

## The Paintbrush: As Mighty As The Textbook.

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During distance learning, two of my grandparents passed away within a week. As a result, I fell into a depression that felt never-ending. What got me out of that dark state of mind was an application for the California State Summer School For The Arts (CSSSA). The program director, Matthew Gallagher gave a presentation about the prestigious program. At that moment, passion and excitement ran through my veins; I had so much to write about. For the first time in months, I was feeling creative. That same day I started the rigorous application. I kept up with my set deadlines and turned in the application three days early. I was accepted to the program that summer. During the program, I caught the attention of the writing department chair. At the end of the four-week course, I was chosen out of one hundred students to receive a scholarship.

Before this opportunity, college was never on my mind; however, I will be attending UCI this fall because of the arts and the scholarship I was awarded. Even the smallest space given to art in students' lives can have a monumental impact, I am proof of that.

Sitting and reflecting on my arts education, I realized how privileged I was to have it, especially since I had to leave my local district, Pomona Unified, to further my artistic

ambitions. I wondered about the passionate students who are still giving up time from their academics to create, and was determined to fight for their right to an equitable arts curriculum.

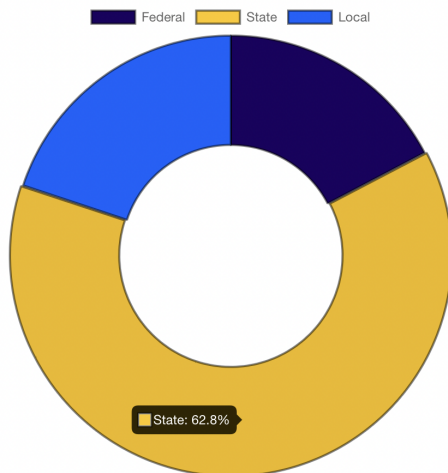
To begin this venture, I interviewed my middle school band director, Tim Kinney, who has taught at PUSD for over 25 years. During this interview, I learned Mr. Kinney, alone, is currently teaching over three hundred students across five schools this year. Although Mr. Kinney is an amazing instructor, students only receive thirty minutes of arts education a week. During my interview with Mr. Kinney, I was saddened by his answer when I asked him how he thought the art programs could be improved. He said not much, but he was grateful for the district's help, like buying a few instruments that can be lent to students. During my years with Mr. Kinney, I had to purchase or rent my instrument to learn how to play music.

There are academic benefits to arts education: data shows that students are three times more likely to attend school, five times less likely to drop out, and two times more likely to graduate high school (Americans for the Arts, NEA, 2012), despite this, some may argue that art is not as valuable as math, english, and science. A UCLA study shows that students with a "high arts involvement performed better on standardized achievement tests than students with low arts involvement" (National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2006). Yet California neglects the arts, "88% of schools are not offering mandated levels of arts instructions" (Create California, 2018).

When I entered the fourth grade, I was finally allowed to take instrumental music, the only art course offered at my K-8 school. We convened once a week for thirty minutes – if we were lucky because it was during our academic classes and on occasions teachers wouldn't allow us to attend. In those thirty minutes, I managed to fall in love with not just music, but the arts, its community, and the process of creating. At this young age, I was taught that the arts and academics are exclusive. Now, I know that the arts are academic." The term 'core academic subjects' means English, reading or language arts,

writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, and physical education, and any other subject as determined by the state.

Pomona Unified School District had a total revenue of \$433.3 million in the 2016-17 school year. 19.9% came from local sources, 62.8% from state sources, and 17.3% from federal sources.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, PUSD depends on the state of California for over 60% of the district's funding. This data, along with my interview with Mr. Kinney, revealed that the lack of art programs was not because the district didn't want to invest in them; but because my community simply could not afford them.

It is important to understand that all of California's schools severely lack arts education, however, in the article "Time to Fund Arts Education?" Carol Kosivar, former president of California's PTA states " participation in arts follows a familiar pattern: schools, where more families are poor, are far less likely to provide students with access to education in the arts" (Ed 100).

Looking at my local district – Pomona Unified, only **ONE-THIRD** of students are enrolled in arts curriculum (Art Eds Data Project). This is indicative of inequality amongst schools, especially when the poverty rate in Pomona is double that of neighboring cities. Almost accepting defeat, because as a 17 year-old, I can't ease Pomona's poverty levels, I saw a ray of hope when I learned through my internship with Create CA about the Arts Initiative.

Austin Beutner, former LA County Unified School District superintendent, has submitted this initiative to fight for equality in arts education across ALL schools in California. As he has visited the majority of schools in LAUSD, Beutner has witnessed the tremendous need for the arts.

This initiative will allocate 1% of California's already existing surplus funding for art programs— without raising taxes. These funds will be distributed to K-12 schools yearly and will keep schools accountable by requiring annual reports ensuring they are used for arts education – and hiring **certified** instructors. This initiative addresses the lack of arts education not just in the state, but in underfunded school districts. Written in the initiative, it clearly states that “ even more funding [will be given to] schools that serve children in low-income communities who lack access to arts and music education...” (ca.gov).

Support for the arts initiative has been phenomenal - the initiative will be on the ballot for the upcoming election happening in California on November 8, 2022.

Californians are ready for change. This fall, if this initiative passes, schools across the state will be given financing to offer quality art courses to ALL students. If you would like to support this initiative alongside award-winning actor John Lithgow and grammy winner Dr.Dre, pre-register to vote, visit [voteartsandminds.org](http://voteartsandminds.org) to sign the initiative, and stay updated on its journey to election night.

This November **you** will be able to invest in the future of students like me, students who live in low-income communities that have been historically marginalized in the state of California.

Now is the time for our state to honor our verbal commitment to equity in our schools through social-emotional learning, positive mental health practices, and take a large

step to make them a reality. VOTE YES to prepare students for success by kick-starting social mobility with a well-rounded and well-funded education.

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