Arts education provides a form of expression and communication that is essential to the human experience.

- Susan Salcido, Ed.D., Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools

Children’s Creative Project
We are proud to offer a vibrant arts education program in Santa Barbara County through vital partnerships with non-profit organizations such as the Santa Barbara County Bowl Foundation, the Music Academy of the West, and the Santa Maria Arts Council, to name a few. One of our incredible programs is through the Children’s Creative Project, a non-profit program of the Santa Barbara County Education Office (SBCEO).

The Children’s Creative Project (CCP) provides exceptional visual and performing arts experiences to students throughout the county. It brings together students and professional artists, enabling children to develop artistic perception, creative expression, and an understanding of artists, the creative process, and historical and cultural arts heritage. The project, founded in 1974, now reaches roughly 50,000 children annually during school hours in more than 100 schools in Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties. The program includes visual and performing arts workshops conducted by resident artists, multicultural performances presented by professional touring artists at school sites, and a free annual performance event by a world-renowned artist for 2,000 to 4,000 students at a public theater venue.

The CCP supports individual schools and school districts in creating programs that meet their needs and budgets through resident artist workshops. Artists provide sequential, participatory lessons in dance, drama, vocal music, and visual arts, providing opportunities for creative
expression, skill development, and joyful discovery. These workshops address the California Arts Standards and can integrate the arts with other academic subject areas.

Santa Maria-Bonita School District is one of CCP’s partners providing essential support for K-6 arts education, reaching more than 400 classrooms in 16 schools. CCP works alongside the district to design its program, providing instruction in vocal music, visual arts, dance, and theatre. The support also offers touring artist performances for each school from a catalog of 135 multicultural artists. Another example is Carpinteria Unified School District, where the four elementary schools participate in a district-wide arts instruction program.

Created in 1987 by CCP Executive Director Kathy Koury, the Madonnari Italian Street Painting Festival is the primary fundraiser for the CCP. The festival, the first of its kind in North America, attracts 25,000 visitors annually and has become one of Santa Barbara’s most popular events. A true celebration of the arts and the creative process, Madonnari features live music and authentic Italian cuisine in addition to the unique street paintings that serve as its inspiration. The festival demonstrates the power of local partnerships as it draws significant support from local businesses, service clubs, and individuals.

Another one of the highlights of arts in Santa Barbara County is the annual recognition of an outstanding educator in the performing arts. The Santa Barbara County Performing Arts Teacher of the Year award is given annually to an exemplary performing arts teacher. Since 2016, the Teachers Network, a program of SBCEO, and the Santa Barbara Bowl Foundation, the foundation for Santa Barbara’s premier outdoor concert venue, have chosen a deserving recipient from among the many talented K-12 performing arts teachers. Each recipient is selected for their inspirational work to build students’ skills and creativity, and they serve as an ambassador for performing arts in education.

Finally, one of our newer collaborations is the Sing! Program with the Music Academy of the West. The Music Academy of the West is among the nation’s preeminent summer schools and festivals for gifted young classically-trained musicians and is uniquely positioned to provide arts education. Sing!, a free, after-school choral initiative, engages students, ages 7-12, in vocal music performance. Students learn about music and culture, singing in at least five languages. They gain confidence by performing at preeminent venues, and will be performing with the London Symphony Orchestra in the future. The Santa Barbara County Office of Education collaborates with the Music Academy to support the Sing!’s expansion to other elementary schools and provide opportunities for performances at several events, including the annual A Salute to Teachers event, where the Santa Barbara County Bowl Performing Arts Teacher of the Year is recognized.

Arts education is flourishing in Santa Barbara County, and these experiences enrich the lives of the 70,000 students served by public education.