1999 through 2004, the California Department of Education administered a \$6 million competitive grant program, titled ‘Arts Work.’ Although CAAE and the arts community were successful at advocating at the state Legislature for restoration of the funding in the 2005 budget, Gov. Schwarzenegger eliminated the funding entirely, leaving California with no state funding specifically designated for arts education.”

Ironically, the governor declared March to be “Arts Education Month,” proclaiming that “the arts are one of humanity’s most expressive means of understanding the world, providing a universal language for people to communicate across continents, time and social barriers.”

The proclamation went on to say that arts education gives students the skills to challenge their imagination and push the boundaries of



Is it curtains for the arts in California’s public schools?



their potential.

The California Arts Council's Arts in Education and Artist-in-Residence programs, formerly funded at more than \$10 million annually, have also been gutted by the governor's budget. These programs provide professional artists to assist teachers in the classroom. However, due to budget cuts, only \$1 million in funding is now available for these programs.

While the governor talks about taking his case to "the people," cutting arts education is not what the people have in mind. According to a nationwide survey conducted by the

Gallup organization, 95 percent of Americans believe that music is a key component in a well-rounded education. More than three quarters of those surveyed said that schools should "mandate" music education. And the California Parent-Teacher Association has started a "Bring Back the Arts" campaign to enhance children's education.

Laurie Schell, CAAE executive director, says the association is attempting to "overturn the governor's blue-lining" of arts education funding through lobbying at the Legislature. "We're also trying to educate the governor's office so

Schools without the arts might be educating students, but they're preventing them from expressing themselves, says Deborah Prieskop, whose music classes at J.W. Fair Middle School in San Jose have been cut back to one period a day.

Stories by Sherry Posnick-Goodwin
Photos by Scott Buschman

he can see why arts education is important in California. It fits right into his message of trying to build a healthy California. There are job opportunities that are being filled by people from out of state — and out of the country — because we aren't educating students to hold these jobs. Eliminating funding for the arts will have an economic impact on this state."

"It's because of the arts that Gov. Schwarzenegger is rich and popular as an action hero," observes Stockton music teacher Arthur Coleman Jr., whose budget was cut in half this year. "The fact that he's not trying to protect the arts is a strange dichotomy. It's very ironic. I would love to challenge him to 'give back' to the source that gave so much to him and made him what he is."

In addition to eliminating all funding specifically for the arts, the governor has broken his promise to fully fund Proposition 98. When cuts have to be made, arts education is often the first program to be axed.

"I'm definitely on the chopping block," says Peggy DePue, who teaches painting, drawing and sculpting to middle school students at Georgetown School in the Sierra foothills. A member of the Black Oak Mine Teachers Association, she struggles every year to save the program. "I think that arts programs are targeted first when cuts are made because a lot of people think the arts are fluff."

"I've been teaching drama for 17 years, and it's been harder and harder to get the materials we need," says Glendale High School drama teacher Mack Dugger, a member of the Glendale Teachers Association. "In my drama classes, the kids raise money for lighting, lamps, furnishing the stage and even putting carpet in the room. My kids painted this room and we maintain it the best we can. We are more than doing our part. But the state needs to do its part and fund Prop. 98."

"Although it has been 25 years since the passage of Proposition 13, which cut funding for the state's public schools and virtually eliminated arts programs, schools are still struggling to find a place in their budgets for the arts," reports the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "There is nothing uniform in the way California public schools fund arts programs. Some schools and districts with subsidies form nonprofit arts organizations. Other schools rely on active parents' groups. Still others have no budget and count on classroom teachers to incorporate art into the curriculum."

Funding for school K-12 arts programs is



mostly under local control, according to Schell at CAAE. "Some districts, most notably Los Angeles Unified, have committed to a 10-year plan and have invested millions of dollars on an annual basis for arts education."

This kind of commitment is the exception rather than the rule, notes Schell. It's more common for teachers and administrators to become "adept at filling the funding gap through a range

of 'soft money' solutions," like applying for grants, some as large as \$1 million. There are more than 400 local education foundations in California that dedicate the proceeds from annual fundraising campaigns to the visual and performing arts. "It is not unusual to find a school arts program that is totally funded by the local PTA from the proceeds of bake sales, jog-a-thons and other community events."



It took \$8,000 worth of cookies for Stockton dance students to participate in last year's regional competition, says Ana Frenes (left).

In some communities, parcel taxes provide the sole funding for arts education. In Brisbane, near San Francisco, voters recently renewed a parcel tax that allows the district to keep art and music in the elementary and middle schools. Less lucky were students in Ojai, where voters rejected a proposed parcel tax to keep music in the schools, along with other endangered programs.

In low socioeconomic communities where parental support can't foot the bills either through a parcel tax or donations, teachers raise funds to preserve their program. Some describe this double duty as two full-time jobs.

"We have sold thousands of dollars worth of cookies and other things," says Stockton band teacher Coleman. "I still have two bus bills from last year that haven't been paid. I have an out-

standing bill at the local music store that does my repairs. I'm asking my Booster Club parents to help pay for these things, but the district should pay for them, too."

"This year I received \$1,500 from the district for the entire year," says Stockton dance teacher Ana Frenes. "That was enough for one bus trip to Hayward to attend a regional dance festival." Last year it took about \$8,000 worth of cookies to make it possible for students to compete.

Frenes, who teaches five dance classes a day and sponsors the school's Student Activities Dance Club, includes lessons on finances in her curriculum. "One of the things I emphasize in the dance club is that this is a business and they need to be a part of it. Students need to solicit donations in the community, write letters to the newspaper and get involved in publicity. I tell them they have to make sacrifices and write letters of gratitude to those who have contributed. I let them know that money is never just handed to them and they need to be aware of the financial situation we are in."

You wouldn't know it by the state of school funding, but California's State Board of Education adopted visual and performing arts content standards in 2001, describing what every student should know and be able to do in the visual and performing arts (pre-K-12). A newly revised "Visual and Performing Arts Framework for California Public Schools (K-12)," published in 2004, incorporates and identifies key standards in each discipline. Arts education is also part of the state's Master Plan.

The University of California and California State University systems have instituted new policies officially including the arts as a requirement for entrance. By 2006, applicants must have completed a single course in dance, music, theater or the visual arts in a yearlong sequence. According to CAAE, this requirement may be the only thing keeping arts programs alive and "relatively stable" at the high school level, even though most remain underfunded.

Unfortunately, feeder programs at elementary and middle schools are drying up. High school programs will soon find fewer students entering with training in the arts, especially in low socioeconomic areas where students may not have access to private lessons.

"When I retire, I won't be replaced," says Ricki Pedersen, the last full-time music teacher in Chula Vista's regular elementary schools. In a manner typical of many school districts, "the others gradually retired one by one and were

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It's only rock 'n' roll, but they like it

The blonde wearing dark eyeliner, a miniskirt, over-the-knee socks, a studded black leather belt and a pearl necklace has the bored, eye-rolling demeanor any rock 'n' roll diva might display backstage. In this case, though, there is no stage — only a classroom.

Many of the students milling about have either long hair or spiked hairdos and the requisite skulls on their T-shirts. A girl walks in, tears streaming down her face, wipes her eyes and joins other students at the microphone.

“Okay, let’s get focused,” says teacher Owen Jackman. “We have a gig on Friday.”

The 16 Leonardo da Vinci School students assume their positions and upon hearing “1-2-3-4” abruptly scream “Hey!” and the chaotic scene transforms into a driving rendition of the song “What I Like About You,” recorded by the Romantics. In addition to five vocalists, students play an assortment of instruments including drums, tambourines, bongo drums, electric guitars, bass and keyboard.

The students of the K-8 magnet school sound surprisingly good. The vocalists sing in

harmony and shout “Hey!” like they mean it. The drummer is substituting for another drummer, but handles the job quite ably. The guitarists deliver some nice licks, too.

After the song, the students look at each other and smile. The vocalist who had tears streaming down her face a few minutes ago manages a faint smile at her classmates.

As the Stones say, “It’s only rock ‘n’ roll, but they *like* it!”

The Leonardo da Vinci Blues Band, as they are called, is Sacramento City Unified’s very own version of *School of Rock*. In the hit movie



In the band, you can't tell which students are special ed, say Steve Boettner and Owen Jackman. Here Boettner checks the sound for Maddy Hinrichsen and Samantha Nakagaki. Musicians include (clockwise from top right) Jessie Taylor, Shane Raj, Marlin Jones and Miles Tarr-Raines.



of that name, a down-and-out rock 'n' roller is cast out of his band. Broke and on the verge of eviction, he impersonates his roommate, takes a job as a substitute teacher and teaches his students rock 'n' roll when they get bored with all-day recess. Assigned to be either vocalists or musicians, the students eventually learn how to play music and even gel as a band.

"We're exactly like *School of Rock*," says Jackman, a member of the Sacramento City Teachers Association (SCTA). "One of my students actually said, 'They're copying us.' The only difference is, we have fully credentialed teachers who teach real stuff."

Jackman, who plays the bass, teaches special education. Steve Boettner, who's a guitarist, drummer and keyboardist, teaches general education language arts and a music elective. Ned Hammad, a professional musician, works with the school through the artist-in-residence program. Their rock band, Ed Code and the Violators, performs on request at faculty parties and the parent-teacher talent show.

The rock band class at Leonardo da Vinci is part of the Very Special Arts (VSA) program, which provides arts access for students with disabilities and for mainstream students.

"One of the beauties of this thing is that if you take a look at the band, you can't tell who's in special ed and who's in general ed," says Jackman. "You don't get many opportunities to integrate the kids like this. These are definitely kids who wouldn't be hanging around together if not for this class."



Last year, when the best guitarist and bass player were special education students of his, “other students began to see them in a different light.”

The program “brings students together unlike any program I’ve ever seen,” says Jackman. “It’s the most fun I’ve had in my teaching career.”

Several of his special education students have told him they’d never been on the receiving end of applause before. One student, who’s missing an ear, isn’t missing a beat when it comes to performing.

“I think this class is what keeps many kids coming to school,” says Boettner. “I’ve had much more success dealing with some of these kids in Rock Band than in regular class. It helps build teacher-student relationships in a different way. We learn about the basics of music, showmanship, performance and working together. The kids are really excited about it.”

Students are encouraged to try out all the instruments before they make a final decision on what they want to play. “I never played guitar before, but they said that I could,” says eighth-grader Jesse Taylor. “I came in at lunchtime and Mr. Boettner helped me to learn chords and songs. It’s a lot of fun, although performing is even more fun. It’s a great feeling.”

“I find this class fun and interesting,” says substitute drummer Miles Tarr-Raines. “But I think I’m going to stick with the guitar.”

While the teacher in *School of Rock* had to hide what he was doing through elaborate deceptions, even soundproofing the room, the band at Leonardo da Vinci is officially sanctioned by the principal and parents. When Jackman and Boettner first approached the principal about starting the class, they expected to hear it would only be allowed after school or at lunchtime. When she said it could be a twice-weekly elective, they were pleasantly surprised. The Parent-Teacher Association is reimbursing the teachers for the musical instruments, which they purchased out of pocket.

This year, the band has played Sacramento-area gigs at Dimple Records, Tower Records and the Very Special Arts Festival.

“Like most schools, we are facing budget cutbacks,” says Jackman. “But we are keeping our music here at Leonardo da Vinci. We are fighting to keep music here because it’s so important.”

“This is fun, and it lets something inside of you come out,” says seventh-grader and percussionist Marlin Jones. He believes the school definitely made the right choice. “Music is good for your life.”



Is it curtains for the arts?

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not replaced.”

“Elementary programs in the arts continue to be fragile and inconsistent — in funding, in access for all students, in addressing all arts disciplines and in delivery by credentialed teachers,” notes a CAAE report. “Visual and performing arts programs in California public schools are offered to some of the students, some of the time, in some of the arts disciplines, by a sometimes credentialed and qualified faculty, in somewhat adequate facilities — hardly the comprehensive approach one would expect in a ‘core’ subject area.”

Although NCLB defines the arts as a core subject, the testing frenzy surrounding NCLB

requirements — and possible sanctions including school closure or conversion to a charter school — have had a devastating effect on arts education. Resources are now allocated to subjects reflected on state standardized tests — language arts and math — at the expense of the arts.

“Perhaps they thought they were helping when they passed this legislation,” says Prieskop in San Jose. “Maybe the legislators thought that since they had had children in the schools, they knew all about schools. But No Child Left Behind is destroying the music programs here and in other schools.”

“The way things are going, we’re at risk of turning out students who just know how to take tests,” says CAAE’s Schell. Without the arts, students will lose the ability to express themselves. “Students won’t understand nuance, creative problem solving, working thematically across disciplines and working collaboratively. That’s



It's difficult to fit the arts in with all the requirements, even at the kindergarten level, says Emily Sosa at Monroe Elementary in Stockton.

what we are in danger of losing here in California.”

Next year, Prieskop says, many English language learners and remedial students at her school will be assigned three periods of language arts, two periods of math and one period of PE each day. “There will be no social studies, no science and no exploratory electives like music. The poor babies. They are taking away all the things they enjoy in school. It seems very harsh.”

The magnet arts middle school in Stockton where Coleman has taught marching band, jazz band and concert band for the past 12 years will be restructured as part of a districtwide plan to improve test scores. Middle schools are being merged with elementary schools in hopes that test scores in grades 6-8 will go up in a K-8 setting.

Coleman is transferring to the high school because he fears that the restructuring plan will

eliminate middle school bands and disperse the talent pool of students over a wide area. Phasing out feeder programs in the lower grades is likely to mean the quality of Stockton's high school programs will suffer and students will arrive without musical training.

Coleman is sad to see the exemplary music program he helped to develop go by the wayside. “It gave the kids something to aspire to, and gave the high school program some kids to pull from. My kids had to have a GPA of 3.0 to be in the band. Every time their grades would slip, they'd come see me to figure out how to improve. Now, I worry that we are not focusing on what's important. In the midst of our desperation to raise test scores, sometimes we forget about the kids. Yesterday, three kids came up to me and said they can't take music next year because they are taking two English classes and have no room for electives. That hurts me deep down inside.”

Gwyn Pellegrini was a music teacher in Rio Lindo until the district eliminated music for elementary school children last year. Now a language arts resource specialist, she has been asked to provide professional development for fellow teachers on ways to incorporate music into the curriculum. “The district has music

books and musical instruments that cost thousands and thousands of dollars, but they are locked away in closets. I felt that this was tragic, and thought maybe classroom teachers with a talent or love of music could share these things with their students if I gave them a few tools.”

While some teachers have been able to incorporate her ideas, others feel too overwhelmed by testing. “Because of all of the demands of standards and accountability, some classroom teachers thought it was just one more thing to do.” Students constantly run up to her on the playground and ask her why they can't come to her music classes anymore. “It breaks my heart that we can't give music to all children,” she says.

Even in preschool and kindergarten, testing pressure has meant a reduction in arts education. “It's very difficult to fit art and music in,” says Emily Sosa, who teaches all-day kindergarten at James Monroe Elementary School in Stockton. “We have kindergarten standards. They have to know how to read and write before they leave kindergarten. They have to know how to add and subtract, make comparisons, understand simple graphing and do some measurements. This year we have added on science standards and social studies standards. I have to sacrifice two to three weeks just for testing.”

She says it's too bad there is so little time for the arts, which allow kids to express themselves individually in a creative way. “We are trying to hang on to that, but we can't spend too much time because the children need to read and write in English, and 85 percent of my children don't speak English.”

“We are doing federally mandated testing for 4-year-olds, which President Bush and his friends from Texas have pushed on us,” says preschool teacher Simone Zulu, president of the Palmdale Elementary Teachers Association. “Preschool has become more academic for kids who are not ready for academics, and children are being labeled as soon as they walk in the door.”

When very young children are denied art and music, it's bad for their mental development, even if they can't speak English. “I speak from personal experience because I came here at age 13 from Africa and didn't speak a word of English,” says Zulu. “I listened to music all the time and repeated words to the songs, and it helped me learn the language.”

“The arts are important,” she adds. “If you put your hand on your heart, you will find that even your heart beats to music. They can never take that away from students.”



In defense of the arts: They're not just a frill

Like many other art and music teachers, Arthur Coleman Jr. is constantly justifying the existence of his program. His students, however, don't need convincing.

Their passion is evident not only while the Hamilton Middle School jazz band is performing, but also afterward when the eighth-graders talk about what the arts mean to them. They may be young, but they are able to describe something that is larger than the band or the sum of its parts. Music, they say, gives their lives meaning and excitement. It also gives them a sense of harmony and belonging in the universe.

"This program is important to us," says La Princess Chappell. "It allows us to express how we feel through music. It challenges us to learn new things."

"People like Mr. Coleman *rock!*" says Aaron Roider. "People like Mr. Coleman bring the whole world to us."

"It's music, but it's more than music," says Merissa Magdael-Lauron. "He pushes us past our limits. He makes us want to learn more. He makes us want to come to school and excel."

One of California's Teachers of the Year last year and a member of the Stockton Teachers Association, Coleman says most of the students in the jazz and marching bands are minority students from disadvantaged families, reflective of the Stockton district as a whole. While in most cases they haven't had access to the after-school enrichment programs or private music lessons available to students in more affluent areas, they are showing plenty of talent that deserves nurturing.

The same is true at Franklin High School in Stockton, where Ana Frenes' Student Activities Dance Club keeps students focused on their goals and helps them resist the temptation to get into trouble after school.

A physical education teacher whose specialty is dance, Frenes is constantly defending arts education as a necessity, not a frill. "The arts are a valid part of education," she says. "They set up a learning experience that kids can't get anywhere else. Kids learn to work in cooperative



groups and be creative. They learn discipline from rehearsals that can be painful. It's definitely not a frill."

When cutbacks occur, they have a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged students. "They are hit the hardest — and it's the worst population to hit."

If schools want to raise academic achievement, they should increase funding for the arts, not cut it back, says band teacher Fred Lee at Mar Vista Middle School in San Diego. "If they beefed up existing programs and got more kids involved, you'd see a huge difference in the success rate in language arts and mathematics."

"Of course, they shouldn't do it just to raise test scores," adds Lee, a member of the Sweetwater Education Association. "There is more to life than just getting high scores."

As arts education withers and dies, so does student motivation and interest in school. "It's turning kids off to school," he says. "And it's turning off teachers, too. Unfortunately, it's forcing a lot of really good educators to look twice at their careers and make some hard decisions."

The big question, he says, is, "If we give up arts education, what will the cost be? Over time, people will see the negative impact it's going to

have on schools, students and the community. And they will be wondering why they ever did it in the first place."

"Kids need music because it gives them a connection to school and to each other," says CTA Board member Paula Caplinger, a music teacher at Will C. Wood Middle School in Sacramento for the last 30 years.

"It doesn't matter whether you are limited English proficient, gifted, in special education or a so-called middle-of-the-road student. I once had a student who couldn't read or write, but he could play anything on the drum that you asked for."

Another of her students made All-City Band with her trumpet even though she was autistic. Yet another student lost the use of the right side of his body, and although he could no longer march with the band, he became the band captain and played baritone horn in concerts.

"Everyone can do something to feel good about themselves," says Caplinger. "Everyone has a strength and everyone can contribute."

"Kids love the arts because it offers them a different way of expressing themselves," says Martha Gutierrez, who teaches dance, music and theater for third-graders at Riverside's

Teachers like Arthur Coleman Jr. (facing page) make students want to learn and push them past what they think are their limits, says trombonist Merissa Magdael-Lauron (above).

Monroe Elementary. "It's helpful to English language learners, because so much vocabulary is learned during our dance period — like shapes, lines and how the body moves. It's a motivator, it's fun and it's good exercise. And it helps them to become a little more well-rounded."

Gutierrez, a first-year teacher and a member of the Riverside City Teachers Association, wishes she could work with each group of students more than just once a week. "I can't go into depth in such a short amount of time, but at least the seeds have been planted."

"The arts are important because they teach kids problem-solving, risk-taking and how to have respect for others," says Peggy DePue, a middle school teacher in Georgetown and a member of the Black Oak Mine Teachers Association. "It gives them focus and discipline, teaches them how to persevere and stresses the importance of following through. But most of

Research validates the role of the arts

Numerous studies document the ways in which the arts boost student achievement:

■ Taking piano lessons improves specific math skills in elementary school children, according to a study by UC Irvine researchers. Piano instruction is believed to enhance the brain's "hard-wiring" for temporal reasoning — the ability to visualize and transform objects in space and time. Music specifically helps with fractions and proportional math.

■ Regardless of socioeconomic background, students who make music get higher marks in standardized tests than those who had no music involvement, according to a UCLA study.

■ According to the College Board, SAT scores in 2001 were 57 points higher on the verbal portion and 41 points higher on the math portion for students who studied the arts for more than four years.

■ Middle and high school students who participate in instrumental music programs score significantly higher in standardized tests, according to university studies in Georgia and Texas.

■ The arts connect students to themselves and to one another, transform the environment for learning, provide new challenges for students already considered successful and reach students who are not otherwise being reached, according to researchers from Harvard, Stanford and UCLA. They also reinforce positive social behavior by promoting confidence, self-control and teamwork.

■ Music training helps underachievers, according to Rhode Island researchers, and motivates them to go to school.

■ Students who participate in school band or orchestra have the lowest levels of current and lifelong use of alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs among any group in society, reports the Texas Commission on Drug and Alcohol Abuse.

■ Certain forms of arts instruction enhance basic reading instruction aimed at helping children "break the phonetic code" that unlocks written language.

■ *Business Week* reports that the nation's top business executives agree that arts education programs can help repair weaknesses in education and better prepare workers for the future.



A lot of Glendale's success with making the arts a priority comes from promoting the programs in the community and applying for grants, say teachers like Mark Dugger (facing page, top) and Grace Sheldon-Williams (right).

which means they would have to hire more teachers. Administration says they can't *afford* to cut it."

The arts are a "vehicle to a child's spirit," says Linda Chittle, a visual arts teacher at Newark Memorial High School and a Newark Teachers Association member. "Whether they are innately talented or not, it gives them a chance to discover their true selves and take down their defenses. It's a connection that no other discipline can really touch upon."

She has students who have never had success anywhere else in life, "and suddenly they see the tangible results of their own work and learn to trust in themselves. They channel that into academic areas, too."

Drama is good for the soul because it gives students a "natural high" that they won't get from drugs or alcohol, says Carol Mathews, a drama teacher at Mira Costa High School in Manhattan Beach. "There's nothing like performing in front of an audience. Students receive instant gratification and confidence. They can walk a mile in somebody else's shoes."

Unfortunately, says the incoming Manhattan Beach Unified Teachers Association president, pressure is sometimes put on students to take other classes besides drama so they can get into a top college. In her opinion, drama has plenty of "real life" value. "It prepares students to make presentations in front of an audience, and it can help them make a good first impression when they interview for jobs."

Ricki Pedersen is the last full-time music teacher in the Chula Vista elementary schools. The Chula Vista Educators Association member has already been told that she won't be replaced when she retires.

The day the music dies will be a "disaster" for children, she believes. "The biggest loss won't be to this generation," she says. It will be to future generations who won't understand the role of the arts in their lives.

"We are going to lose this knowledge if we don't change. It's already happening little by little. And once something is gone, the sad thing is that you don't know what you've lost."

all, it teaches the importance of creative expression. How many companies are looking for a cookie-cutter person? Most want creative people who can think outside the box."

"It's one of those things that kids are really excited about doing," says NEA Board member Anthony Parreira, who's taught band at Los Banos Junior High School for 28 years. "Lots of kids say that they come to school because they can be in the band."

He considers himself lucky to live in a community that's supportive of the arts. Because Los Banos is an extremely fast-growing community, it's been able to expand its program while surrounding districts are facing cutbacks.

Another high-growth district that's expanding its visual and performing arts offerings is Madera Unified. "We have a superintendent who

strongly believes that test scores are increased by music instruction," says Dan Okamura, who teaches music at the middle school and two K-8 sites. "Last year all of the schools scored well, and I'd like to think that music played a part in that."

But Okamura, a member of the Madera Unified Teachers Association, believes that the benefits of the arts extend beyond testing. The arts give "students a positive in their day that they might otherwise not have." Some recent graduates "told me that without music, they would have dropped out a long time ago."

While other school districts are cutting back on the arts to save money, Madera's music program is viewed as a money saver. The high school band has 250 students taught by two teachers. "Without music, they would have to find other classes for them at a ratio of 30 or 40 to one,



At Glendale High School the arts are essential to the learning experience

It's just hours before Open House at Glendale High School, a time when most teachers and many students would be frazzled and perhaps on the verge of hysteria. But when life is a stage every day, Open House is no big deal.

In the school's Visual and Performing Arts Department, students add finishing touches to paintings soon to be displayed in a student gallery. Vases are being thrown on pottery wheels in the crafts room. Musical compositions are being written on computers. The sound of a cappella voices in rehearsal gives way to rich, other-worldly melodies emanating from the bell choir, then hot jazz riffs from

another rehearsal area. In an improv theater class, drama students experiment with their emotions. Outside in the quad, sketch artists eye their surroundings pensively.

In an age when the arts are dying on the vine, when teachers have to plead for every penny and when parents have to pass parcel taxes or bond measures so their children can sing, dance, paint and perform, Glendale High has an embarrassment of riches.

There are 22 performing arts classes in the areas of dance, music and theater, and 33 visual arts classes, covering everything from art history and design to applied arts like painting,





ceramics, sculpture, jewelry design and photography. Glendale High is one of the few schools in the state with a three-year technical theater program. And, while many high schools offer the minimum necessary to meet college and university visual and performing arts (VAPA) requirements, Glendale goes above and beyond.

Art, it seems, is everywhere. More than half of the school's 3,400 students are enrolled in arts courses.

The school was one of five recognized by the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education, winning the Creative Ticket National School of Distinction Award last year "for doing an outstanding job of making the arts an essential part of the education for their students."

Three years ago the Los Angeles County Music Center awarded the school a BRAVO Award for excellence in arts education.

How can the school offer such a menu of arts programs in these challenging economic times?

It's not because it's a rich school or because parents are spending all their time raising funds. In fact, it's a Title I school with half its students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches and a third classified as English language learners.

The answer is that the visual and performing arts are a priority at Glendale. And when something is a priority, people find a way to make it happen.

Arts education thrives because it is sup-

ported by all of the school's stakeholders: Visual and performing arts teachers, many of whom have been teaching there for more than 15 years, are by nature dedicated to keeping the programs going and maintaining sequential arts learning for all students.

District support is also key. When administrators see programs as valuable, they provide more than lip service to keeping them around.

The students, 53 percent of whom are Armenian, come from families that strongly support the arts.

And the school has strong community ties, including ongoing relationships with Disney Imagineering and the Pasadena Art Center of Design. A mentoring program brings art center students into the classroom as assistants and role models. And the high school's Center for the Arts and Arts Technology programs provide learning opportunities for those who plan to complete at least three years of arts coursework.

Still, keeping the programs going is not without challenges, say members of the Glendale Teachers Association. The school is not immune to cutbacks. Teachers must raise funds and charge lab fees. The budget for John Phan's Art I and II classes is exactly what it was in 1985, the year he graduated from Glendale High. Amy Rangel, who teaches the school's symphony orchestra, concert band, advanced strings and jazz band classes, says her students sell lots of candy bars for "extras" like the cost of traveling to competitions.

Many programs receive grants that help keep classes functioning. Teachers feel lucky to have immigrant students who arrive with an appreciation of the arts and often with experience in playing a musical instrument.

"A lot of our success here is because we get out and promote the program in the community," says Grace Sheldon-Williams, who teaches choral classes, a cappella classes and bell choir. "We are also a strong team and inspire one another."

"We work well as a department and meet together to focus on the standards," says Jo Butcher, who teaches painting, drawing and sculpture. "We have three-year sequential courses that meet A-G requirements [for admission to UC and CSU]. We collaborate on meeting the standards and also work as a team. For example, our music and technology class uses drums made in ceramics classes. The CD covers for musical compositions are designed by students in art and drawing classes. We



combine the drama department and the full orchestra for performances such as *Les Misérables*.”

It helps that most teachers are artists in their own right, says Rangel, who plays horn with the school’s jazz band. “All of us practice our discipline outside of school,” and that helps to strengthen support for the programs.

While arts education helps boost academic achievement — Glendale ranks 7 out of 10 on the Academic Performance Index and a 9 when compared to schools with similar demographics — that’s not the only goal, say teachers. Arts education provides students with an outlet, builds self confidence and discipline, and offers a means for self-expression.

“In other core subjects, self-expression is limited,” explains Phan. “It’s like you push a button and students give the right answer. But in art class, there’s not a rigid structure where everyone is supposed to have the same answer. Here, students can be creative. They can learn how to interact with others. They have the freedom to go out and walk around and look at things, just

The difference between the arts and academics is there are no rigid answers, says visual arts teacher John Phan (facing page). Learning real-world skills as they sketch outdoors are Arpi Nazaryan and Anni Issagoolian.

like in the real world.”

Bill Byrnes’ music and technology class gives students an appreciation for both high-tech and low-tech approaches to music. They can play Udu drums crafted in ceramics class and kalimbas made from Popsicle sticks that buzz and twang, or write complex musical compositions on computers. One of his students, freshman Matthew Chavez, varied the tempo from 70 to 200 to 150 beats per minute in a composition he named “Crazy.”

The technical theater class provides instruction in lighting, sound and acoustics, rigging, set construction and stage management. The three-year, sequential program meets A-G college requirements and qualifies students for

behind-the-scenes jobs in the entertainment industry after graduation.

In the gallery space, Butcher points to a few magnificent paintings and explains that the artist is a special education student. At other schools, this student might be assigned three remedial classes of English and two remedial classes of math each day and have no time left for art. “If that were to happen, the student would lose his soul.”

Everyone, she says, has some talent to be nurtured.

Some of the symphony orchestra, concert band and jazz band students have a difficult time “fitting in” elsewhere on the campus, but find acceptance in the music room. “With so many students here, they can find a place where they belong,” says Rangel. “It’s a home for people who need a home. We’re like a family.”

“To get rid of the arts because of budget constraints would be silly,” says senior Sam Smith. “The arts are an essential part of a person’s development.”