

San Diego Business Journal

Future Leaders Need Art-Infused Education

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San Diego Business Journal Staff

As Harvey White and Pete Garcia, both former executives on the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corp. board of trustees, have argued, “We need STEAM, not just STEM” to ensure our leadership in the 21st century. We need to put art back into our curricula.

White, who is co-founder of both Qualcomm Inc. and Leap Wireless International Inc., and Garcia, from University Engineering, know something about the work force of the future. White, who actually coined the phrase STEAM — or **Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math** — in a talk to the EDC, is especially passionate: “We simply cannot compete in the new economy unless we do something now about creativity and innovation.”

More than two years ago, then-President Bush signed into law a bill called the America Competes Act, also known as the STEM initiative for Science Technology Engineering and Math. President Obama has also called for a renewed STEM focus, and centers and institutes for STEM are popping up across the nation.

The Bush administration bill authorized \$151 million to help students earn a bachelor’s degree, math and science teachers to get teaching credentials, and provide additional money to help align kindergarten through grade 12 math and science curricula to better prepare students for college.

In a commentary in The Wall Street Journal, Chester E. Finn Jr. and Diane Ravitch, both assistant secretaries of education in the first Bush administration, complained loudly: “This is a mistake that will ill serve our children while misconstruing the true nature of American competitiveness and the challenges we face in the 21st century.”

In truth, we need a huge infusion of capital and a change in attitude about art and music, math and science. We need to define a well-rounded education and to make the case for its importance in a global innovation economy.

Getting Creative, Innovative

As demand for a new work force to meet the challenges of a global knowledge economy is rapidly increasing, few things could be as important in this period of our nation’s history than art education. Most analysts studying the new global economy agree that the growing “creative and innovative” economy represents America’s salvation.

Former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley predicted that the jobs in greatest demand in the future don’t yet exist. In fact, he said, they will require workers to use technologies that have not yet been invented to solve problems that we don’t yet even know are problems.

Clearly we are headed into a new and uncertain future, yet many of the critical questions are not being asked, let alone answered, in the public debate over K-12 education.

Humanity In The Marketplace

Addressing a Fordham Foundation education conference in early 2007, Dana Gioia, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, said: **“If the U.S. is to compete effectively with the rest of the world in the new global marketplace, we need a system that grounds all students in pleasure, beauty and wonder.**

It is the best way to create citizens who are awakened not only to their humanity, but also to the human enterprise that they inherit and will — for good or ill — perpetuate.”

He argued that America’s success will not be through “cheap labor, cheap raw materials, or the free flow of capital or a streamlined industrial base,” but through “creativity, ingenuity and innovation.”

After a decade of studying the human brain, we know the arts enhance math and science comprehension. We know that where art-infused education is used to redesign the curriculum, one that is truly integrated, collaborative and interactive, students’ attendance dramatically improves, as does performance.

There is simply no excuse for not reinventing our schools to meet the challenges of this new global knowledge-based age.

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