

NEW YORK CITY ARTS IN EDUCATION CANDIDATE SURVEY PROJECT

Manhattan Borough President Candidates

The following questions are designed to determine candidates' positions on a number of issues related to the delivery of arts education (including music, dance, theater and visual arts) in New York City public schools. Questionnaires are being delivered to all certified candidates for the Office of Brooklyn Borough President. Responses will be posted at www.nycartsed.com, on participating organizations' websites, and provided to constituents, the public and press. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Candidate Name: Gale Brewer

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1. What meaningful experiences, if any, with the arts, either in school or otherwise, did you have in your life and what did you gain from these experiences?

I was so pleased that this year's Tony Awards were held at the Beacon Theater in my district. I was also delighted that the producers of the Tony's made tickets available to the high schools in my district. Several weeks after the Tony's, I was visiting a high school and a student I spoke with had attended the Tony Awards. He explained to me how that experience changed his life. He now knew he wanted to go into the theater. He suddenly had big dreams and concrete goals. This is the kind of impact arts can have on young people. This is why I am such an avid supporter of the arts.

2. It is widely acknowledged that access to a well-rounded curriculum is a key component of a quality education. However, numerous studies show that over the past decade disciplines such as art, science, and social studies are getting crowded out of the school day. In New York City, for instance, only half of all elementary schools are providing the arts instruction that is outlined in state education law. What strategies do you envision for broadening the school-day curriculum?

Broadening the school-day curriculum to allow more art based study per week has been one of the most challenging tasks school administrators have tried to address. One possible approach would be to offer students in grades 3 and up the opportunity of rotating from lunch/recess to working on art works in progress once or twice a week while eating a limited variety of lunch food in the designated art studio classroom. This will give the student more working time on their art they have already begun in formal lessons. Assigning a school aid to monitor the art room during this "lunch/art period" will allow the art teacher to take her/his designated lunch/prep periods. Doing this would add 35 to 45 minutes once or twice a week of accrual working time. This same approach can apply to student's music study, and practice requirements.

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3. How, if at all, would you envision restructuring the current system of school governance? How might this impact the delivery of arts instruction in city schools?

There are a number of changes that I would consider making in school governance including making the current CECs more democratic. We must commit to adequate funding in the arts, understanding that the arts are a discipline unto themselves that nurtures growth, and self esteem as well as active community participation.

4. The arts are recognized as a core subject area here in New York and at the federal level. However, while many schools in New York City do provide quality arts instruction, access to this instruction is far from universal. How best can the city ensure equity in the delivery of arts education in the following key areas:

A. Funding: Principals consistently cite budget constraints as the chief obstacle to providing arts education at their schools. While schools receive “Supplemental Arts Funding” each year (formerly known as Project Arts), as of 2007 principals are not required to spend these funds directly on arts education. How can the city ensure that every school in the city has the resources to provide every student with a quality education that includes the arts?

We have to adequately fund the arts in schools and particularly alternative sources of funding similar to Project Arts, and deliver the funding equally as per need to every school. Department of Ed oversight of the arts must parallel that of other subject areas.

B. Qualified Instructors: Highly qualified certified arts teachers are the cornerstone of quality arts programs in schools. However, whether due to budget constraints, school size, or other factors, almost 20% of city schools have no certified arts instructor on staff. How can the city ensure that all of our public school students receive instruction from qualified arts instructors?

A terrific solution for schools is to bring in non-profit orgs who have qualified artists and who can also train others in sequential curriculum.

C. Space: Lack of available in-school arts space is one of the top challenges principals face in implementing arts education. What policies would you propose to prevent the loss of arts spaces in public schools due to overcrowding, co-location, or other factors?

Art rooms cannot be up for grabs when negotiating co-locations. When charter schools co-locate in public schools, public schools often lose space. Losing an art room should not be an option.

Designated art rooms in a shared school community should be mandated to create schedules so all students have adequate time in it. Currently schools share cafeterias, gyms, and auditoriums. Art rooms can also be shared facilities, particularly if outside artists come in to help train art teacher and to assist with space utilization in art rooms.

D. Partnerships: New York City has a rich array of cultural resources, including arts and cultural institutions and professional artists that play an important role in the lives and education of some of our school children. How can the city ensure that all public school students and their families enjoy meaningful engagement with these resources?

All institutions that receive city funding should be mandated to deliver comp tickets to public schools or other schools that show financial need. The DOE must work to ensure fair distribution of comp tickets and that they are distributed on a regular basis.

We must also work with cultural institutions that receive city funding to ensure that they are making it clear to families and youth that admission fees are suggested, not mandated.

5. The city's accountability system places a heavy emphasis on student performance on state assessments in English language arts and math. Currently, performance assessments for the arts are being piloted in city schools and while the arts can potentially factor into a high school's report card grade, the overall impact is minimal. Are there ways you would propose the city expand or revise the school accountability system to incorporate the arts?

Those professionals in the field of art education have brought to my attention that a grading assessment system for the arts should rely on the students continuous active participation, and attendance, but not exclusively on proficiency in the discipline at hand.

6. How would you engage teachers, parents, the arts and cultural community, city agencies, and other interested stakeholders to expand access to arts education both in-school and outside of the school day?

This is an area that requires the active promotion of art exhibits and events as well as ongoing advocacy (for funding, resources, etc.)

Additional Comments:

I have been a strong and continuous supporter of the arts in my district by funding schools, nonprofit art orgs, as well as senior citizens organization with funding I earmarked for arts education and the art community in general.

An example is the nonprofit art organization called Arts in Action VAP Inc. Through funding for the past 6 years they have been able to help children ages 5 through 17 learn a progressive sequential fine art curriculum that has empowered them to communicate more effectively, and well as produce a large body of middle school students who have been accepted into the art based high schools such as LaGuardia, Frank Sinatra, as well as other high schools who are looking for students interested in fine art like Beacon High school. I also partnered local business with arts organizations who have helped support these art based nonprofits in their community. This was not unique for this organization alone but for all arts organizations throughout my district.

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