

ART FOR OUR SAKE

BY OLIVER GUINAN

THE RN&R'S ONLY TEENAGE CONTRIBUTOR EXPLAINS WHAT THE CITY'S YOUNG ARTISTS WANT FROM THEIR EDUCATION

My peers and I agree: Reno has a vibrant arts community. Private organizations like the Holland Project and the Nevada Museum of Art provide numerous spaces for young artists and musicians to showcase their work and help maintain a culture supportive of creatives.

Despite this, art and music programs in Nevada schools, which have been historically underfunded, continue to suffer budget cuts. This prevents new students from enrolling in creative classes, limiting Reno's development of young artists. It's difficult to take advantage of opportunities in the community and gain exposure if you lack the necessary technical skills that are supposed to be taught in a classroom. Art and music classes typically bare the brunt of funding deficits, but the trend has accelerated over the last four years.

"It definitely got a lot worse," said Madi Steiner, who recently graduated from Reno High School. Steiner is the founder of the

Reno High Art Club and took classes including sculpture, drawing and others while at school. "There were three traditional art classes originally, and now there are two. I know for a fact that the teacher was let go for funding reasons. They couldn't afford another art teacher."

McQueen High School has undergone many of the same cuts as Reno High, further shrinking its art program. McQueen's drawing teacher was laid off last year, leaving only two art teachers for nearly 1,800 students. Jordan Black, a senior, has been enrolled in the school's Global Studies Fine Arts program since his freshman year.

"It can be really hard to focus," Black said. "It's overwhelming with how many kids there are in one class. My ceramics teacher has definitely noticed that it's getting a lot harder to watch everyone and actually help everyone."

Because of the lack of instructors, each period consists of students at both



the Advanced Placement (or AP, which are classes meant to provide college credit for advanced students) level, as well as entry-level students. This means that students rarely receive the individual instruction their skill levels require.

In a state consistently ranked at or near the bottom in overall education standings, including a dead-last 51st ranking from Education Week's 2018 Quality Counts report, funding issues are unsurprising. Washoe County is in its 12th consecutive year with a budget deficit averaging between \$21 and \$28 million. Yet, funding is only partly to blame for insufficient faculty and exploding class sizes in creative courses. Much of the blame falls on how courses are prioritized in k-12 education.

The amount of funding a subject or department receives depends on how administrators perceive its value in relation to future employability. This makes sense only if you believe education exists solely

to serve the job market. Improvements in art education will not only require more funding but also a reassessment of educational values and priorities.

Creativity must no longer be an afterthought. Education as a whole should strive to create well-rounded citizens who are passionate and excited to express themselves, regardless of what job they pursue. Besides, careers in art are no less rewarding just because they typically generate less income than, say, a day trader. All occupations stand to benefit from a creative mind capable of surpassing conventional limits.

We all interact with art every day in countless ways, and it shapes the society we live in—especially in Northern Nevada. Moreover, self expression promotes democracy by helping individuals realize their value. Art education must not be left to fight for crumbs from other programs and should be treated as part of the bigger conversation around Reno's schools. □



LEANN RIMES

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