



# Santa Barbara County Education Office

4400 Cathedral Oaks Road, P.O. Box 6307, Santa Barbara, CA 93160-6307  
(805) 964-4711 • FAX: (805) 967-2234 • Direct Dial: (805) 964-4710 plus extension

*Service and Leadership • sbceo.org*

---

## Bill Cirone op ed column

**To:** All newspapers  
Feb. 28, 2017 —Col. 16/17-19

**For information:** David J. Lawrence  
964-4710, ext. 5282

### Larsen ‘instrumental’ to teaching

*By Bill Cirone, Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools*

It is always a joy to shine a bright light on outstanding teachers, and Brett Larsen is one of the very best. A music teacher at Adams School in Santa Barbara, he received the second annual Santa Barbara County Performing Arts Teacher of the Year award this year, and his beaming students stand in testament to the merits of that honor.

Larsen works musical magic, helping scores of students find their passion and an excitement for school. All 4<sup>th</sup> graders at Adams learn to play the violin, and 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders learn to play either a wind or string instrument. After hours, Larsen also teaches an all-school chorus program twice a week, and serves as co-leader of Bravo, the district’s elementary honor band. Bravo students have performed in the State Street Holiday Parade, the Milpas Parade, and for the City Council, and they are all special thrills for the students who take part.

“It’s a thrill that invariably translates to the classroom, too,” he says.

The studies bear him out. It’s been demonstrated that arts education plays a critical role in developing initiative, creative ability, self-expression, self-reflection, thinking skills, discipline, and a heightened appreciation of beauty and cross-cultural understandings. Most important, many young people find great joy in artistic expression. It helps keep them connected to their teachers and their schools.

This is where Larsen is a true master, encouraging students in ways teachers of other disciplines cannot always do as easily.

His personal route to teaching is also instructive. The Orcutt native moved to Manhattan a year before completing his degree at UCSB to spend a year working for a small record label. Then he returned to finish his degree in music composition and spent several years working at Cymbeline Records in Santa

Barbara while also moonlighting for a record producer in town. He also tried working in Information Technology for a while.

His sister, a kindergarten teacher in Texas, recognized his restlessness and suggested he might be happy as a music teacher. She was right.

He started working on a credential at Cal Lutheran. “The more I did it, the more I loved it,” he says, “and the more excited I got about my future. Once I got into the classroom, I knew I’d found my niche.”

His background as practitioner gives an extra layer of texture to his teaching and it’s clear his students love what he teaches and how he does it. He goes out of his way to pay tribute to the community partnerships that have played a part in helping unlock students’ musical potential: the Santa Barbara Education Foundation, the Santa Barbara Bowl, and Village Properties, among others.

Albert Einstein once said, “It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.” Brent Larsen is the embodiment of that art. He stands as an impressive representative of all the fine teachers in our county who touch lives and make a difference every single day, through their enthusiasm, their passion, and their skill. We salute them all. And we especially applaud Brett Larsen for being named Santa Barbara County Performing Arts Teacher of the Year.

###