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City Schools Fail to Comply With State Rule on Arts Classes

By [JENNIFER MEDINA](#)

Only 4 percent of the city's elementary schools meet the state's requirement for arts education, according to the results of a city survey Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) announced on Thursday.

But the mayor said that the city was making progress, noting that 98 percent of elementary schools have some instruction in either dance, music, theater or visual arts.

"We are moving in the right direction," he said. "We will hold them accountable for teaching the arts just as we have established holding them accountable for English and math."

Advocates for the arts in public education immediately attacked the city's efforts.

"In our City of New York, the arts capital of the world, the majority of our elementary and middle school students do not appear to meet what are the most minimal state requirements," said Richard Kessler, the executive director of the Center for Arts Education.

Several advocates said that the roughly \$150,000 in private donations spent on the survey would have been better spent on arts programs.

The state requires that elementary school students receive education in dance, music, theater and visual arts every year. The survey showed that fewer than 30 percent of middle schools met the requirement of providing two half-unit art classes between seventh and eighth grades.

Despite the requirements, the state does not demand that the City Education Department report on arts instruction. But city officials emphasized that they would ask more schools to meet those expectations.

Last spring, the department infuriated arts advocates when Chancellor [Joel I. Klein](#) gave principals control of the money used for a multimillion-dollar arts program. Although some feared the principals would cut arts instruction, Mr. Bloomberg said yesterday that principals were spending more money on the programs than they had in the past. This school year, arts spending has increased by 3 percent, to approximately \$322 million, the department said.

In July, the mayor announced that the department would hold schools accountable for providing quality arts classes, and that principals would be rated on how well they ran such programs. Each school will receive a report card on the arts, which will be posted on the school's Web site.

Project Arts, the \$67.5 million program that had previously financed arts education, was developed during the Giuliani administration as a way to rebuild arts programs eviscerated during the fiscal crisis of the 1970s. Education officials said the money was a fraction of what was spent on the arts, with the rest coming from other parts of the budget and private financing.

Arts advocates said they worried that midyear budget cuts and deeper cuts planned for next year would lead principals to scale back arts programs to focus on reading and math.

"With the elimination of Project Arts, cuts to the school budget, a lack of licensed arts teachers, and many school administrators lacking in the skills necessary to administer the arts, we may be looking at a perfect storm brewing for arts education," Mr. Kessler said. "The entire city must ask how the arts will really count." The mayor added that despite the cuts, he expected principals would spend money on the arts. "I will not stand for anyone to pick on one thing," he said. "We are not walking away from the arts. Will it expand as fast as we would like it to? No. But then, nothing is going to expand as fast as we like it to in the real world."