

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: Robert Jackson

Date: 6/17/2013

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 a product of New York City public schools, a Community School Board President and now a City Council leader and Chair of the Council Education Committee, I've seen firsthand the transformative power arts education can have on a student. Arts Education provide the skills, creativity and ingenuity students need to compete and can also help bridge the achievement gap, lifting students who might otherwise be felt behind.

That's why I have fought hard for arts education – holding hearings, organizing rallies and successfully saving arts specialists in our schools. In 2007, I was proud to receive your first ArtSmart New York Award for work to support arts education.

On a more personal level, I've seen the positive effect of arts education on my own daughters. My oldest daughter became actively involved in theater in Junior High School, including participating in TADA. This involvement had a positive effect on her academic performance, and today she is a doctor. Similarly, my youngest daughter has studied at the Julliard School and pursued a career as a dancer. I've seen what arts education has meant for them and it has reinforced my commitment to provide a robust arts education to every child.

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?

An education framework that emphasizes test scores has resulted in a significant diversion of resources away from arts education. That's why I introduced a 2012 Resolution calling on the state to develop an accountability system which does not require extensive standardized testing. And *view responses from all candidates for mayor and borough president at nycartsed.com*

the real irony is that students with access to arts education have been shown to produce superior academic achievement on standardized tests, the very goal that is being pursued. We must end the emphasis on high stakes testing and put greater emphasis on bringing creativity and innovation into the education process.

Almost three years ago, the Panel for Educational Policy's Arts Education Advisory Committee laid out a three-year plan to "create an arts education program in all our schools that is based on access and equity for every student, that meets the state standards for arts education, and that ensures that all children growing up in the cultural capital of the world will finally receive a world-class arts education."

Unfortunately, since then little has changed and far too many students are not receiving strong arts instruction. With a whole new city government coming in next year, we must rally together for a more balanced curriculum that meets the commitments that have long been talked about. We must make sure funds are not diverted, arts teachers and leadership is provided and all schools achieve NYSED arts requirements. As Borough President, I am ready to lead this campaign to ensure that all children receive the arts education they need, deserve and to which they are entitled.

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?

First, I would get rid of Mayoral Control. Under Mayoral Control now, parents, teachers and students are shut out of the decision making process and it is more a "do as we say [not as we do]" attitude and system. We need a governance system that respects the people directly impacted and involve them as stakeholders in shaping important educational decision. Input from the stakeholders will help move away from a curriculum that focuses on test scores to one that focuses on students needs like arts education.

Second, we must give more power to the Panel for Educational Policy. It no longer should be a rubber stamp for the Mayor. PEP's 2011 report provided a clear Blueprint for delivering arts education. We must implement its recommendations for a well rounded arts education for all 1.1 million public school parents.

Third, we should be giving a greater voice to Community Education Councils. This also will provide a greater voice for parents in the decision making process of their local schools. Greater parental involvement will have positive effect on all aspects of the schools and provide an important voice for arts education of their children.

And fourth, we should look for greater partnerships between schools in the same area and between schools and cultural institutions. This sharing of resources could help provide schools the resources to provide improved arts education.

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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?

The elimination in 2008 of Project Arts which provided a dedicated funding line for art education has resulted in sharp declines in spending for important areas of arts education and the number of new arts instructors citywide. This decline has been particularly prevalent in schools serving poorer neighborhoods where principals are struggling to meet their schools’ needs with limited resources. However, it has also been reported that these students can benefit most from well-rounded arts education and it can help close the achievement gap.

As a City Council leader I’ve spoken out for, held hearings and lead rallies that have helped prevent cuts in arts education. I will continue this fight with the larger platform the Borough President’s office provides. But it is also clear based on the clear evidence of declines in arts education and arts teachers when DOE reclassified these funds as “Supplemental Arts Funding”, the City should go back to a dedicated funding line for arts education that once again ensures that schools are spending this funding on arts education as intended.

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?

Clearly we can’t achieve the arts education our children need and to which they are entitled without certified arts instructors on staff. In 2011, I lead the fight to prevent more than 4,000 teacher layoffs, roughly 350 of which would have been arts specialists. Last year, I helped launch “Walk the Talk” an innovative public demonstration to build awareness about the deteriorating funding for arts education in NYC public schools. Many can talk the talk, but my record shows I’ve walked the walk and made this a priority and commitment for the past 11 years. I will continue this important fight as Manhattan Borough President.

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?

According to The Center for Arts Education’s own report, “a 2008 survey of principals, 25 percent reported losing their art, music, dance, drama, or foreign language spaces to general education

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classrooms during their tenure (Horowitz & Haimson 2008). And according to a study that same year by the national Center on Education Policy, since the implementation of No Child Left Behind in 2001, schools were increasing instructional time on math, reading, and related testing and test preparation and decreasing their teaching time on the arts and other subject areas (Center on Education Policy 2008).”

Since then the problem has gotten worse as overcrowding, co-location, and other factors have exacerbated the problem. Co-locations put particular stress on specialized space like cafeterias, gymnasiums and arts spaces. But too many of the co-locations have been done without community input and without a process to work out these problems. When co-locations take place they must be done with cooperation of the stakeholders and make sure the existing schools do not lose access to art spaces.

To solve the problem, we must first have accurate information. That’s why I championed the True Blue Book Bill to require the Department of Education to report specific information about each school building, such as whether rooms such as arts spaces, gymnasiums, libraries or science labs have been converted to general classroom space.

We must also plan better for growth in school populations. The CFE lawsuit which I brought against state provided billions of new dollars for school construction. With good planning and the right priorities, we must ensure that in-school arts space is provided and preserved.

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?

New York City is the cultural capital of the world and right now many exciting partnerships exist between our great cultural institutions and our public schools. However, far too many children are not able to take advantage of this great resource. We must catalogue and analyze the partnerships that are in place and see where students are being left out. We must more proactively work these elements into the education system and foster an increased level of engagement.

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 support work to create a school accountability system to incorporate the arts performance assessments in the schools. There should be continued work to assure that DOE is able to conduct arts assessments and parents can see school’s success in achieving required levels of arts education.

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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?

Throughout my career, I've been a strong advocate who knows how to bring people together to turn challenges into opportunities. In this city and particularly in the Borough of Manhattan we have so many leaders in the arts and people who have contributed so much to the arts. Working together, we must build on the great work and strong coalitions the Center for Arts Education has built to promote an active, engaged movement for arts education. Our city is the cultural capital of the world. There is no reason we should not also be the leader in arts education in the world. But right now we are being passed by other big cities. I will engage teachers, parents, the arts and cultural community, city agencies, and other interested stakeholders to build a movement to expand access to arts education both in-school and outside of the school day. And I hope one of my legacies of my term as Borough President will be to make this happen.

Additional Comments:

No additional comments.