

The Arts in Hawaii

From the da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* to Monet's water lilies, art, showcased all over the world in countless museums, inspires billions of people. Over the centuries, the word "art" has evolved to encompass theater, music, and, in Hawaii, the local arts of lei making, feather cloaks, Japanese washi, and Chinese calligraphy. Today, art not only inspires, but it is essential to achieving success and maintaining Hawaii's unique cultural identity. As art programs in Hawaii decline, however, local students find themselves losing touch with Hawaii's remarkable cultural identity and behind the curve of other students, both nationally and worldwide.

As a result of the implementation of George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind" policy and STEM, a national movement that pushes students to study technology, science, engineering, and math, art is leaving Hawaii's public schools. This deportation is further hastened by policy limitations and shrinking budgets, reports the Honolulu Civil Beat. This includes the State Department of Education's ("DOE") Hawaii Common Core Standards, implemented by 2014 in all public schools, which lacked goals for arts education. Although Barack Obama provided for more educational opportunity than Bush through his "Every Student Succeeds Act" and the Race to the Top Fund, an initiative that works for educational reform, neither provides for arts education, according to the U.S. Department of Education. The DOE partners with different arts programs across Hawaii, but these partnerships fail to provide long-terms arts instruction for all students. While the DOE does provide experiences for students to learn traditional Hawaiian arts, these experiences are not significant enough to spark a lasting interest or expertise in Hawaii's cultural arts. While private school students are relatively insulated from these factors and

therefore continue to be exposed to the arts, the vast majority of students in Hawaii are denied the benefits of an arts education.

When the arts are snipped from schools, so are its benefits. Students nationwide who practice the arts are four times more likely to be recognized for academic success, twice as likely to graduate from college, and five times less likely to drop out of high school. Statistics from Americans for the Arts show that students of the arts earn higher SAT scores, thereby increasing their chances of college acceptance. Furthermore, students engaged in the arts develop creativity, a trait not easily enhanced through traditional high school courses but which 72% of business leaders seek. With 85% of such business leaders unable to secure such creative applicants, studying the arts is an investment in one's career.

While the arts are increasingly confined to the classrooms of private schools and private lessons of professional teachers, it does not have to be this way. Students educated in the arts can mobilize themselves to teach other interested students without the same opportunities in their neighborhoods, while the current partnerships the DOE possesses with art programs can be adjusted so that students have the opportunity to consistently learn from professionals on a long-term basis. Employees of these art institutions can visit schools on a weekly basis to teach students their respective art, giving students who cannot attend currently available arts programs the opportunity to learn. More interested students, along with these masters, can fundraise and participate in performances held at arts centers with donations offsetting the costs of the supplies for these classes. Theater students, for instance, would have the opportunity to perform, on stage, with the actors of the Hawaii Opera Theater. Not only would such an opportunity be both motivating and encouraging, it would give students actual performance experience. Moreover,

state and federal initiatives can be made for funding to be dedicated solely to the arts. These solutions, both on small and large scales, would enable the arts to be spread across Hawaii, increasing the opportunities available for students.

Should the arts remain accessible to only those who can afford it, in fifty years, the public school students of Hawaii will find themselves increasingly crowded out of colleges, graduate schools, and higher paying work, thus facing more obstacles towards achieving the “American Dream” as colleges will pass them over in favor of students with arts experience who offer more talent for their campuses. Furthermore, these suggested measures will save the precious and individual cultural identity of Hawaii, by encouraging the next generation to participate and spread these arts.

Clarence T.C. Ching, in his life and through his foundation, did not only help preserve Hawaii’s precious culture arts through the Chinese cultural center he aided in constructing, but he also created instrumental homes, hospitals, and now, buildings across school campuses to facilitate learning, to assist others in achieving success in life. Through his vision, the arts can become a source of inspiration, a focal point in the turmoil of life, a means of advancement, and a connection with one’s community for students all across Hawaii. In honor of Clarence T.C. Ching, who is remembered today for his work in perpetuating local culture and even more so for his tremendous efforts in helping an unfathomable amount of people move up the ladder of life from its depths, we must build art programs to both connect people with their island culture and to help people rise in this world.