

Building Support For School Art Programs Part II—In Your Community

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Support art education at all levels K-12.

We cannot assume that students will elect high school art classes if they have not been involved in art throughout their schooling. Elementary and middle school programs and teachers need support.

Identify “art supporters” who are colleagues and parents.

Offer to do a presentation on “What is Abstract Art Anyway?” for the parents organization. Do a parent and kid hands-on event in the schoolyard. While you’re at it, develop a mailing list of interested parents and community to keep them informed about your program.

Hang exhibits in unlikely places.

Get the community talking about seeing students’ works where they least expect it...in fraternal halls, hardware stores, fire stations. Exhibits of prints are good because they are multiples and security is not as crucial.

Share credit and give awards frequently.

Programs of exhibits should always include principal, superintendent, and school board names. A “Friend of Art Award,” complete with gold notary seal and ribbon, paves the way for future support.

Publicize your events.

Make sure the event is out of the ordinary, then write a media release, and send a photo to local papers.

Win poster contests.

In my view it is time we took the limelight from classroom teachers whose kids make trite crayon posters but win because there’s no competition. The public should not assume that these poorly done works are representative of that which children are capable. Teaching advertising skills is a legitimate art lesson; choose the worthy contests. Art programs can benefit from the ensuing publicity provided by the sponsoring organization. Let them see that art teachers do make a difference.

Never embarrass anyone about their lack of art knowledge.

Most of our colleagues and decision makers have had poor art education. They traced their hand and made turkeys, then were bored with “art in the dirt” in college and are embarrassed that they still draw like third graders. Do not expect them to understand what you are trying to provide for your students unless you inform them. Your school exhibits that show reproductions (even postcards) and explain the style may provide learning experiences for them as well as for your students.

Never assume nobody cares.

Somebody out there *does* care. Find them and ask for support *before* your program is threatened.

Never assume anyone is an “enemy of art.”

Even if you have some evidence to the contrary operate *as if* the person would like to be a “friend of art” and strategize ways to win him/her over.

Never assume your program is secure.

“As artists, we may look at the world through the young eyes of our students.

- As art teachers we must deal with the world with the inquiring mind of DaVinci and the insight of Durer.

- We must see subtle shades in the dark like Ad Reinhardt, unify complexity like Louise Nevelson.

- We must be unafraid to face the bare truth with Alice Neel, share the dissonant with Diane Arbus, humor with Saul Steinberg, and criticize with Ben Shahn.

- But we must never lose the romantic vision of J. W. Turner, the poetry of Romare Bearden or the fantasy of William Baziotes.

- To make art central in education we must be as clear as Edward Hopper, as convincing as Andrew Wyeth.

- We must present our views with the single-mindedness of Van Gogh, the luminosity of Rembrandt, and the power of Michelangelo.

Art, like life itself, is risk.” (Irvine, 1988/89).

Never give up.

Nobody said it would be easy.

Reference

Irvine, H. (1988/89, Fall/Winter). Relationship of roles in art education. *NYSATA Bulletin*, 39, 1, pp. 18-24.