

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: Julie Menin

Date: 6/30/2013

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?

As the daughter of an artist, the arts played a meaningful role in my childhood – and have continued to play a major role in my adult life. My mother was involved in Arts Against Aids and I performed pro-bono work for them as an attorney.

After 9/11, I started a non-profit, "Wall Street Rising," to rebuild lower Manhattan – which incorporated an emphasis on art and culture. We hosted "Art Downtown," which consisted of 5 simultaneous contemporary art shows in a four-block area, and "Music Downtown," a series of free concerts at the Tribeca Performing Arts Center. These programs lured people from across our city – and contributed to lower Manhattan's cultural regrowth.

In addition, I helped find and secure \$200 million in funding for the WTC Performing Arts Center -- which will be a world-class theater, dance and music facility in lower Manhattan. Through the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, we also awarded \$45 million in cultural grants to art projects.

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?

We need to make sure kids are getting a wholesome education and developing creative and analytical skills – they can't just be learning to take tests.

Budget constraints, overcrowding, and pressure to devote resources to test preparation have resulted in severe cuts to arts and physical education classes from our schools' curriculum.

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Our kids attend school to develop their collaborative and critical thinking skills, and to unleash their creative abilities. Arts and music classes are central components in helping kids develop those skills – making the City’s shortfalls in incorporating arts education in some curriculums particularly painful.

As Borough President, I will publicize where our schools are falling short on New York State’s mandated arts and physical education classes. For instance, New York State Education Law requires elementary schools to offer instruction in dance, music, theater, and visual arts. The DOE conceded in a 2012 report that only 54% of elementary schools offered all four art disciplines.

Like the Manhattan Borough President’s current appointee on the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP), the next Borough President’s PEP appointee should be a community leader with a demonstrated record of advocacy on behalf of parents who can make his or her voice heard.

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?

If elected Manhattan Borough President, I would use my appointee to the Panel for Educational Policy to push for a strengthened role for parents in the governance of our schools. In addition, Community Education Councils should be granted additional powers so that the community also has a voice in the educational process. We must do more to increase democratic participation and transparency when it comes to our schools.

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?

Principals currently operate in an environment that encourages them to cut arts education when making tough decisions with limited resources. By increasing parental and community involvement in each school’s priorities, we can work toward changing the circumstances in which principals currently make decisions.

If elected Borough President, I will advocate at least a percentage of Supplemental Arts Funding would be used for its intended purpose.

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?

As Manhattan Borough President, I would be an advocate for families on meeting state law on arts education – with qualified arts instructors. I think that by emphasizing arts education as part of our academic priorities, and meeting the state-mandated arts education requirement, we will start to attract additional qualified arts instructors for our schools.

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?

The overcrowding of our public schools is one of the biggest concerns facing Manhattan.

The comprehensive Master Plan for the borough that I have put forward will require major residential developments to set aside school seats to relieve the burden of overcrowding. Co-location, be it the co-location of multiple public schools or charter schools alongside public school in the same building, has reduced space for all students. Faced with limited resources, schools have been quick to cut dedicated space for arts programs, physical education and dedicated science classrooms. Arts programming is not only essential to a well-rounded education, but required under state law, and it is unacceptable that the Department of Education and the School Construction Authority's lack of planning has led to these problems.

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?

By cutting arts education, we are robbing our kids from enjoying and appreciating art at an early age. That's especially problematic for New York – we're the cultural center of the world and the arts are central to our vitality. Schools should take advantage of our museums, performing arts centers, and galleries.

By emphasizing arts education in our schools, we will increase students' interest in arts and encourage them to seize opportunities around them. In addition, as Borough President, I will advocate for partnerships between our cultural centers and schools – so students across Manhattan have greater exposure to our arts and cultural institutions.

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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?

Yes, I believe that school progress reports should also include whether schools are meeting the state law on arts education requirements. We need our curriculum and assessments to move away from a model centered on test-taking to one that reflects the totality of the education a student is gaining.

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?

If elected Borough President, my appointee to the City's Panel for Education Policy will be a community leader with a demonstrated record of advocacy. School governance needs to engage parents and the community. Combined, these efforts will expose students to more opportunities in their communities – and make arts education a greater priority within schools.

I will also encourage partnerships between schools and art and cultural institutions in our city. Our city has so much to offer when it comes to the arts – and building those partnerships will help unleash our kids' creativity and enrich our city.

Additional Comments:

No additional comments.