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# West Side Story: Success Within Special Education Through Arts Integration

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West Side Story: Success Within Special Education Through Arts Integration

Kelly Richardson

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### Abstract

Arts education programs can provide the necessary skills students need for future success, including communication skills and confidence. The Turnaround Arts program at Rosa Parks Elementary School has advanced overall student success, particularly benefiting students in Special Education. Both Special Education teachers and the Arts Specialist at Rosa Parks Elementary were interviewed and the Turnaround Arts Program was observed. Each teacher described their experiences within this program to be noteworthy and recognized the importance it has had on their students' success in the classroom. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, we used what we have learned to formulate an action that responds to the focus issue in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience. Our action involved educating the public about the Turnaround Arts Program and what benefits it has brought to Rosa Parks Elementary through informative flyers.

**Best Side Story: Success Within Special Education Through Arts Integration**

For as long as I can remember, I have struggled in school and keeping up with the learning pace of the rest of my peers. I always felt as though I was “stupid” or “unintelligent,” despite the fact that I tested gifted in the creative & perceptual thinking test. While I struggled in academic learning and meeting certain standards, I always excelled at creative thinking, thinking outside the box, and understanding humor and sarcasm from a young age.

Unlike many of my fellow students who could complete 20 times-tables in 5 minutes, when the alarm would go off signaling that time was up, I would find myself having completed 3 of the 20 times-tables. I remember crying almost daily in class, silently, ensuring not to bring attention to myself. In elementary school, I often received grades of “needs improvement” on my report cards and was ashamed to hand them over to my parents. For years, my lack of academic achievement was attributed to me not trying, and sometimes that was the case, as I would get in the mindset of “I am not going to understand the concept or do well anyways, so why try.”

By the time I had to move on from elementary to middle school, I absolutely hated school. I knew that the schoolwork was only going to get more difficult, and I was already behind academically. I dreaded the homework, the tests, and even the social interactions with my peers, for I had this preconceived notion that everyone I knew was smarter than me. My parents chose to send me to Castillero Middle School, a performing arts school known for bussing in students from all over the city. I will admit that I went in discouraged, with a terrible attitude. Not long after I started at this school, I discovered that learning with arts integration not only changed my outlook on school, but also changed my life.

In the first few weeks at my new school, I was diagnosed with several minor learning disabilities. For the first time, with the help of my teachers and my parents, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was created for me to enhance and embrace my learning style. Additionally, in math, science, language arts, social studies, and even Spanish classes, everyone learned through arts education. For me, the difference was phenomenal. I understood the material we were learning, I was engaged, and I genuinely loved learning. In language arts we learned proper sentence structure through the creation of catchy songs we made up as a class, and in science we memorized the human bones with a dance attributing each bone to a different movement. When learning about Pi ( $\pi$ ) in math, we created a “Pi Skyline” with graph paper, graphing each number of Pi using different colors for as long as we wanted to go. Figure 1 provides a visual for the concept of the “Pi Skyline.”



Figure 1. *Pi Skyline*. 4 Mar. 2014,  
[www.whatdowedoallday.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/math-art-pi-city-1.jpg](http://www.whatdowedoallday.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/math-art-pi-city-1.jpg)

As a student with learning disabilities, the use of the arts in my education has transformed my outlook on school, as well as my academic achievement levels. I went from a discouraged kid thinking there was no way out but failure, to an engaged student thriving in a healthy learning environment. The arts provided me with a creative outlet not only for learning in school, but in my social and emotional growth. I truly believe that the arts are a crucial tool for learning and developing, and all students can benefit from arts integration in one way or another.

### **Literature Review**

As future teachers, it is imperative that we understand that a “one-size-fits-all” teaching approach does not benefit students of any age or learning ability. For special needs students this is especially important, as students in Special Education classrooms typically have a wide variety of disabilities with varying levels of severity.

#### **What is the Issue/Opportunity?**

Although music and arts education are known to be beneficial to students, such programs are often absent in Special Education classrooms. This topic is important because the integration of arts and music into education can prove to be an essential tool for teaching students with varying ranges of ability. However, for reasons including budget cuts and lack of resources, the arts are being eliminated from many schools and classrooms. In December of 2015, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act, with a provision that includes the arts in the definition of a “well-rounded education” (Cohen, 2016). That same week, Americans for the Arts conducted a nationwide public survey on the use of arts in schools and arts education. Figure 2 shows the unequivocal support of Americans that took the survey.

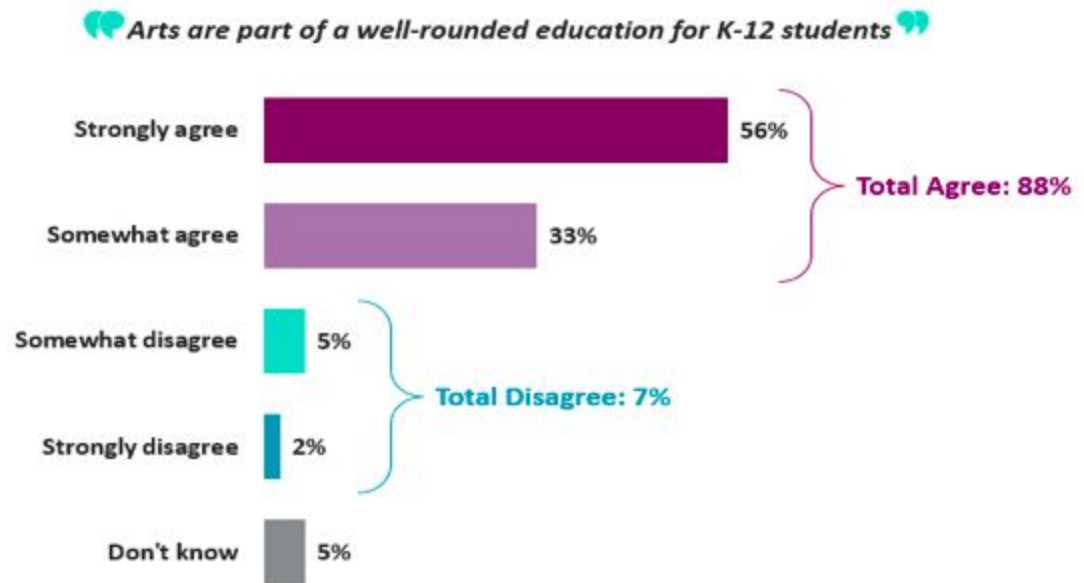


Figure 2. “Do you agree or disagree that the arts are part of a well-rounded education for K-12 students?” conducted by Americans for the Arts, 2015. Retrieved from <https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2016/03/05/the-american-public-says-yes-to-arts-education>

Participation in arts education helps special needs students develop and expand their communication, analyzing, evaluating, adapting, and cooperation skills (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010). Through the arts, students with special needs are exposed to a different process of educational stimulation through creativity rather than traditional academics. Because of this, the use of arts in Special Education not only benefits students with special needs in the classroom, but in their daily lives as well (Goldblatt, 2006). Arts programs in schools also help to provide students in Special Education with a different outlet to explore themselves and their abilities in all aspects. With the implementation of a successful arts program, students with special needs are given the opportunity for their different learning styles to flourish in ways not previously discovered in an arts-absent classroom.

**Why is this an Issue/Opportunity?**

The visual and performing arts benefit all populations, especially educational populations, for several reasons including the enhancement of physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development (Farr, 1990). For students with special needs who struggle in such development, the arts are especially beneficial. Amongst the varying severities of students who qualify for Special Education services are those who struggle in these forms of development, by ways of having “a speech or language impairment, emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment, or a specific learning disability” (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2018) among others.

Integrating arts within the Special Education environment is a critical component to stress relief, self-expression, self-actualization, and reflection in students with special needs. It is a specific approach to teaching that provides the opportunity to view the child as an artist rather than a person with a disability or in a handicapped state (Kellman, 1999; Ball, 2002). This new and innovative approach of integrating arts into the curriculum helps students create and develop their own vocabulary and ways of thinking, and works as a means of letting emotions out through artwork (Kellman, 1999; Wolf-Schein, 2012). Additionally, well-known humanist and psychologist Abraham Maslow (1968) says that creativity is a vital ingredient for self-actualization. According to Maslow, society is a great inhibitor, alienating one from oneself. In other words, society can make those who look or learn differently feel inadequate. Creative individuals overcome this inhibition with the use of creativity and the arts. Krueger (2013) summarized Maslow’s theory on creative individuals, “They are less enculturated, less afraid of what other might say, less afraid of their own impulses, more self-accepting.”



Although the arts have the potential to enhance the development of students with special needs, and ultimately the academic performance of these students, there is an increasing absence of the arts in California public schools. Due to reasons such as budget cuts and emphasis on certain subjects over others, the integration of art is evidently declining in the academic experience (Farr, 1990). For example, Farr explains that when school boards are forced to make resource allocation decisions, they often choose to “reduce or completely eliminate programs in the visual and performing arts” (1990, p. 8). Without opportunities to engage in the arts, all students are missing out on opportunities to enhance their academic experience and impact their lives. Rosa Parks Elementary, a Title I school in Oceanside has found a solution to this problem through the implementation of the Turnaround Arts program.

### **What Has Been Done?**

Various schools across America have had the opportunity of partaking in different arts education programs. Art in Action, EASE, and the Turnaround Arts program are all arts programs that have been implemented in schools in the United States, and include the Special Education population in the arts.

**Art in Action.** The core of Art in Action is a discipline-based, comprehensive art education curriculum available to K-8 schools that is designed around the works of great arts masters. Students learn about works of art from diverse cultures around the world, how to perceive art using certain vocabulary and advanced approaches, and how to express themselves by creating their own masterpieces. 12 lessons are provided for each grade level, which highlight the concepts, vocabulary, and technique appropriate for each lesson and skill level (Art in

Action, n.d.). The program corresponds with the California and National Visual Arts Standards, and incorporates other aspects of Common Core and other subjects.

**Everyday Arts for Special Education (EASE).** EASE was a project designed to train Special Education teachers in arts-infused professional development. This program was 5-year program available to Special Education instructors in New York, where they were given the opportunity to participate in a series of workshops to learn how to integrate music, visual arts, dance, and dramatic arts into their classrooms. The goal of these training workshops was to improve communication, socialization, and academic achievement for students with special needs (Horowitz, 2017). During the 5 years, EASE impacted over 49,000 students with special needs, and raised the overall proficiency of communication and academic achievement through its arts education approach (Horowitz, 2017).

**Turnaround Arts.** For this project, I have had the opportunity of partnering with Rosa Parks Elementary, a school that has recently become a participant in the Turnaround Arts program in California. Turnaround Arts is a national program founded in 2011 by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, under the leaderships of former First Lady Michelle Obama. On the Turnaround Arts website, it is stated that the program is "based on the premise that high-quality and integrated arts education can strengthen school reform efforts, boost academic achievement, and increase student engagement in schools facing some of the toughest educational challenges in the country" (n.d.). Turnaround Arts is currently implemented in 81 schools across the country, 27 of them being schools in California (Turnaround Arts, n.d.). The schools that partake in the three-year Turnaround Arts program receive an array of arts education services for three years, which seek to increase their opportunities for success, engage their

community, and notably raise their overall achievements. Included in the Turnaround Arts services are: art supplies, musical education materials, instructional enhancement resources, professional training facilitated by experts in the field, and high-profile artists partnering with the program who work with the students and teachers. The key to the success of this program is integrating arts education that is effective, rigorous, and implemented thoroughly into the school, as well as strategically targeted to addressing larger school challenges. The program works closely and consistently with each school throughout the year to help the school community plan and implement their program and ensure its quality and impact (Turnaround Arts, n.d.). The special needs students at Rosa Parks Elementary have especially benefited from this program, which is currently in its third year. It has given them an alternative form of learning that has promoted independence and confidence through creativity.

### **Method**

Arts integration in schools have been proven to result in major benefits for students of all ages and abilities. For students with special needs who may struggle with physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development, the arts are a critical tool for enhancement and self-expression. Rosa Parks Elementary School was selected to take part in California's Turnaround Arts Program for underperforming schools, and their Special Education students have been reaping the benefits of this art program. Through research, my partner and I hope to observe these benefits and discuss the growth among the Special Education students. We researched how this program has benefited the Special Education students, and why they are important for student achievement. In order to maintain the confidentiality of all parties involved, we have changed the name of our participating school and teachers.

**Context.** Rosa Parks Elementary School is located in Oceanside, CA and is a part of the Oceanside Unified School District. According to the 2016-17 accountability report card for Rosa Parks Elementary School of the Arts, all teachers at this school are fully credentialed with this exception of 1 this past year (2016-17). The largest percentage of students are hispanic/latino with 82.1% of the student body. Socioeconomically disadvantaged students make up 89.7% of the student body students and English language learners consists of the other large percentage of students with 69.4%. The school's facilities and cleanliness score "good." (Accountability Report Card, 2016-17). Principal Shawn Avery states that the Rosa Parks Elementary School mission is to empower students to cultivate a passion for learning through the arts. Rosa Parks Elementary is partnered with Turnaround Arts, a program that reaches Title I schools across the nation and is dedicated to ensuring that all children have access to the arts, and embodies the five qualities of the Artist Profile: Proud, Creative, Caring, Inquisitive, and Open-Mindedness.

### **Participants and Participant Selection**

Participants were teachers and parents to the Special Education students at Rosa Parks Elementary School. We had three teacher participants. All participants (so far) have been female. The mean age is unable to be determined at this time.

**Judith Doe.** A white female teacher of the Special Education class at Rosa Parks elementary.

**Jane White.** A white female teacher of the Special Education class at Rosa Parks Elementary.

**Jacquelyn Smith.** A white female who is the art specialist at Rosa Parks Elementary.

**Researchers**

**Stephanie.** This research paper is meaningful to me because I have grown up with a special needs younger brother, who I feel may have developed greater communication skills and confidence if he had access to such a thorough and detailed art program like the one at Rosa Parks Elementary School. I have been volunteering in my younger brother's special education classrooms since I was young, so I have seen first hand the amount of art implemented in his classrooms. I have biases due to the fact that my younger brother is the person who inspired this project. I feel that my love for him and passion for this project is both beneficial and potentially harmful. Passion is important when picking a research topic, but it can also lead me down a road of biased opinions and points of views if I am not careful.

**Kelly.** This topic is important to me because I am a student with minor learning and intellectual disabilities, who benefitted from a successful arts program in a school I attended. Prior to attending the performing arts middle school, I struggled with academics and often found myself very discouraged and believing I could not succeed. With my experience, I know that the implementation of a working arts program in schools can have a remarkably beneficial impact on all students, but specifically those in Special Education who have different learning needs. I definitely have biases towards this topic, because the integration of the arts helped me. I realize that just because an arts program guided me to success in school and increased my self-confidence, it does not mean that would be the case for every other student. I need to be careful when advocating for this topic because I know that my experience with the arts does not

speak for the experiences of the entire population.

### **Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

1. Would you say there is a lack of art programs, for example the Turnaround Arts program, in Special Education classrooms?
2. Are there any concerns you have about incorporating arts into Special Education classrooms?
3. What is currently being done inside your classroom to satisfy the Turnaround Arts program standards? - Do you think this is good, bad, or are you indifferent? Why?
4. Do you think anything more should be done to enhance or advocate for the Turnaround Arts program?
5. What do you think are the obstacles/drawbacks/disadvantages to changing the arts department and beginning the Turnaround Arts program?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the arts program and/or the opportunities it has provided you?
7. Would you consider the implementation of the Turnaround Arts program to be a positive influence for your students/child?
8. In what ways has this arts program benefited your students/child?
9. If you are in favor of the arts program, would you be willing to support efforts to advocate and expand on its behalf?

### **Procedure**

What was requested of the selected teachers from Rosa Parks Elementary who were

willing to participate in our capstone paper was to respond to a series of questions we had regarding the Turnaround Arts Program and its impact on students in Special Education. We asked whether they believed it was a program that benefited the Special Education classrooms or not. The teachers who participated were those connected to both Special Education and art. They preferred to be given the series of questions through email so that they could spend time answering them thoughtfully and thoroughly. These questions, along with consent forms, were given to the teachers. All that was asked of them was to answer the questions to the best of their ability, and return them to us. They were not compensated or given anything by us for their participation in our research paper.

### **Data Analysis**

Each teacher was emailed a list of the same questions to answer regarding their students' progress and how the Turnaround Arts Program has benefited their classrooms. Each question will be read and analyzed and connections from their responses and our research will be evaluated. This data will show what has been done regarding the Turnaround Arts program efforts and what could continue to be done.

### **Results**

For this Capstone Project, teachers at Rosa Parks Elementary School were interviewed to see how the Turnaround Arts program in their school has benefited their students and in what ways those benefits could reach other schools. This is important because art programs have been found to improve communication and social skills, and boost confidence among Special Education students. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each

potential Action Option by the following criteria: time, money, and likelihood of implementation. Time is a crucial element because we all have busy lives, and when an action feels stressed and or dragged out it can become less appealing. Likelihood of implementation is important to discuss as well because organizing events can become difficult. Money is also an important criteria to discuss because if an action requires a sizable amount of funding then it most likely requires a lot of time and management as well. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

**Table 1**

*Evaluation of Action Options*

Action Option	Time	Cost	Likelihood of Implementation
Create and hang eye-catching posters with information regarding Turnaround Arts to promote community awareness.	Low	Low	High
Teacher training (visual thinking strategies)	High	High	Medium
Federal, School, and Community support	High	High	Low/Medium



**Action Option 1: Community awareness/Attending school board meetings and discussing the benefits the Turnaround Arts Program has had on Special Education students at Rosa Parks elementary.**

Jaquelyn Smith, the arts specialist brought in to Rosa Parks Elementary by the Turnaround Arts program, expressed concern for the school's ability to maintain arts integration once the three years of the program's implementation is up in the following quote:

We are currently looking to see how we can maintain the Turnaround Arts model after we are not technically in the program after year three. We have asked three non-profit arts organizations to be housed at our site in our "Community Arts Wing" to offer artist residencies, after school programming and family resources and opportunities in exchange for free rent. We are also looking into applying for the district to be a partner with the Kennedy Center so that we can bring arts integration professional development to the district. This would encourage the arts to grow beyond the two current Turnaround Arts Schools in the Oceanside School District. (personal communication, November 13, 2018)

One of the biggest challenges that the Turnaround Arts program faces is the lack of awareness. Even amongst educators, recognition of the program is limited. In a one-on-one conversation we had with Amie Glasser, an elementary school teacher of 32 years, we brought up the research we have been conducting regarding the Turnaround Arts program at Rosa Parks Elementary. This was the first time she had ever heard about the program.

Teachers at Rosa Parks are advocating to have an all inclusive art program within the school because of the progress shown among the students, specifically Special Education

students. Judith Doe, the Special Education teacher at Rosa Parks Elementary for students in grades K-3, gushed about the positive impact the arts have had on her students in her interview. In response to the question, “Would you consider the implementation of the Turnaround Arts program to be a positive influence for your students?” she stated:

Yes it is has been a very positive influence in my students’ lives. I feel it allows me to see a side of my students I could not see before, plus I feel that my students are accessing programs that are allowing them to learn skills that will only benefit them now and in their future. (personal communication, November 15, 2018)

Additionally, in response to the same interview question, the arts specialist also emphasized the benefits that arts education has had on the students at Rosa Parks in the quote:

There is a ton of research that shows the positive outcomes of students who engage in the arts on a regular basis. It provides a way for students to be successful in school in ways that they may not be otherwise. It provides students with a place to use higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, higher levels of thinking. When a child is creating, whether that is visual, performing, music, dance- they are analyzing, evaluating and approaching a problem with an open mind. It gives students an opportunity to be proud of their work and encourages them to not have the same answer or product as the student next to them. (personal communication, November 13, 2018)

One way to ensure that arts education can remain prevalent in schools, such as Rosa Parks Elementary, would be to advocate on behalf of programs like the Turnaround Arts program in the community. This establishes awareness of the positive impacts these programs have for students, specifically Special Education students. Community engagement can be

conceptualized as a long-term, in-depth relationship-building process between the schools and their respective communities, with the goals of cultivating partnerships that prove beneficial to all parties involved, and fostering a sense of pride in the contributions that participants and the community would make to maintain the benefits brought by arts education (Riesch, Ngui, Ehlert, Miller, Cronk, Leuthner, Strehlow, Hewitt, & Durkin, 2013). Epstein (2011), a noted education researcher and director of the National Network for Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University, sums up the benefits of community participation this way: “Schools, families, and communities all contribute to student success, and the best results come when all three work together as equal partners” (National Education Association, 2011, p. 4).

**Action Option 2: Teacher Training/ Courses that allow for training for teachers who do not have an art or music background. (Visual Thinking Strategies)**

Within our interviews we asked our participating teachers, “What is currently being done inside your classroom to satisfy the turnaround arts program standards? - Do you think this is good, bad, or are you indifferent? Why?” One of the Special Education teachers, Judith Doe, mentions how she has received teacher training regarding Visual Thinking Strategies stating,

I have received training in several arts based initiatives (Focus 5 and Visual Thinking Strategies) that teach self-control and using their thinking skills to verbally analyze a given art picture. (personal communication, November 15, 2018)

Visual Thinking Strategies can be defined as, “Making meaning together by observing carefully, deciphering patterns, speculating, clarifying, supporting opinions, and generating more ideas--these skills are learned patterns of thinking” (Moeller, Cutler, Fiedler, & Weier, 2013). This strategy allows students to explore colors, shapes, and textures to create meaning from art.

Students are able to use context clues, examine images and make educated statements regarding their meaning. (et al., 2013). Doe advocates on behalf of her training in Visual Thinking Strategies and how it has impacted her students for the better. When asked if there was anything more she would like to say about the this program or the opportunity she received to learn new teaching strategies, Doe replied, “I never want to move to another school” (personal communication, November 15, 2018).

Due to Doe’s training in Focus 5 and Visual Thinking Strategies, she is able to see progress regarding critical thinking among her students. Providing more teacher training programs in schools nationwide would ensure that students, beyond those at Rosa Parks Elementary, would gain the critical thinking skills and abilities Doe has seen first hand in her classroom.

In Brookings, South Dakota, Camelot Intermediate School has begun implementing Visual Thinking Strategy sessions. These sessions have allowed students to manifest creative and critical thinking skills used when discussing art. Camelot Principal Dave Fiedler talks about the positive outcome of the VTS implemented by his school and how it has, “helped them [teachers] become better facilitators and allow students a little more control of the learning environment” (Fiedler, 2013, p.56).

**Action Option 3: Federal Support/Funding from federal government, community involvement, and school support in order to allow an inclusive art program, such as the Turnaround Arts Program at Rosa Parks Elementary, to continue even after the three year program is finished.**

When conducting our interviews, we asked our participating teachers “Do you think anything more could be done to enhance or advocate for the Turnaround Arts program?” We received responses that brought to light the action of federal support for the arts. Support from the federal government would allow for the progress the Turnaround Arts program has provided to continue after its three year period. The art specialist at Rosa Parks Elementary stated:

When you are an art educator, you learn to always be advocating for the arts. They are usually the first thing to cut when budgets get tight. The work that we are doing at Rosa Parks around the arts is powerful and has had a positive impact on our school culture, our family engagement at all of our art nights as well as improve student behavior while decreasing our suspension rates. Our students are more engaged in the classroom through arts integration and having access to visual arts and music every week. Schools that make the arts a budget and staffing priority just as much as regular staffing, success is achieved.

(personal communication, November 13, 2018)

Along with Jacquelyn Smith the art specialists at Rosa Parks Elementary, Judith Doe, the Special Education teacher advocated for federal funding stating, “We need to see more federal backing for the arts. It has been proven to work” (personal communication, November 15, 2018).

Federal support of the arts can help not only students, but communities as well. According to the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (2010) there are several different ways in which schools, and the communities they belong to, can be positively impacted by art programs. Art programs can produce more jobs and tax revenue that encourage more business activity, attracts tourism revenue, maintains a high quality work force and property values. “The

arts have been shown to be a successful and sustainable strategy for revitalizing rural areas, inner cities and populations struggling with poverty” (p.2). The arts contribute to small business sectors as well as having creative industries comprised of many talented self-employed workers (National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2010). Rosa Parks Elementary School is proof of community building through the arts with their efforts to create a partnership with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

### **Conclusion**

In order for Special Education students to benefit from programs, such as the Turnaround Arts Program, communities need to be made aware of the benefits and positive outcomes they provide. Along with community awareness, teachers must be trained in the ability to entice critically thinking skills regarding artistic expression. Lastly, backing from the federal government is important in ensuring a program can be structured, maintained, and provide economic assistance to their local communities. The reasonableness for each action option varies amongst three criteria: time, cost, and likelihood of implementation. Promoting awareness in the community of such programs would require taking one’s own time to advocate through creating and posting flyers around the community, which proves doable, with no monetary cost needed. Probability of implementation for this option would include putting time into creating said posters, and having the means of transportation to post them around the community. Due to these concessions, this would be the most reasonable action option to implement. However, limitations to this option could include people walking right past such posters without action reading the critical information on them. Action option number two, teacher training, would require a set amount of time and money to implement in addition to needing somebody in charge to schedule

and manage these training workshops, which would prove to have a moderate likelihood of implementation. Many schools do not have extra funding to apply extra teacher training workshops dedicated to coaching arts education, but if they did, schools could benefit greatly from this application. And lastly, obtaining federal, school, and community support would require the most time and money out of the three options, due to the campaigning and elections that would need to take place. Managing the funds from such elections and campaigns would require a very qualified personnel, which could prove to be difficult. If the likelihood of implementation for this action option was higher, this could prove to be the option with the highest impact. With appropriate federal funding, schools could obtain access to all the material and training they would need in order to foster a successful arts program.

### **Action Documentation and Critical Reflection**

For this Capstone project, my partner and I focused on the lack of arts programs in Special Education. In analyzing the results from our three interviewee participants, three action options emerged. These action options were: to create and display vibrant posters containing information regarding Turnaround Arts to promote community awareness, additional teacher training on visual thinking strategies, and gaining more federal, school, and community support. After analyzing the action options using three criteria; time, cost, and likelihood of implementation, we decided to implement the eye-catching poster option as it presented the lowest amount of time, cost, and highest likelihood of implementation. Additionally, in conducting our research we realized that the awareness of the arts education program that we focused on, Turnaround Arts, was little to none. In order to increase awareness, we created a colorful poster that highlighted the benefits that Turnaround Arts has had on schools that it has

been successfully implemented in. Ideally, in addition to creating our posters, we would have liked to attend a district board meeting to advocate for Turnaround Arts and present it as an option for other Title I schools in the area. However, due to the time constraint for this project, we were unable to fit that in. So far, after educating our class and some other members in our major on the program, we believe we have truly promoted awareness for Turnaround Arts and we hope that our posters will continue to inform the surrounding communities.

Moving forward, in order to maintain the awareness for this arts program and others similar to it, my partner and I will continue advocating on its behalf. We will keep our posters up around campus and in various locations within the community. Additionally, we also plan on remaining close with our community partner, Rosa Parks Elementary, as they transition from Turnaround Arts to their independent identity as an arts school.

Going into this project, I was not sure what impacts Turnaround Arts has had on Special Education specifically. After sitting in on lessons and observing a few typical days in the Special Education classrooms, it quickly became clear to me how much the students have truly benefited from arts integration in their education. Overall, I learned that a successfully implemented arts program can break grounds in low performing, low-income schools, particularly in Special Education.

The following page (Figure 3) contains the flyer that we created for our action project.



**TURNAROUND ARTS PROGRAM**

**WHAT IS IT?**  
TURNAROUND ARTS: CALIFORNIA USES ARTS EDUCATION AS A TOOL TO HELP TURN AROUND THE HIGHEST-NEED ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN THE STATE.

**WHO DOES IT REACH?**  
STUDENTS, TEACHERS, PARENTS, COMMUNITY MEMBERS

**HOW DOES IT HELP?**  
PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS SAW IMPROVEMENTS IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, REDUCTION IN DISCIPLINARY REFERRALS AND INCREASES IN ATTENDANCE

**WHAT CAN YOU DO?**  
TALK WITH YOUR LOCAL EDUCATORS AND FIND OUT IF YOUR SCHOOL QUALIFIES FOR THIS PROGRAM

**FOR MORE INFO VISIT**  
[HTTPS://TURNAROUNDARTSCA.ORG/](https://turnaroundartsca.org/)

PosterMyWall.com

Figure 3.

**Synthesis and Integration**

During my time of professional development at California State University Monterey Bay, I have learned a lot about myself and what I am capable of academically, socially, and emotionally. Throughout this project, I have expanded my knowledge and have felt myself transition from a naive college student to a diversity and multicultural scholar, a social justice collaborator, and a subject matter generalist. There will always be ways in which I can better myself, and I know that there is so much more for me to learn. As I further my education, I know that I need to stay focused on my goals and not let stress deter me from becoming the successful professional individual I hope to be.

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