

THE VALUE OF ART By Lisa Alexander

What do we value? As a species, we have created wondrous things: skyscrapers, iPods, satellites, the *Mona Lisa*, and countless other miraculous works of art and science. We have also created every problem that exists in our world today. Through shortsightedness, greed, and intolerance, we have designed overpopulation, poverty, pollution, depletion of natural resources, war, a tanking economy, and a government that spends 10,000 times more money on arms and armed forces than it does on educating its young.

If we had decided consciously what world to create together, would this be it? What are we creating today, and how will it look tomorrow? In this country we claim to value things such as freedom, fairness, intelligence, tolerance, and respect. The time has come for each of us to take action in a more global, conscious way with regard to these values.

Conscious action begins with whole education for our children. We must equip them to face the challenges they will inherit. Now, more than ever, our children need an education that includes more than just information. It must also provide the creative experience to sharpen the cognitive tools that can build new solutions. Every advance ever made by humanity, every problem ever solved, sprang from creative minds. And yet arts programs are being cut from public education almost universally. Can we really afford to eliminate creative training for our young people? To ignore it as though it was unimportant?

Higher brain function is facilitated not by particular centers in the brain, but by systems of interaction—like webs—among many areas. The ability to access many parts of the brain at once allows one to gather numerous bits of information and formulate something completely new. The arts help to build and strengthen these interconnecting pathways in our brains.

The correlation between arts education and SAT scores is well established: more arts exposure equals higher verbal *and* math test scores. Higher scores hold not only for standardized testing, but also in the scholastic areas of reading, English, history, citizenship, and geography. Students who play a musical instrument score up to 34% higher on tests that measure spatial and temporal ability. Studies show that within two to three years after arts programs are cut in schools, attendance and test scores go down; incidents of vandalism (crime) and disruption go up.

Some of the skills that are developed by arts education are:

- Abstract reasoning, which is vital in problem solving, forming theories and ideas, understanding subjects on a complex level, and thinking about and combining things symbolically (i.e. adding in your head rather than counting on your fingers)
- Discipline and focus
- Self confidence
- Spatial thinking, which is critical for learning in the areas of complex mathematics, science, and engineering
- Enhanced communication and expression

Arts education fosters original thinking—and healthy, adaptable, tolerant human beings. Imagine, for a moment, a world in which individuals and societies were able to:

- Creatively find peaceful resolutions for conflicts between individuals, groups, and countries.
- Design homes, buildings, transportation, and lifestyles that are sustainable and symbiotic with the planet (rather than parasitic and resource depleting).
- Create community, family, and individual health through fair trade, fair wages, fair prices, and universal access to excellent education and healthcare.
- Design ways to clean up and eliminate environmental toxins.

These are not outlandish ideas. They are real solutions to devastating problems. If we value these things, they are possible. They are simple ideas to be orchestrated and embraced by creative, well-educated minds. But well-educated minds need to be supported and nurtured.

In 2009, the U.S. Government spent roughly \$1,784,000,000 (that's Billion) per DAY on defense. On Education, for the entire YEAR: \$64,882,384 (that's million).

What DO we value?

Demand from your representatives that education be made a priority. That priority needs to be expressed through substantial financial support. Refuse to allow the arts to be cut from curricula; demand that arts programs be expanded and integrated with other subjects. Support your local school's arts department with money, supplies, and/or volunteer time. At home, expose your children to the arts through attending community classes, galleries, and live performance.

We *can* take conscious action that is aligned with our highest values. We *can* provide a better world for our children. The arts can help to make it happen. Imagine that. Create that. *Do* that.

Senators

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Simitian, S. Joseph	11 160 Town & Country Village (650) 688-6384 701 Ocean Street Room 318A Santa Cruz, CA 95060 (831) 425-0401	State Capitol Sacramento, CA 94248-0001 (916) 651-4011
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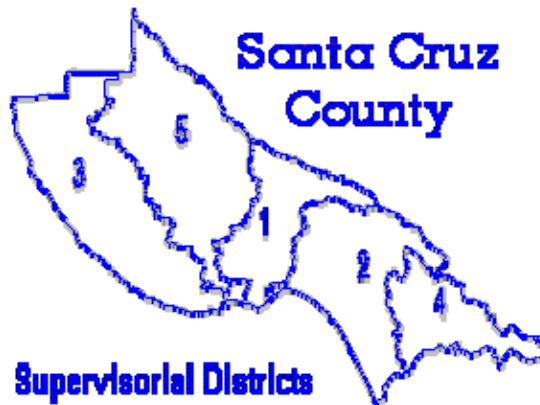
Assembly Members

Member	District Number and Office	Capitol Office
Monning, William W.	27 701 Ocean Street Room 318B Santa Cruz, CA 95060 (831) 425-1503 99 Pacific Street Suite 555D Monterey, CA 93940 (831) 649-2832 (831) 657-6315	State Capitol Room 6005 Sacramento, CA 94249-0027 (916) 319-2027

Contact Congressman Sam Farr:

http://www.farr.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=202

Local Representatives, Districts below.



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District 1 John Leopold E-Mail	District 2 Ellen Pirie E-Mail	District 3 Neal Coonerty E-Mail	District 4 Tony Campos E-Mail	District 5 Mark W.Stone E-Mail
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