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### Arts are cornerstone of education

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ACENTRAL PILLAR of my tenure as superintendent of Alameda County Schools remains the conviction that arts education must be restored as a regular part of the public school curriculum. I am deeply heartened that the New Year brings with it new state funding for arts education in California. Proposed by Gov. Schwarzenegger and approved by the state legislature, California schools will receive \$105 million in ongoing funding for arts education in addition to a one-time allocation of \$500 million for arts and PE equipment.

The California Department of Education recently announced dollar amounts for school districts throughout the state. Of the \$105 million, Alameda County schools will receive more than \$3.5 million this year; dispersal begins this month and, thanks to seven years of planning and preparation, we will make dynamic use of the funds immediately to hire arts teachers and provide professional development for generalist teachers so they can teach and integrate the arts with other content areas to deepen and enrich learning.

This unprecedented commitment by the governor and Legislature represents an historic moment, one made possible by the unrelenting collaborative advocacy of arts education supporters throughout California.

At the Alameda County Office of Education we believe it will take a multitude of players, with a singleness of purpose, over a sustained period of time to achieve our goal of quality learning for every child in every school, every

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day. Our Alliance for Arts Learning Leadership (Alliance for ALL), a group comprising district superintendents, teachers, principals, arts groups, artists, business leaders and parents, under the umbrella of the Alameda County Office of Education, coalesces around a simple message: "Art IS Education!"

Thanks to the work of the Alliance for all these past seven years, many of our schools and school districts have created arts learning site plans and already are using the arts to improve the educational experience. With this new funding, many more students will begin to experience a high quality education by learning in, through and about the arts.

Having district and school site plans in place to address gaps in arts learning is just one part of the equation. There is a long-term need for teachers who can successfully integrate the arts into their teaching.

Through partnerships with local universities and community based arts organizations, we are beginning to address the professional learning needs of teachers

In the words of Eliot Eisner, author of *The Arts and The Development of Mind*, "To neglect the contribution of the arts in education, either through inadequate time, resources or poorly trained teachers is to deny children access to one of the most stunning aspects of their culture and one of the most potent means for developing their minds."

The experiential nature of the arts allows students to make their own meaning through encounters with other disciplines, and the world. We no longer live in a world where there is a finite canon of knowledge that will prepare young people for citizenship, career and lifelong satisfaction.

Instead, we are handing our next generation a world of complex and serious problems. As policy makers, educators and parents, we owe it to our children to assure they have the opportunities to develop their minds, to learn to think and to imagine, so that they can discover solutions we do not currently have.

As I begin a new four-year term, I am gratified to see the critical goal of restoring arts to the standard curriculum being realized, not just in Alameda County, but in school districts throughout California.

Sheila Jordan is superintendent of Alameda County Schools.

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