



# Santa Barbara County Education Office

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## **Enriching lives through arts education and community partnerships**

*By Susan Salcido, Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools*

The arts engage a part of the human spirit that is often beyond the reach of lessons in multiplication, grammar, or history. All these subjects are vital for children to learn, of course, but the arts comprise a different dimension of learning and instruction. For many children, art is intuitive, creative, and personally beautiful.

As our truly gifted 2018 Performing Arts Teacher of the Year, Garson Olivieri from Cabrillo High in Lompoc, says, “Music isn’t what we do, it’s who we are.” It is a form of human expression, communication, and creation. Children of all ages intuitively relate to the performing arts because of what it touches inside them. In fact, the arts provide unique ways of teaching students who may not access knowledge as readily through language and mathematics alone.

Teachers countywide use art in a variety of forms to help students learn. Garson Olivieri, in particular, is a proven master. He has spoken of the value students derive from a vibrant arts curriculum. “It’s a reflection of the culture which creates it, and provides a way to examine thoughts and emotions in pure form,” he said. “Students are enriched as artists, as members of society, as students of other disciplines, and as people.”

We are grateful for dedicated and highly effective educators like Olivieri, and all those he represents. We also appreciate our supportive and helpful community partners, including the Santa Barbara Bowl, which three years ago initiated the Performing Arts Teacher of the Year award that Olivieri recently accepted. The Bowl created this prestigious award as a means of fostering the arts and enriching our local community.

The Santa Barbara Bowl has also provided numerous donations of musical instruments to local schools, provided special performances for students, and issued educational grants funded in part by a contribution of \$1 from every concert ticket sold. By investing in future audiences and artists who attend local schools, the Bowl reinforces its steadfast belief in the power of the arts to transform lives.

Many others have also stepped up to recognize the importance of arts and culture in our schools. The new Performing Arts Center at Pioneer Valley High School in Santa Maria, the Orcutt Children’s Arts Foundation, and the Children’s Creative Project—which puts on the annual *I Madonnari* Festival every May—are only a few examples that testify to the value our community places on arts education. So, too, does “Ignite Santa Barbara County,” an inaugural arts symposium convening at the Santa Barbara County Education Office this November, where educators and non-profit leaders work collaboratively to make arts education even more dynamic and impactful for both students and educators.

All these efforts demonstrate how arts education goes beyond the specific activities and abilities required to take part in singing, performing, or playing an instrument. A recent Harris Poll demonstrated that music education can also teach skills needed for success in a job or career. The poll showed that half of those who had been involved in a music program reported that music education was extremely or very important in providing the skills of working toward common goals, striving for individual excellence in a group setting, obtaining the skills of creative problem solving, and flexibility in a work situation.

The arts are essential elements of a complete education, and often provide the skills and motivation required for school success. For all these reasons, we thank dedicated educators like Garson Olivieri, who use their classes every day to encourage, engage, and challenge students. In doing so, they unlock their students’ imaginations, and help them learn a form of expression and communication that transforms our students’ experiences.

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