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# Monterey arts educators have much to celebrate

By [Claudia Meléndez Salinas](#), Monterey Herald

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MONTEREY >> When people talk about the renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act — most recently known as No Child Left Behind — they often sigh with relief at the thought of leaving testing behind.

Less cited is the fact that the Every Student Succeeds Act puts arts in a comfortable position as a “well-rounded” — and therefore needed — subject.

“Now that art is included in those, it really leverages opportunities for ... arts education funding,” said Jeff Poulin, arts education program manager at Americans for the Arts, a Washington-based advocacy organization.

Poulin will be one of the featured speakers at the 2016 Monterey County Arts Education Summit, which will take place Saturday at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Seaside.

Called “Maximizing the New Momentum,” the event will not just be about celebrating but also about making sure the recent gains are here to last, organizers said.

“There’s more money, more flexibility and more value,” said Paulette Lynch, executive director of the Arts Council for Monterey County. “All the pieces are there but even with all this positive energy, we want to be able to consolidate those gains and keep them moving and create a new normal.”

Arts educators lobbied incessantly in past years to see music, dancing and other like subjects return to the classrooms. Armed with boatloads of data, they insisted the arts were needed to make sure children enjoyed and improved their learning experiences.

The tide began to turn in California when top officials scrapped the way they fund schools and gave more control to districts. The new freedom has meant more arts classes for students.

It’s a remarkable, welcome change, Lynch said, especially when compared to 2004, the year when she first arrived at the Arts Council.

“I did not realize how things had deteriorated. I had teachers calling me crying that had been let go or had had enough and could not take it anymore,” she said.

During those years, everybody did their best but the efforts were haphazard. It’s still patchy, Lynch said, but the tide has definitely turned.

“The trend’s so powerful and so positive we have officially left behind the era of No Child Left Behind,” she said. “Now people are back to (asking) ‘how can we promote real, deeper learning?’ ”

Changes at the federal level will serve to further California changes, Poulin said.

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The reauthorization “is a pretty big win for the arts,” he said, adding that it will impact at least a generation of students.

“It’s not up for a giant rewrite for a number of years,” he said. “It opens the door to opportunities when the states can decide (what to implement) in the next 18 months.”

Correction: The Every Student Succeeds Act was misnamed in an earlier version of this article.

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## About the Author

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Claudia Meléndez Salinas covers education, immigration, youth, children, women and Latino issues in Monterey County and beyond. Reach the author at [cmelendez@montereyherald.com](mailto:cmelendez@montereyherald.com) or follow Claudia on Twitter: [@MelendezSalinas](#).

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