

Inspiration BOARD



Drama teacher Suzanne Nichols (center) with her second-grade students at Hancock Park Elementary School last fall.

You can bring joy back to schools!

We're **inspired** by Suzanne Nichols, who saved art classes in her school district. Now it's your turn: Do just one thing on this list to nurture kids' creativity.

Art, music, drama, dance—they're all disappearing from American kids' lives as school districts across the country cut programs to save money. "It may be hard for some people to believe, but there are students in this country who have never held an instrument, touched new art supplies, or had any opportunity to express themselves in an artistic way," says Narric Rome, a senior director at the nonprofit Americans for the Arts. So when Suzanne Nichols, a mom and drama teacher in Los Angeles, found out that her district was planning to lay off art teachers and kill programs, she stepped up to save them. "It was so unfair to the children," says Suzanne. "When music, drama, and visual arts are a part of the curriculum, children perform better in reading and math, too. My daughter is very artistic, and it broke my heart to think she wouldn't have the chance to develop her talents." So Suzanne launched Save the Arts to inform parents about the staff cuts, and planned a talent show and art auction to raise money. Last June, more than 500 people showed up to her fund-raiser and donated *thousands*. The school district ultimately received funding from the state to keep all programs intact, so officials were able to use the money Suzanne raised to hire an additional drama teacher. "California's budget is horrendous. They're considering completely eliminating arts education next year," says Suzanne, who already has a new fund-raiser in the works. "Parents can really do a lot more than they think. Small events like bake sales and even

an auction of children's artwork are good ways to get your community involved in rescuing these programs."

4 WAYS YOU CAN HELP:

1 Donate new or gently used art supplies to the Dreaming Zebra Foundation, which fills art cabinets at low-income schools across the country with basic items like crayons, construction paper, and paint brushes. Find out what they need most at dreamingzebra.org/wishlist.

2 Book your next hotel stay at one of 55 Kimpton hotels and enter the code VH1STM at checkout. You'll save 10 percent and \$10 will go to the VH1 Save the Music Foundation, which has supplied 1,800 underfunded public schools with instruments since its inception in 1997.

3 Give one public school student a full *year* of free instrumental music lessons with a donation of just \$20 to littlekidsrock.org.

4 Lobby your school board to add more art to the curriculum (or to add it back). Visit giveanote.org/redbook to check out the page that the nonprofit Give a Note Foundation created for REDBOOK readers. There you'll find the latest news on arts education as well as form emails you can send to your representatives asking them to save funding for art classes. —ASHLEY NIEDRINGHAUS