



THE CENTER FOR ARTS EDUCATION

Testimony to the New York City Council

Joint Hearing of the Committee on Education and the

Committee of Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

Delivered by Richard Kessler, The Center for Arts Education

Re: Oversight: The State of Arts Education in New York City Public Schools

April 8, 2008

Good Morning. Thank you Chairmen Jackson and Recchia and members of the Committees on Education and Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations, for the opportunity to testify today on the state of arts education in New York City public schools. I am Richard Kessler, Executive Director of The Center for Arts Education. On behalf of everyone associated with CAE, I would like to thank you all for making this oversight hearing possible.

The Center for Arts Education is dedicated to ensuring that New York City Public School students have quality arts learning as an essential part of their K-12 education. Since its founding in 1996, CAE has provided \$40 million in funding directly schools to support the creation of quality arts education programs. Today's hearing is of great interest to CAE's constituents, the parents and school children of the City of New York. As you know, New York City is the cultural capital of the world and the arts play a critical role in how we define ourselves as a city and as a people. From the lights and "In the Heights" of Broadway, to the soup cans of Andy Warhol, to more than 50 years of Merce Cunningham Dance, to all of the vitality, innovation, and determination that defines the for-profit and commercial arts and its over 300,000 jobs. These are the most visible aspects of the influence of the arts on our city. But the arts also play a critically important role in shaping the hearts and minds of the city's future: namely our public school children.

The arts are inherent to all human beings—the arts are part of our DNA. Each child has the arts within them and should be provided with sustained pathways for learning in and through the arts, as they mature and discover who they are as human beings. Therefore, arts education is a right of our children, not a privilege. CAE agrees with former schools chancellor Rudy Crew, who spoke of the arts and how they help prepare our children to be part of a democracy—or more specifically, "to paint their own democracy."

Unfortunately, based on our own estimation and the expressed opinions of parents, teachers, school administrators, funders, artists, and arts and arts education organization representatives, CAE believes that we are witnessing the gathering of a perfect storm. A storm that is poised to damage access to arts education in ways not experienced since the fiscal crisis of the mid-

1970s. What we are seeing today in the city's public schools is a profound new shift away from the arts, and the other elements of a well-rounded education, including subjects such as history, foreign language, physical education—all content deemed expendable for test preparation. This is to the detriment of the city's school children. As new data we will share today shows, arts offerings and instruction have a positive impact on school culture and New York City's troubling graduation rate - one of the worst in the nation.

So what is the perfect storm we see brewing?

First, if the real and only "Accountability Initiative" is the School Progress Report, which drives the rewards and consequences for each and every principal, and which, for all practical purposes, serves as the engine for what makes a school run. In the elementary and middle schools, the Progress Report is based almost exclusively on standardized tests in reading and math. In high school, graduation rates and regents diplomas are a major factor. A principal may receive a bonus or risk losing their jobs based on these factors.

Second, Project ARTS was the only guaranteed budget line for the arts and the fuel behind the improvements to arts education over the past decade. Many schools and arts educators depended on this funding to keep the arts alive in their classrooms.

Combine its elimination with what will be a nearly 10% cut to the schools budget including this and next year. Then add principals having no practical supervision. Add to this witches brew the hard fact that the arts have always been cut disproportionately during periods of budget reductions. History has taught us this. To consider these factors and to believe anything else is not plausible.

The gathering storm is also well understood within key, alarming statistics provided by the NYC DOE over the past year:

- 32% of parents surveyed by the NYC DOE indicate that their children receive zero arts education.
- Only 29% of all middle school students are provided with the minimum state requirements.
- Only 4% of all elementary schools surveyed are even in a position to provide the minimum state requirement by offering all four art forms in each grade.
- 20% of schools have no arts specialists whatsoever—with almost 1500 schools, well you can do the math.
- The ratio of arts teachers to students, which gives us a blunt gauge of access, contains statistics such as one theater teacher in the system for every 13,000 students. And each theater teacher on average has to work with a school population of 929 students.

Most of this data comes directly from the Department of Education's recent "Annual Arts in Schools Report," which is a good first attempt to shed light on the state of arts education in city public schools.

However, it does not provide us with any measure of what arts instruction elementary school children are actually receiving. At these grade levels, the students are required by the state to receive 10 % of instructional time in the four primary art forms in grades four through six, and 20% of instruction in the four primary art forms in one through three. Data developed for by Department of Education with funding by The Wallace Foundation in 2006 and 2007 estimated

that even where the arts are offered, only a fraction of the students are receiving the instruction. Naturally, this comes as no surprise when you consider the number of arts specialists and how little professional development and emphasis has been placed on the integration of the arts through the curriculum.

Let us also consider that few principals are prepared to effectively administer arts education in their schools, having had little to no arts education in their training as teachers, little to no arts education in their training as principals, and very possibly little experience in arts education in their own K-12 education.

As mentioned, CAE has been working with an independent firm to provide a deeper analysis of the data collected for the "Annual Arts in Schools Report." I'd like to take a brief moment to share some of the preliminary findings with you. As part of our analysis, we looked at data provided by the DOE on student participation in arts activities, the number of certified arts teachers on staff, whether or not schools offered sequential learning in the arts, and completion by graduates of three plus arts courses (a measure that exceeds state standards). We crossed this data with graduation rates and school demographic information.

Our preliminary analysis **points to:**

- A strong correlation between high school graduation rates and access to arts offerings and instruction
- A strong correlation between the percentage of students receiving free lunch (the level of student poverty) and lack of access to arts offerings and instruction

As many of you know, a recent study by the EPE Research Center with funding from the America's Promise Alliance and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation indicated the graduation rate in New York City Public Schools as of 2003-2004 was 45.2%. This is a clear indication that we are failing to adequately provide the environment that keeps our students in school and on a clear path to graduation. Our findings that graduation rate is positively correlated to arts offerings and instruction are very compelling in this light and we believe warrant increased attention by all school decision-makers of the impact of arts education and offerings on graduation rates.

Our other major preliminary finding is equally as important. In those schools with the greatest percentage of students that qualify for free lunch, the arts offering and instruction is the lowest. This points to a real issue of equity and access to arts education that should not be ignored in this discussion and is worthy of further study and action to address.

We have provided a brief summary of this preliminary analysis as an addendum to this testimony and are happy to discuss with interested parties in greater detail.

In fairness, the Department of Education has done some good work in professional development of arts teachers, the creation of small arts themed schools, and the development of a wide range of programmatic efforts, including the creation of the arts blueprints. The Department of Education has since 2003 significantly expanded the number of positions within its Office of Arts and Special Project.

Having been created in 1996 by the Mayor's Office, the then Board of Education, and the United Federation of Teachers, in response to a major challenge grant by The Annenberg Foundation, CAE has for its first 10 years been the good soldier, always helping with whatever was asked by

the Department of Education, never offering public criticism, never appearing to waver from being a supportive partner and flexible resource. Beginning with the elimination of Project ARTS in 2007, however, CAE felt compelled to take a public position that is not always in agreement with the Department of Education.

As you know, we do have a set of state instructional requirements in the arts that if met would certainly be a great step toward improving education in the city's schools. These requirements can be met, they are not an impossible dream. Can anyone here tell me that over the course of 7th and 8th grades that we cannot provide the equivalent of 108 hours for the arts? Two credits, which the State Department of Education defines at 54 hours per credit. Unfortunately, we are not living up to the requirements—we are not accountable to these requirements. In the arts capital of the world, our city's public school students are being denied a well-rounded education that includes the arts. Or as CAE's chair emeritus Laurie Tisch often says: "not having arts education in New York City is like living in Bermuda and never learning how to swim."

Providing a well-rounded education that includes the arts for all of our students will require rethinking of accountability, and a rethinking of in-service and pre-service requirements and offerings for teachers and administrators. It will require careful financial incentivizing along the lines of Project ARTS. It will require a reconsideration of where real value is placed on a policy as well as practical basis. It will require a commitment to provide the minimum requirements for every child and attention paid to "inputs," as well as "outputs." Finally, it will require us all to learn more from those principals and schools that make the arts happen, against the odds, to carefully learn how real value leads to real access and quality.

Recently, I was asked by a senior education official whether "I thought any other subject at all should be taught besides arts education?" It reminded me of when another senior education official told an audience of arts education providers that "principals have other things to think about besides the arts all day long." My response in both instances is to ask when: when will all our school children be provided with what they deserve and are entitled to by New York State law? Will it happen when the graduation rates reach 100%? Will it happen when all schools receive an A on their progress report? Will it happen when all students are reading and performing on mathematics tests at grade level? Will all children be provided with the arts, or at least the minimum state requirements when most of the comprehensive high schools are converted to small schools or when all the schools become the equivalent of 1500 charter schools? CAE believes that the arts are a part of the answer to what students need to succeed and achieve—that there is such a thing as a point of diminishing returns in cannibalizing the school day, the school year, the 13 years of K-12, all of it, for the sake of test prep in reading and math.

Thank you.