

ArtsEdNews: Seattle Commentary Supports Role of Creativity in Education

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Creative learning is part of better student performance

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"It's about time" was our reaction to the recommendation by Washington Learns, Gov. Chris Gregoire's education initiative, to incorporate creativity into the education of Washington's students. It's about time our state recognized that our economy thrives upon a creative and innovative work force and that we must foster creativity in our schools and in our students to compete in the global marketplace.

We commend Washington Learns, which is concluding a top-to-bottom review of our state's education system, for including creativity in its draft report. The recommendations include revising curriculum and teacher training to incorporate the arts, increasing funding for arts programs and educators, and creating a public-private partnership to promote creativity in our schools and communities, among others.

The arts help all students learn to succeed in school and beyond. Students who participate in the arts are more likely to be recognized for academic achievement, to be elected to class office, to participate in a math and science fairs and to receive awards for school attendance. Compared with their peers, students in the arts read for pleasure twice as much and perform more community service. In addition, arts education has a positive impact on deterring delinquent behavior in at-risk youth and can improve the developmental growth of all children.

What students learn through the arts and curricula infused with creativity helps prepare them for the real life demands of today's economy. Creative programs help students learn how to collaborate with others, enhance critical thinking skills, communicate clearly in a variety of media, produce results in real-time and think outside the box.

Globalization has transformed our economy into one that demands a nimble, well-educated work force. Our state's fastest-growing industries rely on people who can produce innovative ideas, solve complex problems and collaborate and strategize on complicated issues. In short, these industries require creative thinkers.

To stay competitive our fastest-growing industries are forced to import employees from outside our state. Washington simply is not producing enough students with the skills necessary to fill these positions and compete in the global economy. In 2004, 45 percent

of Washington businesses reported difficulty finding qualified job applicants.

Creative businesses, from museums to web design firms, demand innovative people as well. In fact, an Americans for the Arts study found that King County has the highest number of creativity-based businesses per capita, second only to New York.

While demand for creative thinkers is increasing, arts education programs are being cut from schools. In the last 15 years, Washington state dropped to 42nd in the nation for K-12 funding. Arts programs are often the first to go as schools try to compensate for the lack of funding.

Washington Learns' final recommendations, due out in November, are destined for the state Legislature in the coming legislative session. We urge Washington Learns and Gregoire to include every single recommendation to promote creativity in the final version of the report.

In January, our Legislature should endorse these recommendations to put arts and creativity back in our schools and align our education system with the demands of the 21st century. The strength of our economy, our communities and the future of our state depend on it.

It's about time we give our citizens the opportunity to succeed in the new global economy through a rigorous education that promotes creativity.

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