

If people were more aware of the tremendous benefits that the arts bring to an individual's life and to society, there would be no debate as to whether to consistently fund arts programs. The arts should not be viewed as the 'icing on the cake', but rather as survival tools.

Yes, people enjoy listening to and participating in creating music. Dance. Theatre. Film. And, the visual/fine arts provide additional dimensions of expression. The arts deliver a sensory 'feel good' experience. They expand our perspectives, nurture us, excite us and educate us. They provide *much* more.

There are in-depth scientific and academic studies from notable sources, which support the knowledge that experiencing the arts actually affects us on a deep physiological level, promoting our good health. For instance, there are dramatic, positive changes that occur physically while engaged in the creative process of the performing arts, as in singing. The elated emotional level that is reached while expressing and communicating acts in harmony with the physical phrasing of rhythmical deep breathing, improving our health, stimulating our minds, and contributing to a total sense of well being.

Studying the arts and interacting through the creative process provides multiple tools that work for a lifetime in whatever personal or career choices students will make. Skills as: the consistent practice of intense focusing needed to improve at one's craft, problem solving, team building and cultivating leadership, social dynamics, communication skills, as well as building tenacity, confidence, self worth, respect, and an appreciation for cultural differences. There are countries that lead in their awareness of the value of arts education and arts in the community and business arenas, and ensure a strong foundation of funding for all of the arts.

When we honestly evaluate our priorities in this life experience, when we know the arts greatly impact the development and understanding of human beings, and their *quality of life*, isn't it our duty to see that we do everything we can to enrich lives? There is unnecessary and unaccountable spending in other areas. You are investing wisely when you support and fund arts education and the integration of arts within the academic classroom, the development of quality performing and visual arts programs, organizations and gifted artists. A return on your investment will be progressively evident in the improvement of health, morale, and educational standards, as well as economic development, and improved cultural understanding and peace.

Thank you for this opportunity to represent the arts community.

Peggy Weston