SFUSD Hires New Executive Director for Creativity and The Arts
State Arts Council Chair Donn K. Harris to lead district-wide efforts to ensure access and equity in arts education, spearhead next stage of ArtsCenter development

May 19, 2016 (San Francisco, CA)- The San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) announced today that Donn K. Harris has been hired as the Executive Director for Creativity and The Arts, effective July 1.

“We are excited to have Mr. Harris rejoin SFUSD in this important leadership role,” said Richard A. Carranza, SFUSD Superintendent of Schools. “There is no better person to help us capture the great opportunities we have in front of us, working collaboratively with every school to ensure that each student has equal access to arts education.”

Harris served as the principal of the School of the Arts in SFUSD for seven years, where both of his daughters graduated. He then assumed the role of Executive and Artistic Director of Oakland School of the Arts (OSA) where he has led major development and expansion since 2007. Recruited by then-Attorney General Jerry Brown to stabilize OSA after the school spent its first five years in basements and portables, Harris ultimately was part of the team that raised the funds to move the school into its permanent home in The Fox Theater.

Governor Brown appointed Harris to the California Arts Council in 2013, and his peers elected him Chairman in 2014. He also serves as the Vice President of the national Arts Schools Network.

As the Executive Director for Creativity and The Arts in SFUSD, Harris will lead district-wide efforts to ensure access and equity in arts education and spearhead the next stage of the SFUSD ArtsCenter development.

“San Francisco has invested in arts education to a degree unseen elsewhere in the nation. Creativity is clearly a core value of our city, and we have work ahead to infuse that spirit into the daily life of our schools: examining contemporary art forms that reflect students’ cultures and interests, and studying our arts ecosystem to determine how best to give students equal access to the art forms that inspire them,” said Harris. “Also, enriching the work lives of teachers through access to resources and arts experiences will allow creativity to flourish in their classrooms, in keeping with the goals of Vision 2025.”

Superintendent Carranza tapped Mr. Harris to take the vision of the SFUSD ArtsCenter to the next level, which will encompass an entire city block on the former Commerce High site fronting Van Ness Avenue between Hayes and Fell. The district has been planning to move Ruth Asawa School of the Arts into a
new custom-built home on that block, and the concept has expanded into an initiative to support arts education for all 57,000 students, 4,000 teachers and 120 schools.

“Art and culture – along with creativity and innovation – emanate from our youth and its is essential that our schools support and grow their talents,” said Carranza. “We have a responsibility to steward an important city block amidst a world-class arts corridor and establishing SFUSD ArtsCenter places our ‘stake in the ground’ for generations to come.”

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