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Rescuing an Eradicated Subject: How one Elementary School is Using  
California State Funding and Resources for Visual Art

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## ABSTRACT

The focus of this research project was to determine if an elementary school in California, was getting the resources and funding needed to integrate visual art into curriculum. It was found that California had increased funding for the arts and arts organizations. To encourage art-integration, The California Board of Education created Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Common Core Standards, which encompassed a broad range of art disciplines at the k-5 level. Although VAPA standards were strongly encouraged, local school boards determined their inclusion. Even though there had been a push to include the arts, California was found to be behind in national testing in art disciplines. The study focused on a k-5 public elementary school in Santa Clara County. A questionnaire was given to a principal and teacher at the school. The findings revealed that the school was not receiving additional grant money, nor had they integrated VAPA standards into their curriculum. The teacher interviewed had no formal arts education and was not provided professional development from the school to integrate the arts. This school offered visual art education to their 5<sup>th</sup> grade students through after-school programming, but it was supported by the Parent Teacher Association, and the local community college.

*KeyWords:* No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), STEM Vs. STEAM, arts integration, education, whole child, California's Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Common Core Standards

### **Introduction and Background**

Art is essential to education and children need daily classroom opportunities to participate in the arts. Art can boost a student's morale, confidence, and excitement about learning and attending class in a variety of ways. Myers (2010) explains, "Research and experience have shown that the arts help inspire confidence, energize and enliven the school environment, help at-risk, hard to reach children, and keep them in school" (p. 4). Therefore, the arts add to the learning experience and create a positive classroom environment, especially among students who struggle in school. Policy and funding often shape how schools include time for the arts. Since The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), curricular contraction and lack of funding contributed to many schools around the county to limit time spent on the arts. Although this had been the case, there has been a push to include art in subjects such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM subjects). Instead of STEM, some programs include the arts and call their program Science, Technology, Engineering, *Arts* and Mathematics, also known as STEAM.

California is one state in particular that has been striving to include more of the arts in public school curriculum. Some of the ways in which this is being accomplished is through funding and the creation of common core standards. These standards are intended to provide students an arts education that encompasses a broad range of material in visual and performing arts from grades k-12 (The California State Board of Education, 2020). California's previous governor Jerry Brown and newly elected Gavin Newsom, both substantially increased funding for the arts within the past five years. This funding has helped California organizations such as the California Arts Council aid schools in providing an education for students in the arts (Californians for the Arts Organization, 2019). Organizations that partner with the California

Arts Council such as CREATE CA and The California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), claim through the California Arts initiative, to provide schools with funding and support in making a transition to incorporate the arts in K-12 curriculum (CCSESA, 2015). The main objective is to help students receive a holistic education that includes the arts.

The purpose of this study was to determine if an Elementary School in California was getting the funding and resources needed to transition their curriculum to integrate visual art. The study was also intended to see if the school had incorporated Visual and Performing Arts Common Core Standards. This study initially covered one art discipline (visual art), but results provided by the participants revealed how the school covered other art disciplines as well. The study also sought to better understand if the recent increase in funding under Governor Gavin Newsom made a difference at this school. Overall, it is important to understand if this school is following the state standards and including visual arts in curriculum, because art is important to development and needs to be included.

The primary question I sought to answer was: *Are elementary schools in California getting the resources they need to integrate visual art into their curriculum?* My Secondary, or related research questions included: *Why is art important in a child's education? What are past and current policies surrounding art education? Is funding for the arts distributed in an equitable way? What have past and current governors in CA, done to promote education in the arts? How accessible is CA state funding for the arts? Do elementary school teachers have the skills needed to teach visual arts, or integrate it into the curriculum? Which of the three options (the hiring of qualified art teachers, after school art programs, or integrated art curricula) is currently used to provide students with an education in visual art? Are schools in California*

*incorporating visual art into curricula to help satisfy the Visual and Performing Arts Common Core Standards?*

***Definitions of Terms:***

*Whole Child:* “is based on the proposition that education must move beyond preparing children to become “well-educated” citizens who are productive participants in the economic system. Education must also cultivate in young people spirituality, reverence for the natural environment, and a sense of social justice. Education must inspire children’s creativity, imagination, compassion, self-knowledge, social skills, and emotional health” (Heishman et al. 2010, p. 7).

## **Literature Review**

### **General Arts History and Contributions to Education and Society**

Art is a great contributor to the discovery of humanity and past cultures. Since the dawn of man, the arts have been a way to communicate and pass down information through the generations. These early forms of language and storytelling allowed humanity to expand thought, record events, and share knowledge, generating the foundation for what is known and understood today. Just as art has developed our understanding of past civilizations, it has played a valuable part in the evolution of a child's education. It has been fought for and argued as a crucial part of the educational experience. Theorists Caterall, Eisner, and Gardener claim that art is key to the development of what they refer to as the “whole child” (as cited in Gullatt, 2008, p. 12).

Education experts throughout history have also claimed art to enhance the learning environment. In the late 1800's, Horace Mann pushed for the idea that visual arts and music be included in schools to develop curriculum in order to facilitate positive learning experiences (Gullatt, p. 13).

Overall, these renowned theorists understood that when the arts are included in curriculum, students learn more efficiently.

With that being said, how does art contribute to education? An education in the arts contributes to a variety of thinking skills such as creativity and imagination. Gullatt (2007) provides key information about what an education in the arts contributes to students. Burton, Horowitz, and Abeles research explains that arts promote the following outcomes in students: creative thinking, fluency in thought, originality, focused perception, imagination, risk taking, task persistence; and ownership in leaning (as cited in Gullatt, 2007, p. 213). Research that was done by the National Endowment of the Arts talks about the identified five roles that the arts play in academics:

Arts can foster the development of students who are actively engaged in learning. Arts contribute to the development of a creative, committed, and exciting school culture of teachers, students, and parents. Arts can help generate a dynamic, coordinated, and cohesive curriculum. Arts can build bridges to the larger community, to the broader culture, and to other institutions. Arts can humanize the learning environment (as cited in Gullatt, 2007, p. 21).

An art education can promote student learning in ways that benefit both the individual and society. Overall, Art acts as a learning tool, brings interest to a student's school day, and helps them connect to their community.

The arts play an important role in subjects such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Jolly (2014) explains how one educator in particular, strongly believes art should be incorporated into curriculum which include these subjects. Ruth Catchen, a writer and creator of STEAM curriculum, advocates for the idea that the arts accommodate diverse learning and a better chance at success in these subjects. She believes that in our technology-focused world, we have the responsibility to educate the whole child to become a global citizen in his or

her community (Jolly, 2014). Catchen sees the potential that art brings to the STEM subjects, seeing art as something that will benefit the entirety of the program. These are beliefs in which she carries, whether it be researched based or based on personal experience, with developing curriculum for these subjects, she has found art plays a substantial role in grasping them.

### **The Effects of Education Policies on Art Education**

The arts had been limited previously due to a high-stakes testing environment and curricular contraction. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is the reiteration of the policy put in place in the mid-1960s. According to Stein (2004) the base of the United States Federal educational policy, which was ratified in 1965, had been created as part of the war on poverty by Lyndon B. Johnson. It is referred to as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Stein mentions it is “the largest federal compensatory educational policy and provides schools with funds intended for programs to serve the perceived educational needs of eligible students” (p. xiv). This policy was created to help people in poverty and minority groups, seen as “victims of cultural deprivation” (p. xv). Although the act sounds positive, some aspects of the policy have done damage to the educational institution.

Due to the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), passed in January of 2002, there had been a decrease in the amount of art taught in schools. According to Wayne’s study (2007), participant’s revealed that non-tested subjects were being shortened to focus on the subjects being tested on, also known as curricular contraction. A term that was coined during this time is referred to as “teaching to test.” It was mentioned that it had become a substantial part of the curriculum, while other subjects were “increasingly excluded from curricular content” (p. 362). Curricular contraction to focus on tested subjects, had limited the amount of time for art in schools. The Center of Education Policy explains how a combination of other subjects which



include art, had been ignored to focus on English, social studies, and math. They also state that “72% of districts have reported cutting time from one or more other subjects or activities, such as social studies, science, art and music, physical education, lunch and/or recess, at the elementary level” (as cited in Myers, 2010, p. 10). With limited subject matter, many students were not able to experience a well-rounded education at this time.

### **Current Efforts at Mitigating Lack of Art Funding and Art Instruction**

The question to answer now is, what has been done in recent years to include the arts in education? One example of the recent progression toward an art-based curriculum, is a movement in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) that has been pushing for a transition to STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics). In 2013, at the congressional STEAM caucus, John Maeda expressed that “Innovation depends on the problem solving, risk taking and creativity that are natural to the way artists and designers think, art and science – once inextricably linked- are better together than apart” (Ghanbari, 2015, p. 2). Art is fluent to the type of innovation that occurs in observation, engineering, and innovation.

Ghanbari’s (2015) study found student achievement at the university level through including art in curriculum that complements STEM subjects. There was student growth in two STEAM programs ArtTechnology and ArtScience. Participants that were interviewed claimed to have new perspectives on collaboration, the programs helped them learn and obtain new subject matter, and it was frequently mentioned that with the knowledge they had obtained they were able create “tangible objects” (p. 16). Art acts as a tool to elevate learning in these fields because students are able to draw out plans, study characteristics of plants and animals, and design layouts for new technologies. These students found that they were able to accurately imagine and explore their interests. Art also ended up translating to other subjects beside art according to

these students. One commonality in experience was that the students were able to draw multiple positive insights through art-based curriculum (p 18). The college students in this study ultimately realized art as a facet to their learning.

In some areas around the country where test scores are low and poverty is high, art had been excluded almost entirely from school curricula, making it an eradicated subject. When art was introduced into the curriculum in a small rural school district in Texas, there was a positive impact on student's test scores, especially in schools where there were a large number of students from low socioeconomic families. One study conducted found that implementation of a fine arts education dramatically improved test scores. There was a "statistically significant difference in the reading and math achievement of a population of students most educators struggle to support; the economically disadvantaged and the Hispanic minority" (Garcia, Issacson & Jones, 2015, p. 12). The very subject that had been cut from many schools may unfortunately be the subject that is needed, especially for students that need something to keep them interested in school. The importance of an art education is considered among many, yet for minority groups that go to underfunded schools they are not able to receive one.

### **California's Efforts to Mitigate Lack of Funding and Art Instruction in Schools**

In California, the arts have been supported and funded by governors new and old. According to Veltman (2018), Governor Jerry Brown proposed a \$5 million dollar increase in California State funding for the arts in 2018. Specifically, the California Arts Council saw an increase of \$10 million dollars. At this time, the funding for the arts increased 30% (Veltman, 2018). Then in 2019, Californian's for the Arts reported that when Governor Gavin Newsom won the governorship he increased the permanent funding for the arts, which was at 16 million previously, to 26 million. This is a substantial increase, as compared to the permanent funding

for the arts in 2001. Then, funding for the arts was at \$1 million (Californians for the Arts Organization, 2019). This is consistent with the NCLBA era when art time was cut all over the country. The amount of funds dedicated to the arts during this era is reflective of that.

California funds arts organizations that provide grants and resources for schools through this funding. The California Arts Council for example, is a government organization composed of an 11-member group appointed by the governor and legislature “to advance the state through the arts and creativity” (CREATE CA, 2020). Their ultimate goal is to strengthen the arts in California through grants, initiatives, and services (California Arts Council Organization, 2020). According to the CREATE CA Partners page (2020) California State arts organizations such as the California Arts Council, CREATE CA, and The California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), collaborate and work together to support the arts in schools.

One of the California Arts Council partners, CCESA is making progress to include art education in curriculum. The CCSESA is a statewide organization that works with schools and districts to ensure students receive a quality education that includes the arts. They also work with state policy makers and the California Department of Education to ensure equitable education to students regardless of economic status or disability (CCSESA, 2015). According to Sarah Anderberg the director of the (CCSESA) Arts Initiative, the arts are making a come back through *Creativity at the Core*. This California initiative is intended to integrate art into curriculum. One of the ways this is accomplished is through free integrated art lessons that incorporate the California Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) Standards (CCSESA, 2015). This is a good example of how the CCSESA Arts Initiative is providing resources to teachers to integrate the arts.

California's Visual and Performing Arts State Standards are productive for arts education because they provide benchmarks that schools meet. According to the California State Board of Education, as of 2019, California State Standards requires k-12 public schools to cover a broad range of concepts, artistic mediums, and vocabulary term fluency in artistic disciplines such as visual art, music, dance, theater, and media arts. (p. 3). Overall, these standards are intended to promote artistic literacy (p. 4). Although these standards are great in creating accessibility to an education in the arts, according to Harrington (2017) local school boards have a say in whether they are included in curriculum. Even though California highly recommends and stresses the implementation of them, they do not track if they are being used in schools (Harrington, 2017). By including common core standards in the arts, it aids in providing a variety of students from all over California an arts education. Although they are helpful to arts education holistically, the state is not keeping tabs on if these standards are being used in school curriculum.

Even though there has been a push to include the arts in curriculum, California was found to be behind in national testing for the arts. Jones (2017) reported that the Western U.S., including California, was behind in terms of student enrollment in art and music classes. For example, in other areas of the country 70% of students in northeastern states were enrolled in an art or music class compared to only 33% in the West. It was also reported that a third of 8<sup>th</sup> graders took an art class at the time, while 17% played in a school band, which is some of the lowest scores in the United States. This evidence was based on a test given by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which is one of the only methods to assess art education in the United States (as cited in Jones, 2017). California since then has made efforts to improve its curriculum to include the arts.

### Methods and Procedures

In order to answer the primary question and some of the related research questions, an elementary school located in Santa Clara County California was chosen. As of 2019, This k-5 elementary school has a student population of 610 and an annual budget of \$272, 929 (“School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) Template”, 2019). This public school was selected because of its involvement and continued participation in an afterschool mural program called Art4change. This program is run by the local community college. Through this program, college students are able to gain experience with teaching and contribute to their community through service. By working with this program, I was personally able to gain experience with 5<sup>th</sup> grade students and also contribute to the final product, a mural based around a children’s book called *The Hungry Little Caterpillar*.

Art4change helps 5<sup>th</sup> grade students gain experience in visual art through painting, drawing, creating, and conceptualizing. A theme is chosen for the final mural at the beginning of the workshop. This theme is often based around children’s books. At the end of the project, the students contribute to designing and then painting a mural on a selected wall at the school. Over the years, the program has painted many murals around the school, which are painted directly on the school’s buildings. The school’s participation in a program like such, reflects the administration’s and faculty’s support for visual art. If this school supports visual art in this way, one can safely assume that they would support the arts in general and may be proactive in including the arts in their school’s curriculum.

To gain more information on if the school was receiving funding and including VAPA standards in curriculum, questionnaires were emailed to a principal and a teacher at the school. This method was chosen because a questionnaire was a straightforward way to get answers to the

research questions asked. Also, in the era of Covid-19, an in-person interview would not have been appropriate. The principal was chosen because he would possibly know about recent grants and/or other sources of funding the school was receiving from the state. Also, he would be involved in hiring art-specific teachers, providing resources and professional development to current teachers, and also be aware of new requirements teachers need to follow. A teacher at the school was chosen because of their potential involvement in curriculum development. They are also at the frontline of teaching. Teachers are also the individuals integrating the arts into curriculum if there are no art-specific teachers to do so. They also have inside knowledge on how much money is allocated for art supplies and if it is adequate enough. The questions provided (See Appendix A) were then used to answer the primary questions and some of the related research questions.

### **Results and Discussion**

By administering two questionnaires with unique questions, it was better understood how the chosen school was getting the resources and funding needed to provide students with an education in visual art. Also, it helped in understanding if they were integrating the Visual and Performing Arts State Standards. Their answers helped to answer the primary question and some of the secondary questions. After reviewing journals and searching the Internet, some of the other related research questions were answered.

*Why is art important in a child's education?* This question was answered through studies and literature reviews on the importance of art in education. Art education is important because it is crucial to development and aids in the learning experience. It enlivens the school environment and provides students with the much-needed life skills. Some of these skills

include, but are not limited to critical thinking, problem solving, and risk-taking. Art also serves disadvantaged and at-risk students because it increases attentiveness and engagement.

*What are past and current policies surrounding art education?* The NCLB act (2001) greatly impacted many subjects including the arts. Curricular contraction caused schools to limit or completely get rid of art programs. At the time, students were learning how to take tests instead of genuine learning. Policy shapes educational climates and the NCLB era caused damage to the education system. This policy impacted the generations that followed, and it is still in the process of recovering.

*What have past and current governors in CA, done to promote education in the arts?* It was found that previous governor Jerry Brown and newly elected Gavin Newsom, had increased permanent funding for the arts within the past five years. California arts organizations see this money and provide grants to schools and non-profit organizations. The California Board of Education sees the important role that art plays in a child's development. The board has created Visual and Performing Arts Common Core Standards that schools should be using in grades k-12. Although these standards are important and should be integrated into curriculum, local school boards decide on their inclusion. These standards should be enforced because it is important that students throughout California reach these same benchmarks.

The primary question: *Are elementary schools in California getting the resources they need to integrate visual art into their curriculum?* In terms of resources and funding, the teacher interviewed said that art supplies are limited. She explained that each teacher at the school gets a small amount of money every year for general supplies, but once those funds are used, she purchases supplies with her own money. The principal said that there was no new funding for the arts and he was not sure if any grant money had been applied for in the school district. Also, the

Parent-Teacher Association at the school funds the Art4change mural program. This reveals that state funding is not helping the school in this area either. Other than these answers given, there was no information provided on how the CCSESA, CREATE CA, or the California Arts Council are funding schools other than through grants.

The questionnaires helped answer some of the secondary questions. One of them was *How accessible is CA state funding for the arts?* Grant money needs to be sought after. California State funding for the arts is not readily available to all schools equally because of the grant writing process. If there is no one seeking money for the arts, a school gets a limited amount, or little to no funding. Ultimately, grants are accessible to those who are willing to apply for them.

Another question I sought to answer was: *Which of the three options (the hiring of qualified art teachers, after school art programs, or integrated art curricula) is currently used to provide students with an education in visual art?* The principal mentioned in the questionnaire, that the school provides their 5<sup>th</sup> grade students an education in visual arts through the mural program Art4change, which has provided the service for six years. In regard to performing arts, the principal explained that they have the Missoula Children's Theater Group which teaches for a week every year. This group has been providing performing arts education for nine years to the school. He did not specifically mention if the school had been integrating visual art into curricula, or whether they have hired teachers that teach visual art specifically.

*Do elementary school teachers have the skills needed to teach visual arts, or integrate it into the curriculum?* The teacher interviewed did not have any previous experience in art and her teacher preparation program did not prepare her to integrate art. She also did not receive any



professional development through the school to integrate visual art into lesson plans either, although, she has elected to take 1-hour sessions at STEAM conferences.

*Are schools in California incorporating visual art into curricula to help satisfy the Visual and Performing Arts Common Core Standards?* The principal did not specify if they were using integrated art lessons or following the VAPA Common Core Standards. The teacher interviewed said the school's faculty had not formally discussed incorporating these standards either. Although, she said that the principal actively seeks to incorporate visual and performing arts at the school. For example, the principal brought in a dance company called TK-5 which teaches students how to dance. Some of the dances learned included The Foxtrot, Waltz, hip hop dance, and more. These were year-round dance classes that occurred 2 times a week for 45-minutes. Along with dancing, the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students take a field trip to a live dance and music performance twice a year. The teacher also mentioned that a STEAM lab was being built at the school.

After reading journal articles, searching the Internet, and conducting qualitative research at an elementary school, the questions that were sought-after were answered adequately. This research is important because students need an education that includes the arts. Even though it may seem like there is a lot of accessible funding from state arts organizations, it is apparent that some schools are taking it upon themselves to include the arts. The teacher interviewed said that art supplies are limited and that she receives a small sum of money for school supplies in general. However, once this money is gone, she uses her own money to provide students with supplies. This indicates that she is not getting the resources that she needs. She also does not have the skills and information needed to integrate visual art. State funded arts organizations, such as the California Arts Council, could be reaching out to local school boards to stress the

importance of art curriculum. Schools could also be made more aware of the free resources provided through the art initiative *Creativity at the Core* to integrate visual and performing arts. In general, local school boards should be requiring their schools to incorporate these standards in curriculum because art is crucial to development, and students across California should be meeting these standards synchronously.

### **Problems and Limitations**

Along with the questionnaire, there was hopes to also be a part of the interviewed teacher's classroom for 20 hours. Because of Covid-19, schools had been canceled until the end of the school year. This service opportunity would have allowed for more one-on-one time with the teacher to better understand her teaching methods. Instead of a questionnaire, an in-person interview could have been conducted. This might have allowed more data to be collected, especially from the principal of the school.

This was also a small sample size. These results do not speak to every California public school. It also does not give an accurate view of all elementary school teachers. The teacher interviewed had no formal art education, was not prepared in her teacher preparation program to integrate art, and was not offered professional development through the school. Also, there might be other districts, or schools in the area, who are using the VAPA Standards. It might be by chance that this school is not incorporating them. Further research would need to be conducted to get a more accurate picture.

### **Conclusion**

Art has been a way in which previous generations passed down knowledge, made connections to the world, and communicated with one another. The arts are crucial to development and therefore should be included in curriculum taught in our schools. Ultimately,

the arts provide students with essential skills that they will carry with them the rest of their lives. These skills include, but are not limited to problem solving, creative thinking, fluency in thought, and risk-taking. When art is included in curriculum, students excel in other subjects and test scores improve as well. The arts also aid in grasping subjects such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), which is why programs are integrating the arts in subjects like such.

Unfortunately, because of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) the arts were cut, or reduced greatly from school curricula. In California specifically, there has been a push to revive the arts. Governors Jerry Brown and Gavin Newsom increased permanent funding for the arts, which have helped state organizations such as the California Arts Council provide grants to schools and non-profit organizations. Although they are available to these groups, they need to be applied for. Visual and Performing Arts Common Core Standards were introduced in California, which helps schools meet benchmarks, but local school boards have the choice to use them or not. The state, although highly recommends that they are satisfied, does not monitor if districts are using them.

The results gathered from the school, indicate that the administration, teachers, and parents take it upon themselves to provide students with an education in the arts. Even though they have not officially discussed, or incorporated the VAPA Standards, the school is currently building a STEAM lab at their school. They also help fund an afterschool mural program called Art4change. This program serves 5<sup>th</sup> grade students and provides them with visual art experience through conceptualizing, drawing, and by painting a large-scale mural.

Overall, the primary question was answered through a questionnaire sent to a teacher and principal at an elementary school, but because this was a small sample size, more research needs

to be done. It would be helpful to get a better idea of how many elementary schools in California are receiving grants and incorporating the Visual and Performing Arts State Standards in their curriculum. These standards are solid benchmarks in which all schools in California should be meeting. It is also essential that teachers are getting the resources and skills they need to be able to incorporate them.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

#### Principal's Questionnaire:

- 1.) Has El Roble seen any new funding for the arts from the state (visual art specifically), besides grant money, within the past 2 years? If so, do you feel that it was an adequate amount?
- 2.) Has anyone at El Roble applied for and/or received grant money from the state within the past 2 years for visual arts education? Who? When?
- 3.) How is El Roble incorporating the 2019 Visual and Performing Arts Common Core Standards into curriculum?
- 4.) Has your school hired art-specific teachers? If not, are current teachers being provided resources and/or methods to satisfy these common core standards?

#### Teacher's Questionnaire:

- 1.) Do you have experience, or a formal education in the arts, specifically in visual arts?
- 2.) Did your teacher preparation program in college prepare you to teach visual art, or integrate it into lessons?
- 3.) If your experience in art was limited, were you offered professional development through your school?
- 4.) Do you have the resources you need in order to provide students with an education in visual art? Resources include, art supplies and support from administration?
- 5.) Given the new (2019-2020) common core standards for visual and performing arts, how is your school incorporating these standards into daily, or weekly lessons?