

# Creativity at the Center

A New Vision for Arts Education  
in the San Diego Unified School District

January 2021

SDUSD Visual and Performing Arts Department



cpag

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# I. Executive Summary

## Introduction and Methodology

This report presents a vision for the evolution of visual and performing arts education in the San Diego Unified School District. The intention is to consider broader possibilities for arts education as the Visual and Performing Arts Program (VAPA) prepares to create a new strategic plan and to align with the District's new guiding Vision 2030, which is currently in development.

To support a broader view, this vision project reexamined the fundamental role of arts education. If we believe that arts have great value for students and society, where do we go from here? What will success look like for arts education? How can VAPA better prepare students for college and careers, inside and outside the arts? How can the VAPA program and the District better align with the region's economic development strategies? How can VAPA support racial and cultural equity? How can VAPA make the best use of San Diego's creative community? The answers have potentially far-reaching implications for VAPA and the District.

*Vision 2030 is all about creativity. Whether expressed through art forms or inspired by arts education, we want students to think creatively all the time. Arts have to be at the center.*

*Richard Barrera, President,  
Board of Education*

## Overarching Themes

Research included a review of relevant plans and studies, supplemented by interviews with 39 key stakeholders inside and outside the District, including arts education, higher education, economic development, workforce development, City of San Diego, the arts community, and others. Several overarching themes emerged:

- Creativity is an essential skill in education and society, and arts education is a powerful tool to teach and practice creativity.
- Creativity and arts education are now widely seen as central to the educational success of the District.
- Arts education should become better aligned externally with the region's economic development, workforce readiness, and higher education.
- There is a well-grounded faith in the California Arts Education Framework and curriculum standards to produce excellent educational results, if truly implemented.
- San Diego's creative community is a large collective resource with greater potential to augment the District's VAPA program.

## Opportunities for Arts Education

There are several opportunities for arts education to fulfill an expanded vision, for both the VAPA Program and the District as a whole:

- Align with regional economic development strategies: arts education has a vital role to play in efforts to develop a local talent pipeline by building creativity and other essential employment skills, focusing especially on underrepresented students beginning before 7<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Explore collaborations with the City’s Department of Cultural Affairs: the Department’s new *Creative Economy Report* documents opportunities for engaging San Diego’s creative sector people and organizations, and preparing students for creative employment.
- Better prepare students for college and career: this is an explicit goal of the District and VAPA can play a larger role in helping students, teachers, families and counselors understand and prepare for expanded opportunities inside and outside the arts.
- Address access barriers and make arts education available to all: VAPA and the District have made great strides in improving access and equity in recent years. VAPA has analyzed current offerings and pathways and documented gaps for future action.
- Focus on VAPA’s cultural relevancy and instructional approaches: stakeholders believe it is imperative that arts education become more culturally relevant to students’ backgrounds. This is intrinsic to the District’s commitment to make education equitable and anti-racist.
- Intentionally incorporate creativity into Vision 2030: arts education, and creativity more generally, have an essential role throughout Vision 2030. The opportunity is to reimagine how VAPA can contribute best.
- Expand VAPA’s partnership with CTE: there are models for the two programs to adapt their individual strengths to best fulfill the District’s goals.
- Expand relationships with San Diego’s creative community: engagement with working artists and professional arts experiences are part of the California Arts Education Framework, and advance college and career preparation. This will require structure, management and mediation.
- Leverage positive innovations sparked by Covid-19: this vision project was developed during severe and ongoing disruptions throughout the District and VAPA. In addition to the difficulties and losses, stakeholders identified potential gains from changes and lessons arising from the pandemic.
- Explore potential funding sources for education and arts education: other communities have created new funding sources and the District can pursue a range of opportunities to “expand the resource pie.”

*The District’s entire educational design should be built around the arts. This is a moment of total disruption – there is no alternative but to change.*

*Dr. Sharon Whitehurst-Payne,  
Vice President, Board of  
Education*



# Introduction & Methodology

## II. Introduction and Methodology

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project is to develop a vision for the evolution of visual and performing arts education in the San Diego Unified School District. The intention is to consider broader possibilities for arts education as the Visual and Performing Arts Program (VAPA) prepares to create a new strategic plan and to align with the District's new guiding Vision 2030, which is currently in development.

It's an opportune time to reconsider VAPA. Arts education in the District has made great strides in recent years and now appears to be at its highest level in District history. While exact comparisons are not available, it is clear that VAPA now serves more students at higher levels of quality than ever before. The VAPA Department created a five-year strategic plan in 2016, now in its final year of implementation. Through the framework of that plan, arts education programs have expanded to serve more schools with a more diverse array of programs, improve instructional pathways, and offer more disciplines than ever in the past. The quality of instruction has strengthened across the board, and the District boasts many notable examples of artistic excellence. More work remains to address equity and access, and to close remaining gaps in the ecosystem of arts education. But it is a time to acknowledge and celebrate arts education for its successes in the District.

VAPA's work is part of a larger educational movement. The District is guided by a vision of what society can become and the role of education in advancing the community towards that goal. It seeks to provide "quality schools in every neighborhood." It is making sustained and systemic efforts to address fundamental challenges such as racial bias and equity. It is working to close achievement gaps and diversify its workforce. VAPA has innovated to contribute to these larger efforts. For example, VAPA has created new programs that integrate the arts with other content areas, such as science, technology, engineering and math in the District's STEAM Initiative. It has also used new scheduling approaches to create much-needed instructional time for the arts.

VAPA's past strategic plan was primarily internal. It focused first and effectively on strengthening VAPA systems and building the foundation for quality arts education. A guiding principle of that plan was, and should remain, to fully implement the California Arts Education Framework and curriculum standards. The next VAPA strategic plan will also take a broader view and look externally to the place of arts education in the larger educational and regional context of San Diego.

To support a broader view, this vision project reexamines the fundamental role of arts education. If we believe that arts have great value for students and society, where do we go from here? What will success look like for arts education? How can VAPA better prepare students for college and careers, inside and outside the arts? How can the VAPA program and the District better align with the region's economic development strategies? How can VAPA support racial and cultural

equity? How can VAPA make the best use of San Diego's creative community? The answers have potentially far-reaching implications for VAPA and the District.

This report was developed during severe disruptions throughout the District and VAPA Program caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The vision is influenced to a degree by Covid-19 but looks ahead to a post-pandemic future that can incorporate lessons from these challenges.

## METHODOLOGY

To develop the vision project, the VAPA Director first worked with the consultant in July 2020 to lay a firm foundation by refining and agreeing on the project purpose and process. This included a list of questions to be answered through the research. To provide context, the consultant reviewed a list of relevant plans and studies, such as the current VAPA strategic plan, the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation's Inclusive Growth Agenda, San Diego Creative Economy report, Vision 2030, and others. They identified a list of 39 interviewees inside and outside the District who represented key arts education stakeholders (see list of individuals, next page):

- Arts Organizations / Arts Partners
- Board of Education
- College and Career Technical Education Department
- City of San Diego Department of Cultural Affairs
- San Diego City College
- San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation
- San Diego State University
- San Diego Workforce Partnership
- Superintendent of Education
- University of California, San Diego
- University of San Diego
- VAPA Advisory Committee
- VAPA arts teachers and principals
- VAPA staff

Interviewees were selected not only for their representation but also for their capacity to engage in visionary thinking about arts education. The Director and consultant together conducted interviews from August to October, and held two group discussions with VAPA staff. The consultant reviewed and synthesized the research materials, as well as District data, and developed the draft report in November. It was reviewed and vetted first by the Director, then by District leadership and additional stakeholders. A revised draft report was circulated to all interviewees and feedback incorporated in the final version in January 2021.

## VISION PARTICIPANTS

Maria Araujo, Vice President for Learning and Community Engagement, San Diego Symphony  
Richard Barrera, President, Board of Education, San Diego Unified School District  
Rebecca Bellingham, Artist and Professional Development Consultant, San Diego Unified School District  
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Timothy Farson, Principal, San Diego School for Creative and Performing Arts  
Anne Fennell, K-12 Music Program Manager, VAPA Department, San Diego Unified School District  
Jonathon Glus, Executive Director, City of San Diego Department of Arts and Culture  
Amy Gray, Education Manager, The New Children's Museum  
Professor Allan Havis, Department of Theatre & Dance, University of California at San Diego  
Tomoko Kuta, Deputy Museum Director, The New Children's Museum  
Andrea Lemaitre, Chair, VAPA Advisory Council; Dance Faculty, San Diego School for the Creative and Performing Arts  
Dr. Jeffrey Malecki, Director of Bands & Music Education, University of San Diego  
Cindy Marten, Superintendent, San Diego Unified School District  
Donald Masse, Art Teacher, Zamorano Fine Arts Academy  
Ethan Morgan, VAPA Facilities Manager, VAPA Department, San Diego Unified School District  
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Dr. Michael Remson, President & CEO, San Diego Youth Symphony and Conservatory  
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Adrienne Valencia, Executive Director, Arts for Learning  
Eduardo Velasquez, Research Director, San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation  
Sarah Vielma, Director, College and Career Technical Education, San Diego Unified School District  
Dr. Sharon Whitehurst-Payne, Vice President, Board of Education, San Diego Unified School District  
Laura Williams, Choral Resource Teacher, VAPA Department, San Diego Unified School District  
Samuel Woodhouse, Artist Director, San Diego Repertory Theatre





# An Expanded Vision for Arts Education

# III. An Expanded Vision for Arts Education

## THEMES

The vision research asked stakeholders to reflect on the role of arts education and its potential to be more effective in broader purposes. We asked how to strengthen arts instruction, as was done in the first strategic plan. We also asked about bold goals for arts education – its highest and best possible educational use. The following themes emerged from across the stakeholder interviews and discussion groups.

**Creativity is an essential skill in education and society, and arts education is a powerful tool to teach and practice creativity.**

Stakeholders inside and outside the District emphasize the importance of creativity. They believe it is essential to a successful society – community wellbeing, economic competitiveness, achieving a just and fair society, and other overarching goals. It is also central to educational success. They believe that arts education – VAPA – is a powerful way to develop students’ creativity.

*Vision 2030 is all about creativity. Whether expressed through art forms or inspired by arts education, we want students to think creatively all the time. Arts have to be at the center.*

*Richard Barrera, President,  
Board of Education*

**Creativity and arts education are now widely seen as central to the educational success of the District.**

There was resounding confirmation of the role of arts education in achieving the educational goals of the District. The District is in the process of refining its new Vision 2030, which sets out a highly aspirational framework grounded in ideas about the type of society we seek to create. Creativity is central to the elements of the vision and to each goal. Arts education is valuable as arts instruction as well as for its larger capacity to develop students into the people we want in our society. Vision 2030 goals can be achieved through the arts, for example, by developing critical thinking skills, social-emotional learning, advancing equity, and closing the achievement gap.

**Arts education should become better aligned externally with the region’s economic development, workforce readiness, and higher education.**

Stakeholders across-the-board view arts education as important to regional goals for economic development, workforce readiness, and higher education. They believe that creativity is an essential workforce skill and that arts education, more than other subjects, teaches creativity. They also understand that arts education develops many other desirable employment characteristics and can help students of all backgrounds succeed educationally. It helps close the achievement gap and prepare students, including from historically underperforming groups, for highly desirable jobs in the innovation economy. Colleges and universities in the region seek to

recruit and serve District graduates and view strong arts education as increasing an applicant's competitiveness in the admissions process.

**There is a well-grounded faith in the California Arts Education Framework and curriculum standards to produce excellent educational results, if truly implemented.**

Arts educators share a belief, borne of experience, in the fundamental power of the framework to benefit students. Excellence in arts instruction, over time, produces the qualities we seek to engender in students: creative problem solving, team work, empathy, cultural competence, confidence to handle challenges, resilience in the face of failure, and more. Shortcomings are due to shortfalls in implementing the curriculum standards, not vice versa. This drives educators' desire for things like equitable access to the arts for all students and providing consistent instructional pathways. These enable the power of the framework.

**San Diego's creative community is a large collective resource with greater potential to augment the District's VAPA program.**

The VAPA Program and individual schools have long had relationships with the region's arts and cultural organizations and teaching artists. These relationships can be invaluable and successful, but vary in their consistency and effectiveness. Organizations and artists seek more engagement with the District and better avenues to partner with VAPA and schools. The possibilities are many but there are a variety of communication and resource barriers. The City of San Diego's recent Creative Economy study (see page 15) documents the extraordinary scale and range of the region's creative sector: nonprofit arts organizations, creative businesses, artists and creative professionals. It presents an enormous resource with greater potential to enrich arts education and the VAPA Program.

*The District's entire educational design should be built around the arts. This is a moment of total disruption – there is no alternative but to change.*

*Dr. Sharon Whitehurst-Payne,  
Vice President, Board of  
Education*

## VISION: WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE FOR ARTS EDUCATION?

The following statements are the vision statement for arts education – descriptions of what stakeholders believe success will look like in the future, with an expanded educational role in the District.

The District uses arts education as a primary tool for developing students' creativity and as an innovative partner in achieving other educational goals.

All students have equitable access to arts education throughout their years in the District, including excellent teaching, consistent learning pathways, a diversity of curriculum choices, culturally relevant curriculum, and appropriate resources – in all schools and all grade levels.

The voice of students is heard, respected and reflected throughout arts education.

Arts education is culturally diverse, inclusive, and an effective partner in eliminating systemic racism and bias.

Students, families and communities understand the full value of arts education to their current and future lives.

Arts education develops the full range of student skills, including but extending beyond performance and art-making to encompass reflection, critical thinking, writing, production, documentation, management, and teaching.

Arts education is aligned with the region's economic development and prepares students effectively for careers inside and outside the arts.

Arts education is aligned with the admissions criteria and educational opportunities of colleges and universities, and prepares students effectively for arts learning in higher education.

The VAPA Program encompasses all five artistic disciplines: music, art, theatre, dance and media arts.

The VAPA Program actively partners with CCTE to expand the educational reach of both programs and to leverage the respective strengths of each.

The VAPA Program maintains strong ongoing relationships with regional arts organizations, creative businesses, artists and teaching artists and utilizes partnerships to enrich arts learning for students.

The VAPA Program has strong ongoing internal and external relationships and communications that inform and support its vision.

As a reference, these are the VAPA Department's guiding statements, crafted in 2016:

**Vision Statement**

- Transforming lives through the arts.

**Guiding Principles**

- All students have equitable access to arts education.
- We find strength in diversity.

**Mission Statement**

*San Diego Unified School District will promote artistic literacy, innovation, creativity, and excellence in the arts by providing a high quality, sequential, TK-12 arts experience for all students. By implementing district policies that support and sustain the arts as a core subject, the Visual and Performing Arts Department (VAPA) will support the highest quality arts education in dance, music, theatre, and visual arts, providing services in curriculum and instruction, professional development and community collaboration.*

# Opportunities for Arts Education

## IV. Opportunities for Arts Education

There are several opportunities for arts education to fulfill the expanded vision. They are for both the VAPA Program and the District as a whole.

### ALIGN WITH REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

San Diego now has a comprehensive regional economic development plan, the **Inclusive Growth Agenda** (<https://www.sandiegobusiness.org/research/inclusive-growth/>). This 2019 strategic plan was developed by the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation (EDC). It is a consensus plan for the whole county's economy, developed with a broadly representative leadership group from academia, local government, nonprofits, and the private sector.

The central argument of the Inclusive Growth Agenda is that growth in San Diego's innovation economy has made the region better educated and more prosperous than most of its peer regions. Each job in the innovation economy supports another two jobs in the region. However, this economic transformation presents new challenges for future growth. If unaddressed, San Diego will no longer be an attractive place to live and do business. For the region to remain competitive, proactive measures to promote economic inclusion must be taken.

For arts education, the most relevant part of the plan is the goal to **build a strong talent pipeline**. To meet the region's demand for talent, special focus must be placed on underrepresented populations as they continue to grow proportionately. San Diego's economy depends on a highly-educated and highly-skilled workforce. Changing skill requirements, a nationwide competition for talent and soaring cost of living make attracting talent from elsewhere increasingly difficult. San Diego needs to build a strong local talent pipeline. The EDC and its steering committee have determined that the region

must double its number of locally produced talent to 20,000 new skilled workers in San Diego per year by 2030, as measured by degree or credential completions.

The benefits of the innovation economy are not reaching all San Diegans. The region's Hispanic population, in particular, is glaringly underrepresented in San Diego's highest-paying industries and occupations. A rising tide is not lifting all boats. The most significant factor contributing to this disparate representation is education attainment. Innovation industries require college degrees or credentials. However, the local population does not currently meet the education requirements demanded by the innovation economy and demographic trends suggest the gap will widen. The supply of local talent is not keeping pace with demand. In San Diego, Hispanics are statistically least prepared to enter or

*Smart economic development is inclusive economic development.*

*Inclusive Growth Agenda,  
San Diego Regional  
Economic Development  
Corporation*

*The literature shows that creativity is a skill to be developed and exercised. It is not necessarily innate.*

*Eduardo Velasquez, Research Director, San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation*

complete a degree or credential program, yet represent nearly half of the future local talent pipeline. While not all students aspire to attend college, too many high school graduates in the region are not meeting college entrance requirements and therefore lack the choice and the opportunity. Most Hispanics and blacks are not finishing high school college-ready.

**Arts education has a vital role to play in developing the local talent pipeline** and the EDC is currently turning its focus to public school districts. EDC's research suggests that early interventions, at 7<sup>th</sup> grade and earlier, are needed to prepare students for jobs in the innovation economy. Arts education is important because it develops creativity, which is considered an essential skill for occupations outside as well as inside the arts. For example, software development is projected to be the highest growth occupation in San Diego, and creativity is considered critical to coders' success. Also, the ability to be creative, adaptable, a critical thinker and problem-solver – these are what will prevent an occupation from being automated. Creative skills are less likely to be routine and replaceable.

Specific opportunities for the VAPA Program lie in creating an ongoing relationship with the EDC to align arts education with efforts to build the local talent pipeline. Learning is required on both sides to understand the ways in which the VAPA Program builds creativity and other critical employment skills, and to identify ways to amplify that learning.

The Inclusive Growth Agenda clearly has other implications for the District. Closing the achievement gap is another way of developing the local talent pipeline and of defining alignment with regional economic development. Similarly, better preparing students for success in higher education, such as greater fulfillment of A-G graduation requirements. Countywide data shows that only about one third of high schoolers in San Diego County completes a college degree within six years of graduation. This is half the number of skilled workers needed for our regional economy.

*The STEM vs. humanities debate is a false choice. You need a well-balanced, holistic education to develop individuals that are valued in our economic system.*

*Eduardo Velasquez, Research Director,  
San Diego Regional Economic  
Development Corporation*

*We want to place the District at the core of the region's economic development.*

*Richard Barrera, President,  
Board of Education*

The EDC has focused its initial implementation of the educational components of the Inclusive Growth Agenda on community colleges. Three community college presidents now serve on the EDC board of directors. The EDC now seeks to build relationships with public school districts to help influence the talent pipeline at earlier points in the educational process. One possibility is for the District to join the leadership of the Inclusive Growth Agenda.

The EDC oversees the region's overall efforts to build a more competitive and successful economy. The **San Diego Workforce Partnership** (SDWP) is another important agency, charged with preparing San Diegans for meaningful work opportunities. The SDWP is recognized as a highly innovative organization in its efforts to assist students as well as adults with specific barriers to employment.



The District already has a productive relationship with the SDWP. In recent years, the District has collaborated with the SDWP in the My Next Move program, which assists students to self-identify career opportunities. To date, the District has allowed career poster boards to be placed in all schools. The poster boards educate students, teachers, administrators, counselors and families about career opportunities, requirements, pay, sample companies, etc. This does not yet include the arts or creative occupations, so this is one simple opportunity to highlight and encourage career opportunities in the creative sector.

**The SDWP is also interested in greater collaborations with the District.** Specific possibilities, in addition to the My Next Move program, are promoting employment in the region's creative sector, translating San Diego's new Creative Economy Report (see below) into actionable career pathways, promoting student participation in SDWP, developing an entrepreneurship program, and related ideas.

## EXPLORE COLLABORATIONS WITH THE CITY'S DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The City of San Diego is in an auspicious position to explore new collaborative opportunities in the area of arts education. The Commission for Arts and Culture was recently reorganized into the **Department of Cultural Affairs**, with a significantly expanded portfolio and dynamic leadership. Until recently, as the Commission, this agency funded arts education in at least two ways: nonprofit arts organizations receiving City funding were required to provide arts education services and the Commission also had a specific arts education grant fund. As part of its reorganization, the new Department is reevaluating its arts education programs and seeks to partner with the VAPA Program to define mutually beneficial roles.

The Department of Cultural Affairs also recently released a first-ever study of **San Diego's Creative Economy** ([www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/creative\\_economy\\_study.pdf](http://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/creative_economy_study.pdf)), prepared by the EDC (the agency that also developed the Inclusive Growth Agenda). This report has far-reaching implications for arts education and the VAPA Program. It identifies the undeniable importance of the creative sector to the region's overall economy and documents its defining characteristics. These will be useful to the VAPA Program, and other agencies, in identifying career pathways as well as potential new relationships with the creative sector to enrich the offerings of the program.

First, the report documents the scale of the sector. San Diego's creative economy had total economic impact of \$11.1 billion and 107,673 FTE jobs in 2019. There is a total of 7,386 creative firms in the region. The EDC does not publish specific comparisons among economic sectors because methodological challenges can make them misleading. However, the creative sector

*San Diego has built its system around nonprofit organizations. How far do you push them to deliver arts education as opposed to the District?*

*Jonathon Glus, Executive Director,  
City of San Diego Department of  
Arts and Culture*

overlaps with and contributes to the region's largest economic sectors: military/defense, tourism and innovation.

*The City's economic development strategy has not included creative industries. The Commission has lacked a policy structure for this.*

*Jonathon Glus, Executive Director, City of San Diego Department of Arts and Culture*

Second, the creative sector is growing. Creative jobs expanded 11% between 2014 and 2019. They also pay well, with a median income of approximately \$75,000. San Diego's creative firms say that they value work experience even more than college degrees or credentials, illustrating the importance to VAPA students of internships and other pre-professional experiences.

Third, the report highlights the role San Diego's creative economy can play in the region's economic recovery from the pandemic. The creative sector has to date been essentially "unplanned" and is now ripe for strategic investments that can leverage its growth potential. The report provides specific information and entry points for economic development interventions.

The Department's Creative Economy report provides another opportunity for the VAPA Program and the District to align with and leverage the region's abundant creative resources. The VAPA Program has an ongoing relationship with the Department and, through it, can explore future collaborations.

## BETTER PREPARE STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER

Preparing students for college and career is an explicit goal of the District but there are specific opportunities for the VAPA Program in achieving it. There are extra steps VAPA and the District can take in enhancing students' preparation for their lives after graduation.

San Diego's colleges and universities are interested in recruiting District graduates and specifically students with training in the arts. Colleges generally view arts education as valuable preparation for college and the arts are part of the District's graduation requirements. More is possible through ongoing and more strategic relationships with the VAPA Program. This vision report included interviews with representatives from the University of California, San Diego; University of San Diego; San Diego State University; and San Diego City College. Each expressed interest in an expanded relationship regarding arts education and offered specific suggestions.

How can the VAPA Program better prepare students for arts learning in higher education? In many ways, this is similar to preparing them for careers in the creative sector. On the most basic level, the VAPA Program can help students, teachers, counselors, administrators and parents **understand the range of jobs and roles in the creative sector**. Many equate a career in the arts with being an artist: a musician, actor or painter. People often understandably attach stereotypes to an arts career as

*SDSU is a Hispanic-serving university. We want students "from here."*

*Dr. Peggy Shannon, Dean, College of Professional Studies and Fine Arts, San Diego State University*

undesirable – unrealistically competitive and financially impractical. The reality is that creative sector jobs span the range of artistic, design, production, management, technical, engineering,

*Where you go to high school is incredibly important for a student's arts education....*

software, teaching and many other occupations that involve advanced training in creative skills. Generally, the jobs are many and the compensation is above-average. Promoting awareness of the scope of employment creates the possibility for students to explore and see themselves in a future role, and to engage in their own arts education in a more directed manner.

*Black and Latina/o/x students have less access to the arts through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. As a result, they have less preparation for higher level learning in high school and beyond.*

Colleges also suggest providing students – and their teachers, families and counselors – with experiences on campus that allow students to see themselves in higher education. This includes campus arts experiences that can demonstrate the excitement and value of majoring in an arts field. In addition, high school students and arts teachers need better information about admissions requirements, as well as the extracurricular experiences that help prepare students for arts learning on the college level.

*Dr. Patti Saraniero, Founder & Principal,  
Moxie Research*

Nearly all interviewees listed increased exposure to the artistic process as critical to students' arts education. Observing and working alongside professional artists is valued above all in building students' skills and expanding their

understanding of the creative process.

*We have to demystify what lives in the arts can be. Youth's paradigm is stardom.... Social media focuses on the people who get the attention.*

*Rebecca Bellingham, Artist and Professional Development Consultant, San Diego Unified School District*

This extends to other creative work and pre-professional experiences. All stakeholders expressed the belief that experiences beyond arts instruction in the classroom are an effective way to fulfill the promise of arts education. Attending arts events in the community, collaborating with college arts groups, internships in area arts organizations or creative firms, apprenticeships, and community-based creative projects – these expand students' comprehension and help connect them with their own future creative path. This is seen as valuable whether students choose a career in the creative sector or simply develop their own creative abilities.

## **ADDRESS ACCESS BARRIERS AND MAKE ARTS EDUCATION AVAILABLE TO ALL**

This opportunity is axiomatic to the California Arts Education Framework but deserves emphasis. A fundamental question in any arts education program is, "Are they getting the arts? And who is getting it?" Providing meaningful access to arts education for all students, including students with special needs, at all grade levels is central to many of the vision elements. If

students do not engage with arts education at an early age and consistently throughout grade levels, they cannot equitably benefit from its educational and developmental gifts.

The VAPA Program and the District have made great strides in improving access in recent years, as well as making arts education more equitable, especially in the elementary grades. The VAPA Program has also analyzed its current arts education offerings and pathways, and has documented the gaps. There are specific schools and population groups disproportionately impacted, including Black and Hispanic students. This provides an opportunity to address access and equity in a systemic manner, moving forward. In fact, when Black and Hispanic students have access, they take more arts classes than other students.

## FOCUS ON VAPA'S CULTURAL RELEVANCY AND INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES

Many interviewees, including the arts educators, believe it is imperative that arts education become more culturally relevant to students' backgrounds. This is intrinsic to the District's commitment to make education equitable and anti-racist.

Students must be able to see themselves in the artistic and cultural traditions they are taught. Grounding arts education in diverse cultures also offers the opportunity to develop cross-cultural awareness, empathy, and tolerance. San Diego's extraordinary cultural diversity provides ample opportunity to draw on the rich cultures of our own people.

While this belief is shared, there are practical challenges. Arts faculty are less diverse than the student population. Nearly all arts teachers are educated in Eurocentric art forms and traditions, and curriculum is often developed along these same lines. There is great educational value in traditional materials and approaches. At the same time, instructors in all disciplines have found ways to diversify their teaching. Teaching artists and other enrichment experiences offer additional opportunities to open up the materials. But the VAPA Program must look inward as well as outside the District to increase cultural relevancy.

*Access to arts education is the first hurdle. Culturally responsive education is the second.*

*Dalouge Smith, CEO, The Lewis Prize for Music*

*Education tends to micromanage experience for students. The arts ask students to do the work themselves.*

*Rebecca Bellingham, Artist and Professional Development Consultant, San Diego Unified School District*

There is widespread recognition that students live in a culturally diverse world and one that increasingly uses new techniques for making and sharing the arts. Contemporary artists and students alike make beats in a studio instead of writing music on staff paper. They increasingly make art on the computer and not the canvas. People consume the arts more often on an electronic screen than in a theater, and through other contemporary practices. This has profound implications for the VAPA Program. Are arts instructors prepared to "meet students where they are" culturally? Are they versed in new art-making techniques? Do they have access to the equipment, materials and facilities needed to provide more culturally relevant and contemporary arts education? Can they augment their own expertise

with resources from the region’s arts community? The answer is seen not as opening up to pop culture influences as much as acknowledging the new mindset and toolkit for artistry. Arts educators often framed their opinions in the context of balancing the traditional and new or digital techniques, believing each to be valuable to a student’s creativity.

Making arts education more culturally relevant and contemporary naturally will prepare students better for college and career. Culturally relevant typically means more competitive in admissions and more marketable in the employment world.

In addition to the issue of cultural relevancy is a profound belief among arts educators in the power of the creative process. For many, teaching creativity is the ultimate goal and benefit of arts instruction. Teaching students to engage in their own creative processes – apart from cultural context or art form – leads to deeper levels of educational impact. Students learn to trust in the inherent ambiguity of an open-ended process that requires persistence and experimentation to succeed. Just as there is not necessarily a “right answer” to a creative question, there will likely be multiple, unsuccessful attempts on the way to one or more artistic solutions. This promotes resilience and is empowering. It is also transferrable from the arts to other tasks and fields of employment. For the VAPA Program, this may require a different focus to curriculum and professional development.

## INTENTIONALLY INCORPORATE ARTS EDUCATION INTO VISION 2030

The District is in the process of finalizing Vision 2030. A successor to Vision 2020, this document in draft form sets a remarkable framework for the District’s educational efforts, “...widening the sphere of success by engineering equitable learning conditions for students.” The vision statement expands the scope of educational ambition by identifying five skill areas desired for students: cognitive; social and interpersonal; emotional; attitudes, beliefs and mindsets; and leadership. Going far beyond traditional educational outcomes, the skill sets are intended to not only benefit students but improve society and San Diego’s community.

Vision 2030 sets six educational goals for the District:

1. Closing the opportunity and achievement gap with high expectations for all.
2. Access to broad and challenging curriculum.
3. Quality leadership, teaching and learning.
4. Positive school environment, climate and culture, with equity at the core and support for the whole child.
5. Family and community engagement.
6. Well-orchestrated districtwide support services and communications.

*The arts are beneficial to all students, whether or not they pursue arts as a career. It is important to integrate the arts into all areas.*

*Sarah Vielma, Director, College and Career Technical Education (CTE), San Diego Unified School District*

Arts education, and creativity more generally, have an essential role throughout Vision 2030. Creativity is a necessary ingredient in each of the skill areas. For example, creativity is vital to students' cognitive abilities: "...to flexibly organize, adapt and apply knowledge and innovate solutions to real-world challenges." Similarly, creativity is a powerful tool in achieving each of the educational goals. The opportunity is to reimagine how the current VAPA Program can contribute best. In the curriculum goal, the District is exploring how to remake it to be culturally relevant. Rather than silo-ing this learning in Ethnic Studies, the idea is to fashion curriculum across-the-board that is engaging because it is relevant to students and allows young people to learn about their experience. Arts education that draws on student's cultural backgrounds is a natural way to accomplish this objective. If creativity and the arts are "at the center" of Vision 2030, this will require the VAPA Program and arts educators to be at the table and work across disciplines in service of the educational goals.

*We create many separations, even talking about arts education as a separate piece. How do we remove these separations so that arts are a part of each student's learning?*

*Sarah Vielma, Director, College and Career Technical Education (CCTE), San Diego Unified School District*

## EXPAND VAPA'S PARTNERSHIP WITH CCTE

College, Career and Technical Education (CCTE) is the District's program providing college and career-themed courses to high school students. Courses integrate core standards and industry competencies with real-world experiences that prepare students for success in higher education, entry-level employment and career advancement. Courses are offered in 15 industry sectors tied to local economic and workforce needs. As with VAPA, CCTE offers the arts as discrete courses and creativity is an essential skill in coursework for many of the other industry sectors.

*VAPA partnering with CCTE is a good idea. We need to deepen our relationships with San Diego's robust creative industry.*

*Rebecca Bellingham, Artist and Professional Development Consultant, San Diego Unified School District*

The VAPA Program has an ongoing relationship with CCTE and there are opportunities to further develop this connection. Both aim to prepare students for college and career but approach it with different emphases. The differences between the two programs can help define a productive collaboration. VAPA came "from the arts" and is driven now by specialist teachers in specific art forms: music, dance, theatre, visual arts, and media arts. VAPA is effective college prep for many students but it is less oriented to preparation for the range of creative sector jobs. CCTE was originally a job training program for students not planning to attend college. However, it has evolved into preparation for both college and career. CCTE specifically builds job-related skills and offers work experiences, sometimes at employers' sites. This real-world experience is one important strategy to prepare students for careers in the creative sector, including production, technical and administrative occupations not typically taught in VAPA courses.

How can each program adapt to best fulfill the District's goals? Joint planning would be an important first step. CTE and VAPA courses co-exist and sometimes correlate in some of the

*The work in the arts is very similar to CTE. We have similar goals and benefit by working collaboratively.*

*Sarah Vielma, Director, College and Career Technical Education (CTE), San Diego Unified School District*

District's high schools. There are models for the two programs working together. One idea for coordinating the programs is to focus VAPA on foundational learning in the art forms and creative process, while CTE focuses on college and career skills. For example, a student who begins with training in music-making, could then progress to include work experience in audio engineering. There are other possibilities for the programs to differentiate and reinforce one another.

VAPA and CTE also differ in some technical respects. CTE has access to funds for work and campus experiences less available to VAPA. Teacher credentialing differs as well. VAPA teachers must have a specialist credential in their art form, while CTE instructors can be credentialed based on work experience. This opens up valuable access to working creative professionals, for example, designers, artists and arts administrators without regular teacher preparation coursework.

## EXPAND RELATIONSHIPS WITH SAN DIEGO'S CREATIVE COMMUNITY

As discussed in the Vision Themes, the VAPA Program and individual schools in the District have active relationships with arts organizations in the community. Expanding these relationships is a key opportunity for VAPA. It can support better preparation for college and career in multiple ways. Virtually all stakeholders agree that more opportunities to interact with the region's arts community, and its for-profit creative sector, can provide students with great benefits. Engagement with working artists and professional arts experiences is a part of the California Arts Education Framework.

While highly desirable, expanding these relationships poses challenges. Arts organizations cite the need for better communication channels and processes for interacting with the VAPA Program and with individual schools. Arts programs offered by outside organizations must be standards-aligned and otherwise meet the needs of teachers and schools. Mediating the interests of all in relationships between arts organizations and schools requires careful planning and management, and these tasks will likely require new resources of funding, staffing and facilities.

*There is great opportunity in facilitating collaboration among organizations serving District students, assistance to set up ways to partner, for example.*

*Maria Araujo, Vice President for Learning and Community Engagement, San Diego Symphony*

## LEVERAGE POSITIVE INNOVATIONS SPARKED BY COVID-19

This vision project was developed during severe disruptions throughout the District and VAPA Program caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. At this writing, the pandemic is ongoing. It is and has been a time of extraordinary challenges, uncertainty and rapid change. The VAPA Program has nimbly adapted to online learning and unequal student access to needed resources. Arts instructors have remained in touch with and supportive of their students, while developing new curriculum and instructional techniques to meet the demands of the moment. All interviews and discussion groups included discussion of the problems and costs of the pandemic.

This vision project is an exploration of opportunities for arts education and is forward-looking. Stakeholders participating in this study often reflected on the changes and lessons arising from the pandemic, in addition to the losses and unfurling difficulties it causes. In their reflections, they enumerated the potential gains to be considered in recharting the future of arts education in the District.

What might we keep, as the District reemerges from the pandemic? What can a “new normal” look like for VAPA? One possibility is new schedules crafted for the pandemic, which create more time after school for arts education. VAPA teachers have also developed successful new instructional approaches for online lesson plans that can be shared and expanded, providing greater student and teacher access to state-of-the-art pedagogy. Online tools now employed for each artistic discipline can continue to play a role. Some teachers report that parents and caregivers “sat in” on students’ lessons, providing a fascinating glimpse of new family engagement in the arts. These and other positive adaptations can be evaluated for their benefits, moving forward.

*The District’s art team has come together much more during Covid. We are now putting more student choice in the program, pushing this farther and giving different options for how to approach a lesson.*

*Donald Masse, Art Teacher, Zamarano Fine Arts Academy*

## EXPLORE POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES FOR EDUCATION AND ARTS EDUCATION

Many of the opportunities enumerated in this vision report have resource implications. These costs will need to be defined and addressed in the context of annual budgets for VAPA and the District. It is helpful to take a step back and take a larger look at the financial possibilities for the District and arts education. These can keep budget questions from becoming a “zero sum game” that forces unwelcome priority decisions in budgeting, and instead seeks to increase the financial pie rather than merely slicing it differently.



*[The people have]  
the power to enact  
initiatives by  
majority vote.*

*City & County of San  
Francisco v. All Persons  
Interested in the Matter of  
Proposition C*

The VAPA Program created the VAPA Foundation in 2018 as an affiliated nonprofit organization to enhance the quality of and access to arts education in the District. In its first years, the Foundation has raised funds to support its mission and is continuing to build its organizational capacity. There is the potential to expand this funding source.

Many cities have created dedicated public and private funding sources for arts education. Los Angeles County's Arts Education Collective has had a public/private Funders Council for nearly twenty years that has raised significant amounts each year for its countywide programs. Since 2004, the San Francisco Unified School District has had dedicated public funds for purposes that include arts education in its Public Education Enrichment Fund. Schools Rule-Marín is an innovative countywide fundraising campaign that includes the arts in all Marin public school districts.

There are new possibilities for dedicated tax dollars for education and the arts in California. In June 2020, a California Court of Appeals decision opened the door for dedicated taxes enacted with a simple majority vote in certain circumstances. This upends Prop 13 restrictions long thought to prevent taxes dedicated for any purpose, such as education or arts education. The Court of Appeals in that case upheld a tax to fund homelessness services in San Francisco that was enacted through a voter initiative – signature gathering leading to a ballot measure – and that subsequently won a simple majority approval at the ballot box, rather than a two-thirds majority (<https://www.scribd.com/document/467537839/Prop-C-Court-of-Appeal>).

There are other avenues to expand public funding for education and arts education that can and should be considered. The 2020 California Proposition 15, which unfortunately failed to win voter approval, would have created a major new statewide source of dedicated education funding. There are other strategies for changing the funding structure for the District's budget that can and should be pursued in the future to increase resources available for public education and arts education.



# Implications for VAPA Strategic Planning

## V. Implications for VAPA Strategic Planning

The purpose of this vision project is to explore what an expanded view of success looks like for arts education in the future. It is being done in anticipation of VAPA's next strategic planning process in 2021. Because the vision is not itself a strategic plan, the primary focus is on the "what," not the "how." Nonetheless, the stakeholder interviews yielded a wealth of relevant ideas for strategic planning. Stakeholders' suggestions are included here as valuable possibilities and are not prescriptive.

The current VAPA strategic plan, nearing its completion in 2021, generated ways to strengthen the program by building its capacity and filling gaps. The focus was primarily internal to the VAPA program. VAPA's upcoming strategic plan can continue this focus. In addition, there are possibilities identified in this vision project that add new dimensions for planning. They are outward-looking. Examples are aligning with regional economic development, integrating arts education in Vision 2030, and better preparing students for college and career. This will require a new focus on external relationships as well as planning across subject areas and programs within the District.

### **Stakeholder Suggestions and Ideas for VAPA Strategic Planning**

#### New Directions

- Link the new strategic plan to Vision 2030. The arts are implicated in each element of Vision 2030. VAPA can be involved in implementation of Vision 2030 across disciplines and identify ways to place "creativity at the center." Consider the role of VAPA in anti-racism and equity work.
- Participate in EDC's Inclusive Growth Agenda. Consider ways to integrate the District and VAPA into implementation efforts.
- Catalogue and share arts-related admissions requirements for local colleges and universities. Consider implications for curriculum and professional development.
- Consider ways to substantially expand on-campus visits, learning experiences and artistic collaborations with local colleges.
- Establish link with the San Diego Workforce Partnership. Identify ways to leverage their programs and resources for employment in the creative sector. This may involve new SDWP research. Involve CCTE and the City of San Diego Department of Cultural Affairs.
- Consider what can be carried forward from among the adaptations developed during Covid-19.
- Focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Develop inclusive language for VAPA.
- Shift VAPA to be less Eurocentric. Let students see themselves, their history and culture, in the art and artists. This requires adults to agree that the way they learned is not the priority.

- Address access issues for special needs students and English Language Learners.
- Promote awareness of San Diego’s creative economy.

### Community Engagement and Relationships

- Include business and economic development in strategic planning. Bridge the conversations.
- Need to continually educate parents about career possibilities for their child, not “You can’t make a living in the arts.”
- Provide/facilitate internships in local arts organizations and creative businesses. Look for ways to align internships, etc. with the needs of businesses, in part to facilitate funding and other resources.
- Address the coordination needs of new or expanded initiatives, such as offsite placement, internships, partnerships, etc.
- Consider an Office of Innovation Projects at VAPA, to interface with partners outside the District.
- Address the issue of VAPA’s role and relationship with local arts partners. Address the structure and management of relationships with arts providers in the community.
- Consider an Arts for All-type role for VAPA or an intermediary to market and book residencies, partnerships, performances. Is this a different relationship with AERO, Arts for Learning, or other existing agency?
- Create better entry points to VAPA and the District for arts organizations, e.g., ways to publicize opportunities to schools, students and parents and explore partnerships with the District or schools.
- Improve communications among VAPA, CCTE and arts organizations/creative businesses.
- Consider universal exposure program, e.g., every third grader goes to the ballet, every fifth grader to the symphony. San Diego Repertory Theatre, San Diego Symphony and San Diego Ballet each mentioned this.
- The Children’s Museum is very interested in a stronger partnership/relationship with VAPA. They want to be a hub for after-school programming. The building is quiet after 2:30 p.m. They are willing to have an internship program. This would require dedicated staff but the Museum would try to find these resources.
- Address the role of City Cultural Affairs Department in arts education, in relation to the District. Also, the role of creative youth development (CYD) organizations.
- Convene CYD organizations to explore potential partnerships and alignment.
- There is a need for additional staff resources to manage things like inter-magnet-school communication, partnerships with outside organizations, and other external functions.

- Explore potential partnership with the San Diego Workforce Partnership (see also New Directions, above). Help SDWP focus on arts/creativity. Priority employment sectors don't include arts and creative industries. However, SDWP can amplify the creative space. It could work with the District on a new report on careers in the arts. The District could help SDWP fill in gaps in My Next Move, which is considered an innovative program in the workforce field. Help students understand pathways to careers, e.g., through poster boards that include arts/creative careers.

## Curriculum

- Revamp the schedule so high school students can access more arts courses, in addition to A-G.
- Increase flexibility in graduation requirements and curriculum to allow high school students to take additional arts courses.
- Continue developing the partnership with the District's STEAM Initiative.
- Take advantage of the new Covid-19 schedule innovations to make more time for arts during and after school.
- Expand bus-in and other field trip experiences. Also expand in-school performances and residencies.
- Consider providing college credit for arts classes with a professional organization in the community. COSA did this in Coronado.
- Address the representation and balance of the five disciplines. What would it take to do all five?
- Teach the business of art, arts administration skills. Use arts to teach civic engagement, interview preparation.
- Building the relationship with CCTE is important. Need to thoughtfully differentiate the programs and play to the strengths of each. Think through how to leverage the budgets and credentials of each program. EDC and SDWP can be useful here too.
- Quality instruction, curriculum and assessment are also key. How do we get all kids prepared and meet them where they are? There is a great opportunity in the literacy area, marrying literacy and the arts.
- Consider philosophy and approach of Old Globe Arts Engagement: listening to and partnering with community. Reset the balance of power in these relationships. Old Globe has moved away from outreach and towards student-generated work.
- Some teachers have figured out online teaching and appreciate the new opportunities it presents for student choice, different options for how to approach a lesson.
- Consider ways to emphasize/promote the value of student voice and authenticity throughout VAPA.

- Close the gap in artistic disciplines: dance, theatre, visual arts and media arts. This includes addressing the facility needs of the disciplines. Also, address gaps in the TK-12 pathways in all disciplines and clusters.
- Shift VAPA to be less Eurocentric. Let students see themselves, their history and culture, in the art and artists. This requires adults to agree that the way they learned is not the priority.
- Consider balance of traditional arts training versus breadth of training, an ongoing debate in VAPA. Digital versus traditional/manual art-making.
- Focus on raising access and VAPA standards for the less privileged schools.

### Professional Development

- Address professional development, growth opportunities for teachers.
- Honor teachers as artists.
- Give teachers training and experiences that help them teach more artfully, regardless of their subject. Create a Lincoln Center West.
- Address dance credentialing issues.
- Explore greater connection of arts faculty districtwide. E.g., Zamorano art teacher wants more of an ongoing relationship with SCPA faculty. This will require staff resources.
- Support arts faculty's awareness of and ability to prepare students for college.
- USD may be able to contribute to SDUSD professional development for VAPA instructors and classroom teachers. E.g., Casting A Wider Net conference at School of Education.
- Shift VAPA to be less Eurocentric. Let students see themselves, their history and culture, in the art and artists. This requires adults to agree that the way they learned is not the priority.

### Arts Magnet Schools

- Be clear on different roles in VAPA (generalist teachers, 177 schools) and magnet schools (professional track, specialized). Different pathways and desired outcomes.
- VAPA and SCPA should collaborate on instructional planning for the magnet.
- Continue making the arts magnets labs for arts education districtwide (it's a part of the current strategic plan).

### Resources

- There is a large and comprehensive resource issue that must be addressed: teaching and other staff, funding, facilities, supplies, equipment. This can be best approached alongside consideration of the larger possibilities of the vision project. For example,

what would it specifically require to provide access to all schools? What would it require to expand arts in other curricular areas?

- Add VAPA staff positions for partnerships and collaborations.
- VAPA needs beautiful professional learning spaces. Teachers should be inspired by their spaces.
- Address resources – without the necessary resources (supplies, technology), it’s hard to put a plan in place. iPads are ten years old. Start with magnet schools?
- Explore the role of the VAPA Foundation in funding and expanding enrichment.