

Educators call art a key to jobs

Research shows benefit to learning math, science

By Bruce Fessier

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Arts education is notably absent from the list of academic subjects the Obama administration says is needed to grow the U.S. economy.

Study in STEM fields, essentially science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, leads to some of the best-paying careers and can spur the greatest potential for national job growth, the Commerce and Labor departments say.

But arts educators cite an abundance of research showing that music, theater and fine arts education can enhance the learning of those subjects.

Boca Gambale, founder of the new In the Muse Creative Center in Palm Springs, offers more than seven single-spaced pages on the benefits of music education to learning at her website, www.inthemuse.org.

Please see ARTS, A8

The Dr. Carol Channing & Harry Kulljian Foundation For The Arts, the precursor to the American Foundation for Arts Education benefiting students at Rancho Mirage High School, claims in its impact summary:

“The inclusion of arts in education will result in 1) reduction in the dropout rate (approximately one in four California students drop out before grade 12); 2) improved achievement (research shows students exposed to

music have improved math abilities); and 3) increased school safety (over 15 million cases of bullying last year in California).”

In fact, it’s more difficult to find a study that says arts education is not instrumental to education. Ashish Rangnekar, called an education “futurist” as founder and CEO of the Bench Prep education technology company in Chicago, debunks a popular theory that listening to classical music can enhance cognition. But only because he said the theory has been misinterpreted.

“I would call it a myth that listening to music helps you focus,” he said in a telephone interview. “We know, based on the research that was primarily done by (Nick) Perham and (Joanne) Vizard (of the University of Wales Institute at Cardiff, UK, 2010), that’s not true. The kind of music that works better (with focus) is anything that is monotonic in nature. Even classical music has the rhythms and tones going up and down. So that brings you in and out of that study zone.

“Any kind of white noise, which has just one tone and one rhythm to it, works well. In fact, white noise might actually work better than just pure silence.” But Rangnekar says listening to favorite music before an academic task can improve performance.

“It’s very well documented through quantitative research that listening to music prior to a task increases cognitive thought,” he said. “Listening to music before you’re walking on stage or before you’re walking into an exam room absolutely enhances the cognitive process.”

He also believes engaging in music, theater or fine arts has “a direct correlation on cognitive skills” and even arts appreciation studies can improve other academic performance.

“Studying music appreciation I believe opens up a student’s mind to a wide variety of cognitive reasoning,” he said. “I am in full support of that.”

