

## ART=OPPORTUNITY: A City-Wide research Based Initiative to Advance Economic Development

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### Abstract

ART=OPPORTUNITY is research-based initiative designed to increase creativity, cultural capital, and economic dynamism in the greater San Diego area by using the arts as the crucible of social change and community impact. Initiative components include providing community-wide access to leadership training, literacy residencies, teen summits, parent education, and hands-on workshops, for educators, parents, youth and teens, teaching artists, arts providers, and Chambers of Commerce throughout surrounding cities to provide mechanisms for sustainable change. The initiative is hosted by Cal State San Marcos (CSUSM), a federally recognized Hispanic, Asian Pacific Islander, and Native American Serving Institution, that admits a diverse majority of first generation college attendees of whom only 20% enter college with any significant arts education. To address this shortfall and provide clear rationale for the importance of arts participation to community workforce development, a study was conducted to examine the impact of childhood arts experiences on success in STEM-related jobs years after initial exposure. The survey (n=168) results demonstrated that a STEM employee's experience with the arts, specifically with music education in the K-12 years, impacted innovation, creativity, teamwork, appreciation of diversity, and problem-solving, in the areas of Engineering, Operations, Project Management, Finance, and IT. These findings reveal the importance of providing arts education offerings to under resourced, diverse communities. The unique opportunity provided by the ART=OPPORTUNITY initiative creates a mechanism to relay this information directly to parents in the elementary and middle school parenting classes, providing an early intervention to promote future economic stability.

## Introduction

"I believe having a background in the arts absolutely makes a difference in my ability to succeed in my current job...My experience in the arts has opened my eyes to the countless ways of looking at the world around me. It has taught me that not everyone sees things the same way and taking that into consideration when explaining a message, concept or idea can help shape how to efficiently and effectively communicate. Growing up in an area that is not known for tolerance and [yet] being exposed to different forms of art from different places and time periods, absolutely provided [me with] a better understanding of cultures and...appreciation for everyone's contributions to the world. The ability work well in a diverse team environment is invaluable in my current job and just about any job these days." - ViaSat Engineer

This paper is essentially about social justice. It began as an inquiry among arts and business professors when we became concerned about our students and their ability to be creative, innovative, and their ability to think outside of the box, problem solve, and engage in inquiry. We also looked toward our students' future and meeting the needs of the job market upon their graduation. Our initial conversations were among professors from multiple Departments throughout our university as we noticed and began to articulate our mutual concerns about our students' willingness (or non-willingness as it were) to ask questions in class, reflect upon problems, and to be creative.

We became concerned that our students were lacking the background necessary to compete and succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century job market, which according to several studies including several by David Deming (2015) from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, identified 3 key skills as fundamental to success. The three skills were/are: flexibility, cooperation, and empathy. All of us had also attended several conferences in which CEOs

made clear they were looking for employees with arts backgrounds, because the arts set the stage for successful workers. This was at once alarming and exciting to us.

California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) is a federally designated Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) as well as an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander - Serving Institution (AANAPISI). It is largely a commuter school, and most of the students have graduated from local school districts who have guaranteed partnership agreements with the University. Seventy-five percent of the local public schools in our service area Title 1 schools which indicate that the socioeconomic level of the families is needy, and 67% of our students at the university receive financial aid. A majority of students who attend the University are the first in their family to attend college.

In the area of the arts, only 20% of the entire student body has had 3 or more arts classes in high school. We know this through an empirical analysis of CIRP data, explained more fully below, and through a surprisingly collection of class assignments. One of us, Goldberg, the arts professor became curious and concerned when she gave an assignment to her students to make a collage about the arts in their lives. The first hand raised in class was a student who asked, "What is a collage?" That student was not alone. Most of the students, all of whom were upper classmen in a teacher credentialing track, did not know what a collage was, nor had they ever created one. When the students returned the following week with their collages in hand, three themes were consistent their collages: fashion, tattoos, and cars.

Another assignment involved students identifying and labeling musical instruments. They were given pictures of a trumpet, trombone, violin, etc. And asked to name them.

Surprisingly, most of students did not know the difference between a trumpet and trombone. Nor could they identify a clarinet. And, to our further surprise, once we discussed the names of the instruments during class, students invented spellings to label them. Here are a few invented spellings for the instruments cello, cymbals, xylophone, violin, harp, saxophone, trombone, flute, guitar, oboe, timpani, and bassoon: chellow, chelo, cielo, symbols, zilphon, xailaphone, villien, violen, arp, saxiphone, trumbone, fluit, kitour clairanet, obo, tymphony, timponee, bazoon (Goldberg 2017).

Though these students are from southern California, the lack of arts education is not confined to our situation. Statistical research points out that students in lower socio-economic geographies, and students of color across the nation have received fewer arts in their education over the last two decades than any time previous (National Center for Educational Statistics of the Institute of Education Sciences (2012). The gap in access to the arts among the poor has widened significantly, in part due to the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which influenced principal choice by placing emphasis on reading and math through testing to the detriment of not only the arts, but also social studies and science.

States such as New Jersey and California are actively engaged in righting this wrong, and there are hopeful signs in numerous other states as well. In New Jersey every single child receives a dedicated education in the arts, and in California teaching credential requirements now include required training in arts education as well as arts integration. Across the nation arts education is a part of the Education code and is a federally mandated – but it is not always enforced.

It is quite possible that the California State University students never had the experience of someone putting a paintbrush or a musical instrument in their hands, or the experience of acting, or being in a dance ensemble. Their invented spellings of instruments are likely indications that they lacked music textbooks or had attended concerts. Seeing such capable students, we couldn't help but to wonder what opportunities and talent have been lost; i.e. who could have become a dancer, artist, musician, or poet. Lacking an education with arts is one thing, however, when viewed through the lens of the skills necessary to careers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the stakes are even higher. Though it was clear from student responses in classroom settings that there was lack of arts education upon entering college, when we looked at the empirical data, the findings were truly startling.

Analysis of California State University San Marcos' (CSUSM) student data from participation in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) study tells a compelling story supporting the connection between belonging and equity. The CIRP, established in 1966, is a national longitudinal study of the American higher education system, and is regarded as the most comprehensive source of information on college students. Over 15 million students at 1900 institutions of higher education have participated in the survey. CSUSM has been analyzing a significant body of data that will have an important impact on policy regarding the role of arts education, college retention, and ability to succeed in college. Initial analyses examined freshman survey responses for students with >3 years of arts study in high school. The findings revealed that students with three or more years of arts study in high school scored significantly higher on many items studied (all items in bold blue). The only item they self-rated that was significantly lower was Academic Ability.

The sample is all freshman students that ever answered these questions over the span of CSUSM survey administration, from 1999 to the present (see the illustration for the percentages)

### **Findings: Actions in Last Year**

**Performed volunteer work**

**Socialized with another racial/ethnic group**

**Voted in a student election**

**Demonstrated for a cause**

### **Skills**

Critical Thinking

Time management

### **Diversity**

**See things from another's perspective**

**Tolerance of differing beliefs**

Openness to views being challenged

**Discuss and negotiate controversial issues**

Work with diverse people

### **Habits of the mind**

**Ask Questions in Class**

**Support opinions with a logical argument**

**Seek solution to problems and explain to others**

**Evaluate the quality or reliability of information**

**Take a risk for gain**

**Seek alternative solutions to a problem**

**Look up scientific research articles and resources**

**Explore topics on your own although not required**

Accept mistakes as part of learning process

**Integrate skills and knowledge from different sources**

**Self-Ratings**

**Academic Ability, Rated Significantly Lower (only one)**

**Artistic Ability**

Drive to achieve

**Leadership Ability**

**Compassion**

**Creativity**

Risk Taking

**Understanding of others**

**Future Goals**

Becoming a community leader

**Becoming accomplished in a performing art**

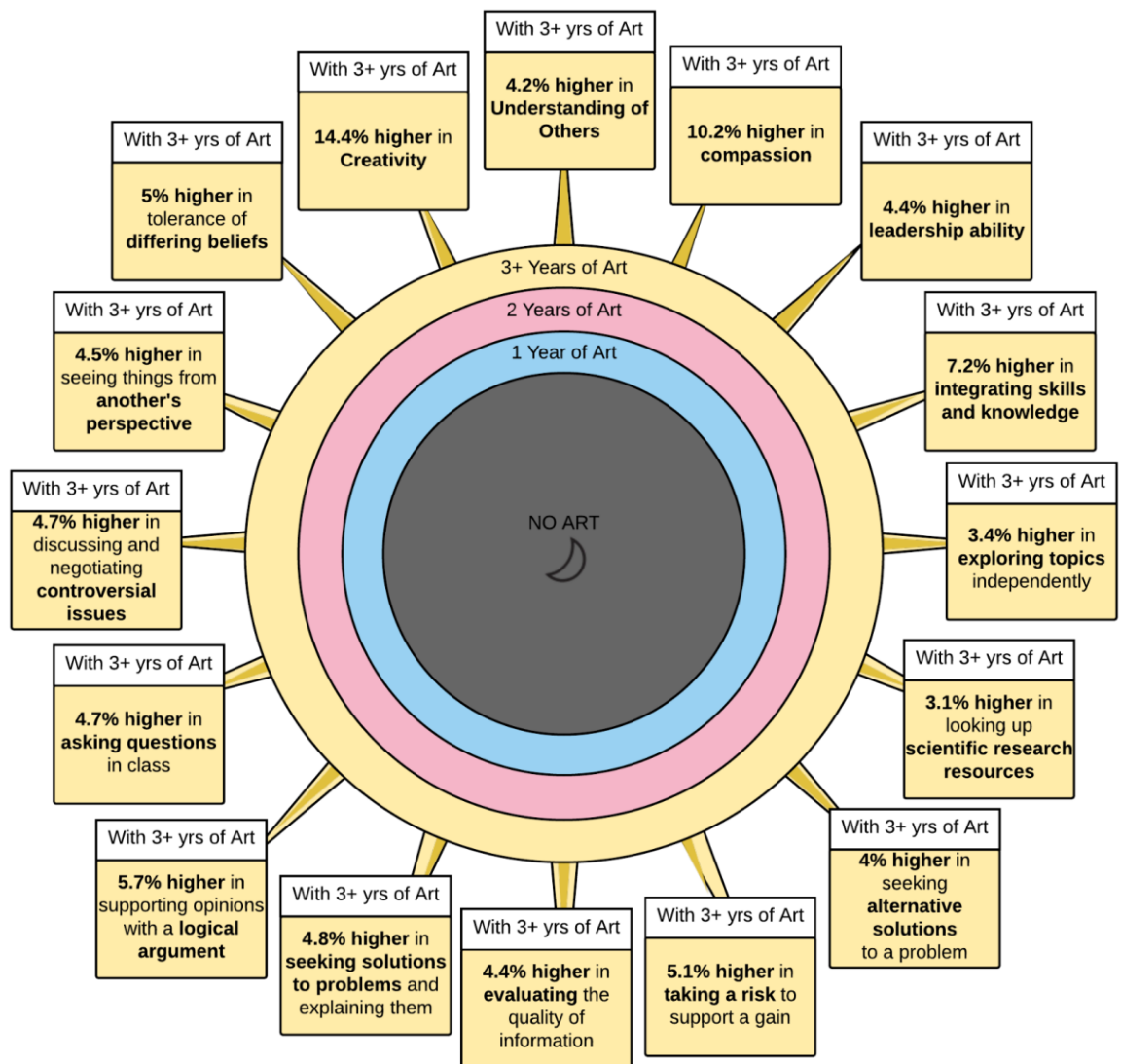
**Creating Artistic work**

Helping others in difficulty

Improving Understanding of other countries

Participating in a community action program

**Participate in Clubs/groups**



A troubling empirical result from this study is that only 20% of all incoming freshman are in the category of 3 or more years (could even be as little as 3 classes) of arts in high school. Even more troubling is that among the 20%, the numbers are skewed in favor of higher economic status and women. The study has also begun digging into retention rates, and so far, it appears as if students with 3 or more years of arts experiences in high school are retained



in college at a higher level than those without. Arts education in our setting clearly provides a “college edge” for the students who have had the arts.

“Being in the marching band in high school, I had to work with people I didn't particularly like. We had to perform as a team and it really taught me how to work well with other people. I learned how to take criticism and turn it into productivity.” - ViaSat Engineer

Having the data from the university that provided answers as to why the majority of students lacked artistic skills (not only in the arts disciplines in and of themselves but also in terms of creativity), we juxtaposed that data upon what the CEOs in business were saying they were looking for in employee skills. We became concerned that students without an arts background could be truly disenfranchised in terms of career opportunities. However, we decided to do a pilot survey to see if what the CEOs were saying was born out in their actual hiring processes.

At the start of our study we recognized that the CEOs from companies such as Apple, QUALCOMM, ViaSat, Boeing, Google, and IBM said they were quite openly looking for individuals who could think outside the box, be creative, work well in teams, and have a background in the arts. The background of the arts made a lot of sense as the arts clearly prepares individuals with skills essential to problem solving and working well with others. In 2013 a survey of CEOs by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that 74% said they would recommend a 21<sup>st</sup> century liberal education to create a more dynamic

worker. A survey of 1500 chief executives by IBM's Institute for Business Value listed creativity as the most important leadership skill need for successful ventures in the future.

To further investigate, we gained access to ViaSat, a highly successful and well-known high-tech giant who through their HR department agreed to send a survey to their employees on our behalf. In that exploratory study we conducted at ViaSat, we found that engineers had a significant background in the arts (especially music). Furthermore, the respondents were wonderfully articulate regarding how their arts background informs and shapes their ability to succeed on the job. For example, "Being in the marching band in high school, I had to **work with people** I didn't particularly like. We had to **perform as a team** and it really taught me how to work well with other people. I **learned how to take criticism** and turn it into productivity." My background in arts has helped me "think of problems in **many different ways** (much like one can interpret/play the same piece of music many different ways), as well as being able to **play off one another** on a team." "Not only does performing music **help me relax** and take my mind off work pressures, but music gives me **additional insight** (and vice versa) into the design and operation of electrical circuits and systems."

Arts are a key component in critical thinking skills and the soft skills that employers want but say they are not getting from too many college graduates. Though certain fields have recognized the importance of arts. Some of the top medical schools in the country such as Harvard, Brown, and Stanford require their students to study drama, dance and art to help them become more reflective, observant and empathetic with their patients. Those engaged in adult education programs, such as civic education at the New York Historical Society, use arts as a method to engage learners studying to become citizens. Meanwhile, more K-12

districts, are returning to arts instruction recognizing the power of arts in academic achievement, student engagement, school climate, and parental involvement (coincidentally the 4 tenets of the Title 1 program). A background in the arts enables and supports flexibility in thinking outside the box thinking of problems in many ways, as well as being able to play off one another on a team. And, now there's tons and tons of research to prove it. See this link for updated research:

<https://www.csusm.edu/artopp>

According to one of the ViaSat participants, "Understanding the mechanics of what is visually appealing has allowed me to more quickly generate presentations and other products meant to convey a message and communicate effectively." "Additionally, my interest and experience in the arts has exposed me to different design software which has allowed me better understand how the software might work and take advantage of more advanced capabilities that might be overlooked by others. I have been able to 'draw' from lessons in commercial art and art history to better analyze other people's products and provide feedback as well."

#### **Our Major Findings include:**

- \* There is a very high rate of access to, and education in, the arts – especially music, among the 168 respondents from ViaSat
- \* Skills learned from the arts that apply to success on the job include: teamwork, critical thinking, and responsibility

- \* A background in the arts enables (and supports) flexibility in “thinking outside the box,” “thinking of problems in many different ways (much like one can interpret/play the same piece of music in many different ways), as well as being able to play off one another on a team”
- \* The discipline of engaging in, and practicing art(s) provides a foundation to “perform under pressure,” “focus, be patient and practice”
- \* A performing background “helps with communication and comfort in front of audiences;” confidence in public speaking (individually, in meetings, in presentations); \* “Performing for audiences helps with communication skills such as public speaking and presenting”
- \* Arts humanizes the work; “gives me a non-engineering perspective and appreciation of human factors,” “humanize technical problems;” \* “Gives me a non-engineering perspective and appreciation of human factors.”

## **Arts Participation**

Most participants in our survey had a significant background that included multiple years of arts in their schooling as well as outside of school. Nearly 50% of the participants had 4+ years of music in school K-12 coupled with the additional education of afterschool lessons or playing in an ensemble. Visual arts came in second with over 50% during school, but a little less after school. Dance and theater did not have the same participation rates, however, that mirrors the opportunity in schools. In California until just recently, there have not been stand-

alone credentials for dance and theater teachers, thus the access to those classes are more limited than the music and visual arts.

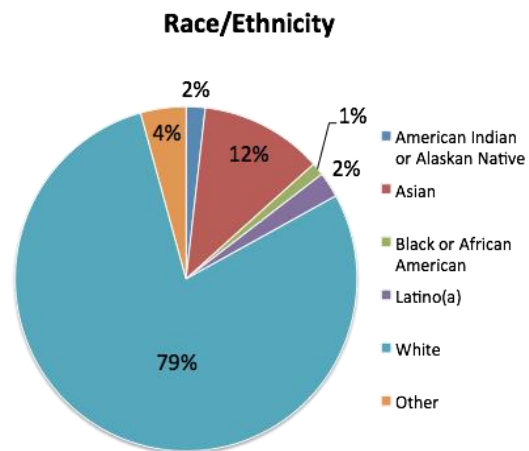
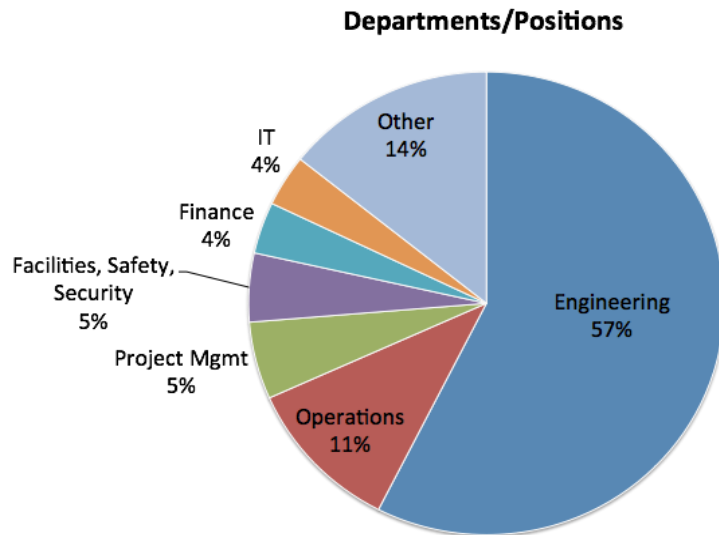
#### **In School arts participation:**

<b>Music</b> (music class, vocal ensemble, choir, band, etc.)	16%	11%	<b>25%</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>Theater</b> (theater class, drama, improv, etc.)	<b>52%</b>	17%	21%	11%
<b>Visual Arts</b> (art class, painting, drawing, pottery, etc.)	19%	21%	<b>32%</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Dance</b> (dance class, ballet, tap, jazz, hip-hop, etc.)	<b>72%</b>	11%	9%	7%

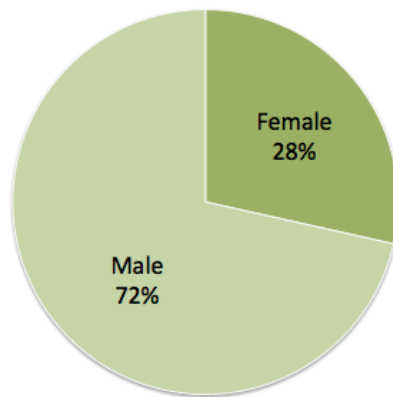
#### **Out of School arts participation:**

<b>Sang in a vocal group</b>	65%	9%	13%	14%
<b>Played an instrument in a band</b>	55%	7%	<b>18%</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Participated in community theater</b>	75%	10%	10%	5%
<b>Engage in visual arts class in community</b>	71%	12%	8%	8%
<b>Took instrumental music lessons</b>	38%	<b>13%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>28%</b>

The majority of ViaSat survey participants were white men, with a median birth year of 1971.



### Gender



### Social Justice

While we already know we must open STEM careers to women and people of color, that access largely parallels what we see in terms of access to the arts. Namely, students without an arts background are disenfranchised from opportunities and careers, simply because they did not have access to attaining many of the skills necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> century job market. And, one could argue that the void of arts in education follows a clear path that divides socioeconomic class and culture. We see it both in education budgets where struggling schools have eliminated the arts, and we see it play out in hiring practices in High Tech – which are largely out of balance with our nation's demographics. However, this pattern is easily disrupted.

However, districts and states who have recognized the arts education divide *have* begun changing their priorities. In our county, Chula Vista School district has hired back over

80 arts and music teachers. The superintendent of that district started his career as a police officer. He witnessed the consequences of when youth did not receive adequate support at home, school, and in their communities. He made his career into helping guide youth into healthy lives and choices and realized the arts were a major component of healthy living. Long story short, he transitioned from police work to education, and as a superintendent has made the arts a priority in his district. In so doing, test scores have risen – which is not a surprise since we have tons and tons of research that shows this over and over. In addition, his schools are a place where empathy thrives.

San Diego Unified has also begun to ramp up their arts education and arts integration strategies systematically through engaging Title I funds. Title I goals are improving academic achievement, student engagement, school climate and parental involvement. What better than the arts to that?! State have also begun to disrupt the system – New jersey not only requires all student to be educated in, with, and through the arts, they follow-up with districts to ensure that they are complying.

### **ART=OPPORTUNITY and AAY!**

ART=OPPORTUNITY is a research and evidence-based movement that seeks to transform communities and schools by ensuring all kids have access to the arts, because the arts really do matter. With the support of our extraordinary leadership team, our hope is that the mantra ART=OPPORTUNITY will become the next “Got Milk?” Funding is provided by the Stuart and Panta Rhea Foundations, California State University San Marcos, with additional funding from the Clare Rose Foundation (specifically for youth programming). A goal is to



move the needle from the belief that arts *enhances* life and education, toward the reality that arts *embodies* life and education and is a necessary ingredient for healthy living and opportunities to succeed in life, careers, and becoming an empathetic citizen.



Since 2017 we've been engaging youth in arts summits, parent education in arts and literacy, art literacy residencies, as well as mentoring of Visual and Performing Arts coordinators, with Business leaders. We facilitated the first San Diego youth summit. The 2018 AAY! Arts Amplifying Youth Summit, was led by youth for youth in National City (near the border of Mexico). The day was spectacular and included youth led workshops on dance, media arts, spoken word, photography, visual art, portfolios, community activism, and diversity. Powerful performances included the Burns Brothers, Dairrick Hodges, BKSoul and TransceDance. It was truly extraordinary and was highlighted by a guest appearance by musician and arts advocate Jason Mraz!

Work on this year's summit is even better than year 1. Check out the Youth's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/AAY2018>



By way of introduction to the teens of 2019 AAY!, there are 12 teens (many of whom were in AAY! 2018), all of them from arts organizations in San Diego who have teen councils. The groups include TranscenDance, ARTS (A Reason To Survive), La Jolla Playhouse, Itzicali, Camp AArt, among others. Many of the teens are from challenging situations ranging from homelessness or foster care, or have found themselves outliers within their school communities because they don't feel as if they fit in.

With an incubating CCYD (Creative Youth Development) forum in San Diego, we were able to also bring together artist-mentors from these organizations. Most of the youth in AAY! 2019 participated as leaders in AAY! 2018. Therefore, they are coming into this year with the experience and confidence gained in 2018. They are also mentoring the new youth that joined the leadership team for 2019. In both years the youth had a retreat in the Fall and then met

every Saturday from January through to the April summit, to plan, organize, and program the summit. As a part of their work, they lead each other in arts activities as well as discussions. Adult mentors help guide them, including an event planner who has helped them keep on track with details such as flyers, registrations, room assignments, food, t-shirts, etc.

Offered the opportunity to create their own arts summit, the youth dove right in. One student remarked, it was the “perfect platform to get to know people and get involved with organizations.” Another stated, “I’m here to express myself further and make a community of students who are like-minded and my age.” “Part of the catchphrase of event is for youth by youth; so we obviously thought about that idea of adults planning it, but it is really important that since this is an event for youth by youth, and some of the events we’ve been to in the past have left us wanting more, we took our experience from prior events and together with the help of the adults, we came together to create something awesome.” Another youth put it this way: “I’ve always been nervous about my artwork of putting it out there, and this has helped me gain more confidence.”

Belonging: We think it is safe to say that most humans seek belonging, or to belong. We can belong to families, groups, gangs, arts organizations, teams, and so on. Belonging means several things, connection, home, inclusion, association, kinship, relationships, and so on. Our query has been to understand what belonging in the context of the arts means for kids, youth, and young adults. Afterall, belonging need not be a positive experience. For example, belonging to a gang definitely engages many youth. But few of us would argue that gang activity will positively impact the youth who are in it. What then, does arts experiences bring to kids that makes it a positive?

## De-Barriers

The youth in AAY! are quite articulate about their experiences. As they engaged in reflective conversations, they compared the meetings of the youth summit to school settings, and pondered the question, “are schools teaching us not to be ourselves?” The space for planning the summit (physical and social) created community, and they felt it was teaching them about themselves, and how to “challenge their brain.” The “safe space” (their words) created through the arts lends itself to being creative, understanding each other, feeling that could express themselves more freely, highlighted a sense of compassion, and the no-limits aspect of the arts brings “us together.” This was in stark contrast to what the youth felt schools **did to** them which was to teach for careers, not teach toward becoming who they could be.

Youth in AAY! are interested in how a community can de-barrier, un-condition, and de-structure toward the greater good. It is with a sense of knowing how they can be thought of as “not belonging” to the norm. One of the youth put it this way, “My role I feel like, is to lead other people. A lot of kids from my neighborhood don’t get the opportunities because they don’t have the money or people think they’re not worth the time. So I want to level up our society and our community so that kids like me can come here and learn awesome things. ”

## ART=OPPORTUNITY Resources

A large portion of the work of ART=OPPORTUNITY is the materials and resources and can be found on the web pages: <https://www.csusm.edu/artopp/>



