



Cablegrams

February 2001

Why Art Matters is a publication of the San Francisco 2nd District PTA made possible by a grant from the San Francisco Arts Commission, with support from The ArtCouncil, and sponsored by the Every Child Can Learn Foundation.

Special Edition

Why

Matters . . .

A Parents Guide to Arts Education for Children

DANCE

Do your children imitate the movements of animals when they play or just start moving when they hear music?

Your children are entering the world of Dance.

MUSIC

Do you like to sing to or with your children? Do they try to play a musical instrument or take lessons? Do you listen to music together?

You are beginning their education in the field of Music.

THEATER

Do your children dress up in old clothes and hats, put on "shows" for you and other family members and friends, act out stories?

They are developing their Theater Arts skills.

VISUAL ARTS

Do your children play with crayons, colored markers, scissors, colored paper, glue, clay?

They are learning to express themselves using the Visual Arts.

LOOK INSIDE!

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Why Art Matters . . .

Arts activities, like those described on the cover, are key to your child's healthy growth and development at school. When young children learn to express themselves through play with drawing, performing, music, and dance, it strengthens their ability, as they grow older, to learn to read and write. Art in school and at home enhances children's connections to each other, to their community, and to themselves.

Arts Education Encourages Creativity

Creativity is not a gift given only to some. We can all learn to be more creative by practicing. One reason **Art Matters** at school and at home is because it encourages children to practice creativity, a skill that will help them throughout their lives.

What Is Creativity?

Creativity is a very personal thing. We are creative when we find a new way to look at something, discover a new way of doing something, have a new idea, change an attitude, or have a thought that is new to us. A creative thought, idea, or action is one that is unique or new to the person thinking or doing it.

More Than One Way to Think

One aspect of creativity is how we think. Just as there is more than one way to be a good parent, there is more than one way to think.

Convergent thinking helps our children to succeed in school. It focuses thoughts in one direction in order to come up with the one correct answer to a question. It is important to learn this type of thinking, and our children practice it in school every day as they learn math, reading, and other academic subjects.

Divergent thinking is a basic building block of creativity. It expands thoughts in many directions, allowing for many possible right answers. Divergent thinking is a valuable life skill, and art is a good way for children to practice it.

In arts education at school and arts activities at home, there are many right ways to do things. Children learn to consider the options and make decisions, depending on their own unique idea of the right answer.

Practice Develops Creative Skills

The understanding that some questions have more than one right answer helps us and our children when we are faced with life's larger, complex questions, like: "What should I do with my spare time?" or "What kind of job do I want?" The more practice we have in coming up with a variety of answers, the more skill we develop in solving problems and making decisions.

“Let’s get rid of the idea that art activity is reserved for divinely gifted people and that aesthetic perception is the exclusive property of a cultivated leisure class.”

—Grant Wood, American artist & teacher, 1938

Arts Education Values Individuals

Your child does not have to be a gifted artist to benefit from art classes and activities. **Art Matters** in elementary school because it recognizes and values each child’s strengths. By engaging their natural talents, art gives children pleasurable and successful experiences at school, just for being themselves. These positive feelings can motivate children to continue going to school and to pursue learning in other subjects.

More Than One Kind of Intelligence

As parents, we are aware of what is special and unique about our children. More and more, educators and psychologists are recognizing what we have always known: There is more than one kind of intelligence. According to the Theory of Multiple Intelligences, each of us has eight intelligences that combine and blend uniquely, just like each person has a unique personality.

In most school subjects, only two intelligences are valued and developed—linguistic and mathematical—but the arts value and develop the other six intelligences. Studies show that once learning through art has begun, it is likely to continue in math, science, history, and other academic subjects.

As you read the chart below, think about your child and about yourself. Check your child’s (and your own) areas of strength. If you are not sure, spend some time observing. What comes naturally? What is fun and easy to do? Make a list and then read the chart again to see what intelligences stand out for each of you.

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| ■ Linguistic
Reading, writing,
speaking, and
listening | ■ Logical/Mathematical
Numbers, problem
solving | ■ Visual/Spatial
Visualization,
maps, puzzles,
creating mental
pictures | ■ Intrapersonal
Self-reflective,
intuitive, spiritual |
| ■ Naturalistic
Outdoors, animals,
subtle differences
in meaning | ■ Bodily-Kinesthetic
Physical coordina-
tion, movement,
activity | ■ Musical
Sensitivity to
rhythm and beats | ■ Interpersonal
Relationships,
communication,
cooperation |

Recognize and Encourage Intelligences

Once you recognize intelligences, encourage them. At home on weekends or after school, join your child in art or learning activities that engage his or her strong intelligences. Talk to your child’s teacher about your observations. But remember, use the categories for discovery and inclusion, not to label or exclude yourself or your child.

How To Start Art

When parents and teachers work together to recognize, value, and encourage each child's creativity and unique blend of intelligences and skills, we open the doors of the future to our children. When we work together for arts education at home, at school, and in the community, we open the doors of education to all children.

At Home . . .

There are many ways you can start and support art at home. You don't need any special background or resources—just the desire to help your child discover and learn. Self-expression through art, such as painting, playacting, singing, or making creatures with homemade clay, is fun and a natural activity for children. It enriches their lives, and it will enrich yours if you give it a chance.

Where Do I Start?

One way to ignite your child's excitement about art is to be enthusiastic yourself.

- **Talk about art.** Tell your child the history of a special work of art in your home—a quilt, a musical instrument, a piece of pottery. Or ask your child to tell you about a piece of art they like and why they like it. Your child will benefit greatly just from having an enjoyable conversation with you!
- **Read about art.** Get books from the library about dancers, actors, musicians, and visual artists, like painters or sculptors, and read them out loud to your child. The single most important thing you can do for your child's overall development is read out loud.
- **Provide materials and acknowledge your child's work.** Crayons, clay, dress-up clothes, or a musical instrument, and a place to use and keep them will encourage your child's creativity and imagination. Display your child's art work in the house and give your full attention to "talent shows."
- **Do things together.** Establish an art time, for example, Wednesday afternoon or Saturday morning, and work on a project together, or each do your own. Talk about the ideas you have and the decisions you must make as you create. Vary your projects to include music, singing, dance, and drama as well as the visual arts.
- **Take your child out.** Go to a museum or performance with your child. Taking your child out is one of the most important things you can do.

ART MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES FOR HOME

Dance

Materials

Radio, tapes and CDs, books about different types of dance

Activities

If you know how to dance, teach your child. Or play a game with movement and music. For example, Echo: when the music starts, the leader performs a movement and then freezes. The "echo" observes, then copies the movement and freezes. Take turns being leader and echo.

Visual Art

Materials

Paper, crayons, finger paints, water colors, homemade clay, old magazines, buttons, yarn, scraps of material, macaroni, scraps of wood

Activities

Encourage your child to observe all around them. What shapes do they see within objects? For example, circle, square, triangle, straight or curved line. What tools and materials do they want to use to create those shapes? Two-dimensional art might be drawn or painted on paper while 3-dimensional art might be made with clay or wood.

Here are some things you may already have at home that you can use to encourage your child's interest in art.

THINGS TO DO



Drama

Materials

Old clothes, hats, shoes, wigs, jewelry for dress-up. Puppets or puppet-making materials and a large box for a stage

Activities

Read stories or poems out loud, playing the characters with your child. Use your voice alone, or add props and costumes, or do a puppet show. Play charades, a good opportunity to practice mime.



START ART!

SKETCHBOOK OF FEELINGS

"Art comes from the heart, and it is helpful to be able to express what is there," says Ernest Regua of the Community School of Music and Arts in Mountain View. He gives children a blank book, which they use to create a visual diary of their moods by drawing pictures in it each day. You might consider getting one for yourself too!

Music

Materials

Wooden spoons, pots and pans, a harmonica or kazoo, your hands for clapping, your voice, radio, a variety of tapes and CDs

Activities

Encourage experimentation on instruments of all kinds, professional or homemade. Play along, or clap your hands, as you listen to different songs together, keeping a steady beat with the music. Make up songs or sing "oldies" when you are walking or driving.

Books With Easy Projects

Global Art: Activities, Projects, and Inventions from Around the World, by MaryAnn F. Kohl and Jean Potter. Over 130 projects from all continents. Published by Gryphon House, 1998, \$14.95.

Paper Patchwork, by Lone Morton. Stencils, templates, ideas, and instructions. Published by Contemporary Books, 1998, \$6.95.

Fun with Modeling Clay, by Barbara Reid. Kids Can Press, 1998, \$5.95.

Simple Puppets from Everyday Materials, by Barbara MacDonald Buetter. Published by Sterling Publishing Co., 1996, \$12.95

Arts and Crafts Recipes, A Klutz Guide. Published by Klutz, 1998, \$4.95.



At School . . .

There are many ways parents can start and support art at school, but it may be hard to begin. We may not feel welcome or comfortable at school, or we may feel that we don't have enough information to know what to do. Remember that obstacles have been overcome at other schools, and 30 years of research tells us one thing: *Family involvement in school is the critical factor for student success.* Arts education is a good

WHAT SHOULD MY CHILD BE LEARNING?

The State of California has set some standards for what all children should be learning in the arts. These standards urge that children be taught to:

- create and perform their own art works;
- talk and write about art with an understanding of art vocabulary words;
- explore art in its historical and cultural context;
- respond to, analyze, and judge art works;
- connect their learning in art to other subjects.

place for parents to start being involved because most teachers need and want help with art in their classroom.

Your first step is self-education: Read this brochure, talk to school and district staff, and read your school's site plan, which details the goals for the year. The site plan is a public document, available from the school principal. Look especially for the parts about family participation and arts education.

Art Matters When Parents Get Involved . . .

Now you are ready to start asking questions. Keep track of everything you learn.

Questions to ask your child's teacher

Does the teacher need parent volunteers to help during art projects or on art field trips? Are there enough art supplies at the school? Are the four art areas taught in the classroom? Is my child evaluated in art? Where is that on the report card? Does the teacher feel that art is important and is she satisfied with arts education at the school?

Questions to ask your school principal

Is there an arts program for all grades and classes at the school? Does it include the four art areas and the standards explained above? Does the school have an artist-in-the-classroom program? Who is the artist and what do they do? Is art included in the school site plan? (Now is a good time to ask for a copy of the plan.) What can parents and the community do to support and improve arts education at the school?

Contact the School District Office

The District administration will know about the district budget and teacher training for arts education. They can answer questions about the curriculum and assessment. You can get information about what is working in other elementary schools in the city, planning a Family Art Night, or ideas for a school-community art partnership.

Contact the Board of Education

As elected officials, school board members are responsible for hearing your concerns. Be an arts advocate. Let them know that art matters in our schools. For Board of Education meeting times and agendas, contact your board of education.

Call the PTA (Parent Teacher Association)

If you have a PTA, call the president, tell her about your interest in supporting the arts, and ask how to get involved. If you don't have a PTA, call your council or district office for help with getting started on organizing a parent group. The PTA sponsors two arts programs that you could start at your school: *Be Smart, Include Art* and *Reflections*. The PTA also has up-to-date information on state and local legislation and grants relating to arts education.

In the Community . . .

In California, we are home to one of the largest and most varied arts communities in the United States. As parents, we can build connections between the arts community and our school community. The more community connections children feel as they grow older, the more likely they are to live positive and healthy lives.

Art Matters Because It Connects Children to Communities . . .

If you already have a PTA or other organization that is involved with the school, here are some ideas for next steps.

- **Invite community artists to talk with your PTA** about their work. Some artists may be happy to come as volunteers; others make part of their living through their work with children and schools. The California State PTA provides information on how to bring artists and arts organizations into your school at www.capta.org
- **Arrange to exhibit children's art work in public places**, like your neighborhood bank, library, community center, or cafe. This could build community support for funding arts education in the schools.
- **Invite the press and elected officials to school arts events**. They can see firsthand the importance of the arts and become advocates for arts programs at school.
- **Support political initiatives** that will bring sustainable funding for art into the schools. California State PTA provides information on statewide initiatives at www.capta.org

Art Matters When You Know More . . .

Credit for the ideas on pages 2 & 3 goes to:
Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences by Howard Gardner.

Minds in Motion: Using Museums to Expand Creative Thinking by Alan Gartenhaus.

Eloquent Evidence: Arts at the Core of Learning,
National Endowment for the Arts.

Publications on Arts Education

Why Art Matters, a special February 2001 edition of the SFPTA Cablegram. Call (415) 241-6048

Fine Arts Guide: K-5. (a curriculum guide)
Call the SFUSD at (415) 759-2916.

Leadership Profiles in Arts Education, Arts Education Funders Collaborative at (415) 252-2596: www.sfinsideout.org.

California Standards for the Visual and Performing Arts, available late in 2001 from the California Dept. of Education. To order call 800-995-4099.

National Standards for Arts Education, available from MENC at 800-828-0229.

Websites

Each website you visit will offer links to other sites with arts education information.

San Francisco 2nd District PTA:
www.sfusd.k12.ca.us/partners/pta

California PTA: www.capta.org

National PTA (*Be Smart, Include Art & Reflections*): www.pta.org

Inside Out (arts education, resources, and links): www.sfinsideout.org.

Calif. Dept. of Education (standards & other information): www.cde.ca.gov

U.S. Dept. of Education: www.ed.gov

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education: www.ncpie.org

Family Education Company (connecting parents, schools, & communities):
www.familyeducation.com

Americans for the Arts (to make arts more accessible to everyone): www.artsusa.org

California Arts Project provides information on standards and resources for parents: www.ucop.edu/tcap

California's statewide resource center for arts education provides information on developing standards based art curriculum: www.teachingarts.org

Standards in Arts Education

The California State Superintendent of Public Instruction created a task force on the arts, which published a report in 1997 entitled *ArtsWork: A Call for Arts Education* for all California Students. It calls for statewide standards, legislation, and additional funding for arts programs. It can be purchased for \$11.25 from the California Department of Education Press at (800) 995-4099.

The California Board of Education recently adopted standards for schools in the visual and performing arts. Standards tell a school district what the state considers important for students to learn at each grade level. The detailed standards are available only on the Internet at this time at www.cde.ca.gov/shsd/arts

Art Matters When Parents Speak Out . . .

As parents, we can make a difference. By educating ourselves and then working together with other parents, school staff, artists, and the community, we can make art happen at home, at school, and in the community. When we give our children art, we give them their best chance to succeed in today's world.

The SFPTA Family Arts Workshop

This brochure is published to coincide with the annual Family Arts Workshop organized by the San Francisco 2nd District PTA. The project is made possible by grants from the San Francisco Arts Commission and The ArtCouncil, and sponsored by the Every Child Can Learn Foundation.

This half-day free workshop provides elementary school parents and their children with a unique opportunity to learn more about art at home, at school and in the community. Participants enjoy a live performance, create art together, talk with artists, and discover ways to be more involved in the arts through a multitude of arts events for youth in San Francisco.

At the event, artists, community organizations, and PTA volunteers join together to help parents deepen their understanding of, and become advocates for the arts. Working side by side with artist-teachers, parents learn how to recognize their children's talents and encourage their creativity. Every participant receives a library of arts resources.

For more information about the Family Arts Workshop or the publication *Why Art Matters*, contact the SFPTA via email at dplatner@aol.com