

NEW YORK CITY ARTS IN EDUCATION CANDIDATE SURVEY PROJECT

Comptroller 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: Scott Stringer

Date: 7/2/2013

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 lifelong New Yorker, I have been enriched--and elevated--by the arts everyday by living in this City. It is the cultural capital of the world, and we are lucky to call it our home. The arts define New York, and we see the evidence of this all around us--from our extraordinary museums, theaters and performing arts centers, to the City's thriving artistic street life and grassroots arts organizations, which do so much to enliven the life of our communities. My wife works professionally in the arts, and I look forward to exposing my two young sons to the riches of this City as they grow. It is impossible to imagine--or appreciate--New York without the arts; they are part of our daily lives.

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?

New York City is the capital of the nation's creative class, but that can sometimes be hard to discern by looking at our school system today. I believe we need to stop looking at arts education as a luxury and recognize that some 60% of our city's economy is based on art, design, consulting and other creative, service-based professions. This is about exposing every student to the wonders of artistic expression, but also giving them the skills they will need to compete in our growing creative economy.

Part of that is moving the city toward a community-based school model. These are schools where arts education is central to the daily curriculum, but also emphasized as part of a rich, after-school environment that re-imagines the role of school in the life of a community. I believe that school

view responses from all candidates for mayor and borough president at nycartsed.com

buildings should be the anchors of our communities, and offer not just a basic education from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., but a rich array of arts and other continuing education opportunities for children and grown-ups alike.

I also think it is appalling that that the city DOE has chosen to knowingly violate state law by failing to provide arts education in every school. As comptroller, I would audit DOE's compliance in this regard to expose exactly which schools are being denied arts education programs (data the DOE has consistently refused to release), and map the results as part of a broader push to reveal underlying inequities in arts education. At the end of the day, we need to build a city where every child has the same opportunity to express themselves through the study and practice of art and other creative disciplines.

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?

I support mayoral control and as comptroller would advocate for its extension, but I also believe its promise has not been fully realized. The true potential of mayoral control lies in the capacity to knock down bureaucratic walls and bring agencies together around the shared goal of lifting up our children, artistically and other ways. Too often our city government operates as a series of silos, with no communication between agency heads or staff. Navigating these channels to find new efficiencies is something I would make a priority as comptroller through targeted, constructive audits. By focusing every agency head on the health, safety and educational growth of our children, we can maximize our resources and help to expand art and other programs designed to enrich the lives of our students.

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 need to increase funding for arts education in our schools so that principals have the resources they need to create meaningful programs, and then we need to adhere to state law that requires arts education be part of every school's curriculum, right next to reading, math, science and social studies. I also think that there is potential within the city's philanthropic community for expanded arts education funding. But the effort must begin with a substantial commitment by the city. As Comptroller, I will use the powers of audit and contract review, to root out waste and inefficiency in City spending so that we can provide needed funding for classroom instruction, including arts education.

view responses from all candidates for mayor and borough president at nycartsed.com

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?

No one doubts that every school should have math teachers, or history teachers. The same should hold true for art teachers, who are just as critical if we are going to teach to the whole child. We need to ensure that every school has certified art teachers on staff, and we need to give them the resources they need to create vibrant, meaningful programs.

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?

In my reports "Crowded Out" (2008), "Still Crowded Out" (2008), and "School Daze" (2009), my office shined a light on DOE's flawed process for planning for future population increases in city schools. Specifically, we found that more than four out of ten (43 percent) of Manhattan elementary and middle schools suffer the negative consequences of the DOE's inadequate planning for public school space needs. The majority of reported problems involved widespread and now-familiar concerns about too few school seats for the number of children to be educated in a given school (41 Manhattan schools), and also the loss of "cluster rooms" for activities such as art, music and science (28 Manhattan schools). With New York City Arts in Education standing at our side, we offered a series of substantive recommendations, including a set of "best practices" designed to improve the timeline for proposed school changes; increased community input in the process of co-location/relocation decisions; and a more clearly defined Educational Impact Statement (EIS) that looks at the full scope of each proposed change, giving communities more meaningful information about the potential ramifications and benefits of DOE proposals.

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 has some of the finest cultural institutions in the world, many of which are already deeply engaged in spreading the joys of artistic expression to our young people. But too many neighborhoods are often overlooked in this process, creating "art deserts" with few real offerings. As mentioned, as comptroller I will work to map these deserts, so that we can identify areas of real need. Then I would work with our major cultural organizations to develop new ways to partner, as well as strategies for making them available to every school in the city.

view responses from all candidates for mayor and borough president at nycartsed.com

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?

I believe that parents need to be given the tools to evaluate individual schools. But I also believe that the city's current testing regime - which rewards teachers and principals only for numerical progress on math and reading scores - has distorted the prism through which schools are judged. Of course math and reading scores are important and need to remain a part of every school Report Card, but I also believe that principals need to be incentivized to provide arts education. That will only happen if we give principals the resources they need to provide such education in every city school, and then hold schools accountable by making arts education a mandatory component of their curriculum, as well as part of school evaluations. That will help parents to find the best schools for their children, and it will help students by broadening their learning experience with more exposure to the arts.

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?

I have long advocated for repairing our city's Community Education Councils, which under mayoral control were intended to serve as the voice of parents and communities. Unfortunately, the DOE has never given our CECs the training and support they deserve, leaving many parents feeling shut out from meaningful discussions around their children's education. That's a tragedy. As Comptroller, just as I have as Borough President, I would advocate for empowering our local CECs, to give them a real voice in setting priorities for school districts. With the proper supports, CECs could engage parents, lead discussions about improved arts education, and also leverage neighborhood resources that could help individual schools improve their arts education offerings.

Additional Comments:

No additional comments.