

Tom Horne Reports Arts Education Is Not a Frill

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The love of the life of the mind does not make us soft, and the love of beauty does not make us extravagant," said the leader of the Athenians, in a major oration following their victory over the more militaristic Spartans. From the time of the Athenians onward, about 24 centuries, the ability to understand and appreciate beauty has been one of the principle features distinguishing a civilized person from a barbarian. There is nothing -nothing — more basic in public education than to teach appreciation of the deeper kinds of beauty.

Students in schools, whose music and art program is inadequate, or mediocre, are not receiving an education worthy of the civilization that we have inherited. Arts education is primarily important because of its intrinsic value. But there are secondary benefits as well. Recent studies of the different functions of the left and the right half of the brain show that the development of aesthetic abilities is an aid to all kinds of other mental functions.

A study by the U.S. Department of Education of reasons for the success of Japanese education included the fact that they place far more emphasis on instrumental music, vocal music, and music application. I recently had to select a few resumes for interview, out of a stack of applications for a legal position with my law firm. One of those selected was a former violinist who had gone to law school. From that part of her resume, alone, I knew that she had the kind of self-discipline, and capability for obsessive hard work that is a precondition for success as a lawyer, or presumably any other worthwhile enterprise.

"Recent actions to strengthen the arts in Paradise Valley include hiring a full time arts coordinator, requiring music in middle school, and hiring adding additional art and strings teachers following passage of the budget override. Arts education is not a frill. It is a fundamental, basic part of the education of young people in any worthwhile civilization.