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by Marcela Davison Aviles

When I was eight years old, and attending the public schools in Tucson, I was given a choice: a violin, a cello or a viola to learn to play for orchestra class. The viola was the size of a small cello, and the cello was taller than me, but the violin was just right. I picked a three-quarter size instrument and thus began my beautiful career as a second violinist in my school orchestra, a journey which led directly to college. The arts are a perennial second fiddle in budget discussions. That's true even in California, where the City of San Jose is expected to eliminate program and operating grant support for the arts, and the state legislature passed AB 1330, which downgraded arts curriculum to elective status.

The impact of these cuts on the Latino community is devastating – the data shows – and has for years, that arts curriculum tracks our kids to academic achievement. The many Latino heritage education and arts programs provided by schools across the



country have long provided a path of pride and the discipline our students need to excel. The state of Texas is a good example, with hundreds of popular mariachi instruction classes throughout the state – it's not difficult to guess the reason why the Latino student drop out rate in Texas is lower than California's

With these developments, Silicon Valley and the state can no longer claim the mantle of the world's center of innovation and creativity. And if Mitt Romney's proposed 50% reduction of funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities is passed, the arts won't be relegated to second fiddle. Try, bottom of the orchestra pit in an abandoned concert hall that's

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about to be demolished.

It's been said that, "it takes more grace than pen can tell to play the second fiddle well." That's because the second violinist plays the harmony – and **must play a supporting role passionately**. Today it takes way more grace than pen can tell to convince government the arts can play the tune of economic recovery – it will take a collective yelp. Occupy the concert hall. Chances are it'll be empty.

Thus November California did give public school kids a choice – a violin or a power drill. This is the result of AB 1330, signed into law last week, which changes California high school graduation requirements resulting in an "either / or" choice between Career Technical Education (CTE) and the Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA).

To many, the legislature placed arts education in the role of the second violins – subordinate to curricula prioritizing STEM – science, technology, engineering and math – subjects. The concern is justified – **the data show music and arts education** improves academic achievement and fosters civic engagement. Yet arts education consistently gets "second fiddle" treatment when it comes to funding. Zero investment in the arts is not just paranoia – the San Jose's Office of Cultural affairs is on record that zero funding is probable. Makes perfect sense, in light of the **considerable economic impact** the arts sector brings to the City's tax base.

The **California Alliance for Arts Education** recommended a harmonizing '**Both / And**' approach to CTE and VAPA, in which these disciplines work together to benefit students and reverse the impact of recent years:

- In 2000, more than one million students were enrolled in school music programs.
- By 2008, that number had dropped to 470,000.
- Inadequate funding is the main reason for these declines.
- With California's budget crisis, these numbers have worsened. In 2009, 60% of districts surveyed by the Legislative Analysts Office had shifted Arts and Music Block Grant funds away from arts and music programs. 20% of those districts cut programs altogether.
- According to a national study, African American and Latino students are impacted disproportionately by declines. There was a 49% drop among African Americans and 40% drop among Latinos.

Creativity and innovation are vital to student success, and the nation's economic recovery. According to the Alliance, 1500 CEOs surveyed by IBM ranked creativity as the number one trait they look for in employees. Research and the **U.S. Congress confirm** that arts education results in higher academic performance and standardized test scores, increased community service and lower drop out rates.

The data on the positive impact of the arts and arts education adds up. We need a new approach to balance government budgets and engage students, one that abandons stereotyped "second fiddle" perspectives on the arts sector. The arts must have a seat at the budget table and standard curriculum should integrate music and the arts – turning STEM into STEAM, to power the efficacy of creative minds. Leonard Bernstein once said, "I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm—that's a problem. And if we have no second fiddle, we have no harmony."

Without the arts cities have no soul, or badly needed tax revenue. And public education cannot teach both the rudiments and the wisdom our children need to be successful, without the passionate harmony which informs vision and encourages skill. So occupy your local budget office. Bring both the tech and the arts fiddlers. Let's re-write this score, and balance the budget, together.

Marcela Davison Aviles is an author, lawyer and CEO of the **Mexican Heritage Corporation** and



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