

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

California Prop. 28 would dedicate funds for arts education. Here's our recommendation

By The Sacramento Bee Editorial Board
Sept. 27, 2022

Only one in five California schools currently has a full-time, accredited arts or music teacher. Proposition 28 seeks to change that.

The measure would require that the state set aside an estimated \$1 billion to fund arts and music education in schools across the state — making it the largest investment in arts and music education in the country.

“Art is not the sprinkles that one puts on top of an ice cream sundae,” said former Los Angeles Unified School District Superintendent Austin Beutner, the author of the proposition. “Arts are an essential part of good education.”

Proposition 28 deserves support because arts and music programs are consistent casualties when school districts face budget cuts. The measure would turn arts and music into a core subject along with reading and math, Beutner contends.

Students from low-income backgrounds who receive an arts education are less likely to drop out of school, more likely to receive a degree and more inclined to pursue a career. Arts and music instruction also builds emotional awareness and fosters empathy — critical skills for success well beyond a child's school years.

Arts education has also been linked to improved math and reading skills in all students, but especially among low-income and other disadvantaged students. Arts education improves attendance and increases self-confidence, too, and students who receive arts education report feeling more motivation to learn.

“Students who participate in arts and music and have a proper arts and music education ... have a better set of life outcomes,” Beutner said.

HOW PROP. 28 WORKS

Prop. 28 requires that California allocate at least 1% of its school funding under Proposition 98 for arts and music education. Prop. 98, passed in 1988, established a minimum level of state funding for public education.

Schools with a high number of low-income students will get more funding, and districts will be required to spend at least 80% of these funds on arts and music instructors. They will also be required to publish annual reports on how the money was spent.

At least 90% of the money given directly to schools has to fund an arts or music program, and only 1% can be used for administration.

“This will be subject to state audit, like every other piece of school funding,” Beutner said. “But in effect, we’re going to rely on school families to audit it — and I think they’re gonna do a heck of a job, because their kids are in that school.”

WHAT DO OPPONENTS SAY?

Nothing. There’s no organized opposition to Prop. 28, and Beutner thinks that silence says a lot.

“On the left side of the page, they will see the arguments for the initiative,” he said. “On the opposite side of the page, it will be blank but for the words which say: ‘No argument was submitted in opposition,’ which gives you some sense that this is something ... a lot of voters think should be happening in schools.”

The measure’s supporters include a litany of famous names from Hollywood and the performing arts, including John Lithgow, Dr. Dre, Issa Rae, Jeff Bridges, Earth Wind & Fire, Josh Groban and many more. It’s also backed by the California Teachers Association, California State PTA and the California Music Educators Association. We join them in recommending a yes vote on Proposition 28.