



Needs of the Field to Ensure Access to an Arts Education

**Perspectives From County Offices of
Education, Districts, and Schools**

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Preface

In 2022, California voters passed Proposition 28 (Prop 28), the Arts and Music (AMS) Funding Guarantee and Accountability Act, which established annual funding (ranging from \$938 million to more than \$1 billion) for arts education for all public schools across the state. This first-of-its-kind legislation provides a permanent funding source dedicated to arts education for California's public school students. WestEd, in partnership with Create CA, received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and funding from the Perenchio Foundation to study the initial impact of these funds on the state's arts education landscape.

In spring 2025, WestEd surveyed staff from county offices of education (COEs), districts, and schools across the state to understand the initial impact of this funding. This brief focuses on what is needed to ensure students have access to arts education from the perspectives of COE, district, and school respondents.

Overview of Respondents and Data

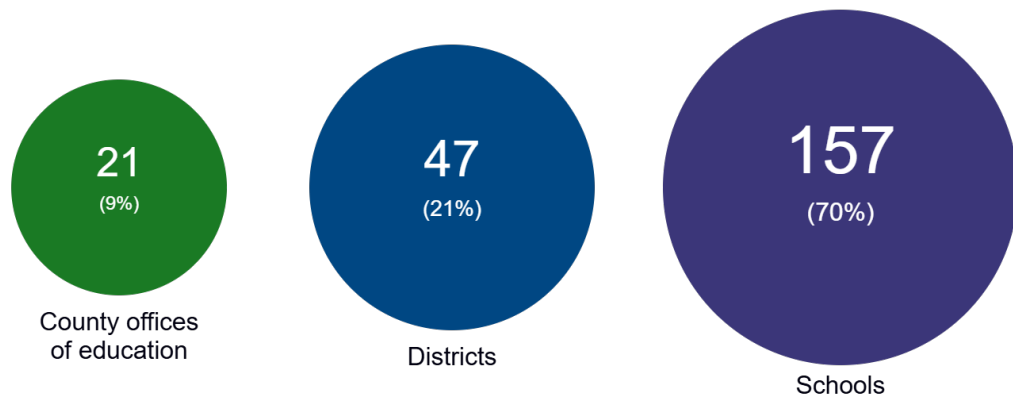
To ensure that the most valid data were used, respondents who answered less than 25% of the survey questions were removed from the analysis. Although 332 respondents began the survey, data from 225 (67%) were included in the analysis. Of these respondents, 21 represented COEs, 47 represented districts, and 157 represented schools (Figure 1). The percentage of respondents removed for not meeting the 25% threshold was similar across all three groups.

All respondents were asked to rate the extent to which each item was needed to ensure all students had access to arts education, regardless of the current availability of that item in their county, school, or district. Responses were on a 5-point scale from 1 = not at all needed to 5 = extensively needed. Thus, higher rated items were considered the components needed to ensure equitable access to an arts education for all students. Participants were also able to answer open-



response questions so that they could offer comments and suggestions for increasing access to arts education.

Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents



Needs of the Field

Across respondent groups, access to arts education was viewed as dependent on both infrastructure and capacity-building supports. Respondents emphasized the need for facilities, supplies, professional development (PD), leadership structures, and long-term planning to fully realize the promise of Prop 28 AMS funding.

Key Takeaways

- The highest rated items across groups were improved facilities and dedicated arts spaces, PD for arts teachers, availability of supplies and materials, a greater emphasis on the value of arts education, and a strategic arts education plan, although responses varied greatly by county, district, and school respondents.



- At the county level, the greatest identified needs were arts integration training for general education (GenEd) teachers, new or expanded partnerships with local arts organizations, simplified paths to a teaching credential, improved recruitment efforts for arts educators, and improved facilities and dedicated arts spaces.
- At the district level, the greatest identified needs were improved facilities and dedicated arts spaces, PD for arts teachers, availability of arts supplies and materials, a greater emphasis on the value of arts education, and improved recruitment efforts for arts educators.
- At the school level, the greatest identified needs were a comprehensive strategic plan for arts education, availability of supplies and materials, more information about Prop 28 AMS and the use of its funds, PD for arts teachers, and improved facilities and dedicated arts spaces.

Table 1. Average Rating by Respondent Group

Need	Counties	Districts	Schools	Overall
Improved facilities and dedicated spaces	3.32	4.10	3.83	3.75
PD for arts teachers	3.11	3.90	3.83	3.61
Availability of supplies and instruments	3.05	3.77	3.91	3.58
Emphasis on the value of arts education	3.26	3.59	3.80	3.55
Strategic plan for arts education	3.21	3.34	3.93	3.50
Designated visual and performing arts (VAPA) coordinator	3.26	3.51	3.66	3.48
Information about Prop 28 use of funds	3.05	3.45	3.85	3.45
Arts integration PD for GenEd teachers	3.79	3.44	3.02	3.42



Need	Counties	Districts	Schools	Overall
Partnerships with local arts organizations	3.37	3.35	3.29	3.34
Improved arts educator recruitment	3.32	3.59	3.01	3.31
Free database of local arts providers	3.26	3.31	3.26	3.28
Arts educator learning communities	3.05	3.41	3.36	3.28
Availability of an arts curriculum	3.21	3.44	2.92	3.19
Better paths to a teaching credential	3.33	3.49	2.54	3.12
Community support for the arts	2.68	3.28	3.36	3.11
Changes in arts hiring practices	2.68	3.10	2.75	2.84

Note. Responses were on a 5-point scale from 1 = not at all a challenge to 5 = an insurmountable challenge.

- The highest rated item for urban respondents was the need for improved facilities and dedicated spaces. For suburban respondents, it was the availability of arts supplies and instruments, and for rural and remote respondents it was a strategic arts education plan.

Table 2. Average Rating by Urbanicity

Need	Urban	Suburban	Rural/ remote
Improved facilities and dedicated spaces	4.05	3.92	3.56
PD for arts teachers	3.92	3.83	3.56
Availability of supplies and instruments	3.97	3.94	3.40
Emphasis on the value of arts education	3.62	3.89	3.39
Strategic arts education plan	3.57	3.87	3.61



Need	Urban	Suburban	Rural/ remote
Designated VAPA coordinator	3.41	3.86	3.19
Information about Prop 28 use of funds	3.97	3.73	3.41
Arts integration PD for GenEd teachers	3.16	3.10	3.47
Partnerships with local arts organizations	3.37	3.27	3.43
Improved arts educator recruitment	3.42	3.01	3.30
Free database of local arts providers	3.29	3.20	3.47
Arts educator learning communities	3.35	3.43	3.21
Availability of an arts curriculum	3.08	2.95	3.30
Better paths to a teaching credential	3.11	2.57	3.17
Community support for the arts	3.24	3.39	3.00
Changes in arts hiring practices	3.11	2.71	2.86

Note. Responses were on a 5-point scale from 1 = not at all a challenge to 5 = an insurmountable challenge.

Other Findings of Interest

- General education teachers rated the need for a greater emphasis on the value of arts education, an availability of arts supplies, a comprehensive plan for arts education, and more information about Prop 28 AMS higher than arts education teachers rated them.
- Middle and high school respondents cited their greatest needs as a strategic arts education plan, a greater emphasis on the value of arts education, professional development for arts teachers, and availability of arts supplies and instruments.



- Elementary school respondents cited their greatest needs as a designated VAPA coordinator, improved facilities and dedicated arts spaces, supplies and materials, more information about Prop 28 AMS and its use of funds, and a strategic arts education plan.

Suggested Strategies for Increasing Access to Arts Education

Participants had the opportunity to offer suggestions and strategies for increasing access to arts education for all students. Their written responses were analyzed for common themes and are shared here with quotations that are representative of the theme.

Hire and retain dedicated arts teachers.

Respondents explained that schools need more credentialed arts teachers, especially in elementary schools and the rural and remote areas of the state.

- “More funding at each site so more schools can receive an art teacher.”
- “[Increase] the number of available arts teachers, especially in rural areas.”
- “Recruit artists to come into the school and teach. [Institute] some type of hub to support artists to teach in the classrooms.”

Designate a VAPA coordinator.

A VAPA coordinator was described as someone who can advocate for arts programs, navigate Prop 28 AMS requirements, support arts teachers, advise principals, and ensure funds are spent strategically.

- “Hiring a dedicated VAPA coordinator would greatly improve access to arts education by providing strong leadership, organization, and advocacy for the program.”



- “[Have the] VAPA [teacher on special assignment (TOSA)] as an advocate to encourage the administration and [counsel us on opening] more sections of arts courses.”
- “We used our arts TOSA as a consultant for principals as they made Prop 28 decisions.”

Develop strategic arts education plans.

Strategic planning at both the district and school levels was identified as important to arts access and Prop 28 AMS implementation. Respondents described using arts plans as guides for decision-making, whereas respondents who did not have plans described directionless spending.

- “Creating a 5-year strategic arts education plan with all VAPA teachers in the district helps to serve as a guiding document when making decisions about how to spend Prop 28 funds.”
- “A collaboratively created school site plan for the arts is critical.”
- “We reference/referenced our strategic arts plan as part of the decision-making process.”

Engage community partners, teaching artists, and nonprofits.

Partnering with external arts organizations and teaching artists was described as a helpful solution, especially for rural and remote schools or when there were staffing constraints.

- “Using our community partners and working with [our county arts council] to help carry this work across the county has been incredibly beneficial.”
- “Creating an artist-in-residence program in our county has been key in allowing smaller schools to utilize the funds beyond buying supplies.”
- “Nonprofit arts partners are helping us fill arts instruction gaps where we are unable to find and hire qualified staff.”



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