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The importance of art

Creative endeavors **help** children be better students

As an educator, watching the arts diminish in schools across the nation has been increasingly difficult. Research suggests that art inspires children in ways that no other form of learning can replace.

There are four true forms of art — visual arts, music, dance and drama — and experts like Charles Fowler, an accomplished figure in the arts and author of “Can We Rescue the Arts for America’s Children?” say we need all four in our schools.

These four forms of art provide valuable life skills for children and can be a make-or-break deal for many children’s academic success.

“If human beings are to survive,” Fowler said, “we need all the symbolic forms at our command because they permit us not only to preserve and pass along our accumulated wisdom but also to give voice to the invention of new visions. We need all these ways of viewing the world because no one way can say it all.”

However, money for the arts is being cut from school budgets nationwide at an alarming rate. Art



classes are often replaced with reading and math remediation courses. While math and reading remediation may be necessary, a better solution to this problem must be sought.

Low standardized test scores and tight budgets might drive many of these decisions, but I am not sure if we understand the ramifications this may have on future generations. The arts can inspire young children to love learning. If we teach them to love dance, music or drawing, could we not teach them reading and math through these instruments?

Tremendous research underscores the importance of art in education. In 1993, the College

Entrance Examination Board announced that students who studied arts and music scored significantly higher than the national average on the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Students who had participated in acting, play production, music performance and appreciation, drama appreciation and art history, scored an average 31 to 50 points higher on the math and verbal sections.

A plethora of studies underscore the value of art in education. Yet, few children in today’s society have the luxury of truly being exposed to the arts.

It has become the duty of parents and community members to afford art-related experiences for children. Luckily, South-

west Florida has many opportunities for children of all ages. A quick check of the local paper usually reveals art-related events through local libraries, art and performance centers and the YMCA.

A few years ago, my daughter, Riley, attended a Lee County Alliance for the Arts summer camp. The campers not only put on a tremendous play, but created the set. It was a wonderful experience for all involved. And there are many more opportunities like this in our region.

The importance of the arts in education (or in children’s lives in general) should not be forgotten. Ernest Boyer, formally of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, stated, “The arts are essential parts of the human experience, they are not a frill. We recommend that all students study the arts to discover how human beings communicate not only with words, but through music, dance and the visual arts.”

Become an advocate for the arts in your community by supporting your local art organizations and education initiatives. ☺