



THE CENTER FOR ARTS EDUCATION

## Testimony to the New York City Council

### Joint Hearing of the Committee on Education and Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses

Delivered by Doug Israel, Director of Research and Policy, The Center for Arts Education

Re: Oversight – Addressing School Overcrowding, Part 1

October 3, 2008

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Good Morning. Thank you Chairs Jackson and Lappin and members of the Committee on Education and Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses for the opportunity to testify today. I am Doug Israel, Director of Research and Policy for The Center for Arts Education (CAE).

As you are aware, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) and the School Construction Authority (SCA) are developing the next five year plan for new school construction. CAE is here today because we believe that as the city tackles overcrowding issues in public schools it is critical that due attention be paid to the maintenance, expansion and reclamation of spaces dedicated to arts learning in public schools.

According to the DOE's 2006-2007 "Annual Arts in Schools Report" the lack of available in-school arts space was one of the top three challenges to implementing arts education reported by all schools. Regrettably, there is evidence that dedicated space for arts learning in public schools is decreasing.

According to a recent survey conducted by Class Size Matters, in conjunction with the New York City Council, 25% of principals reported losing their art, music, dance, drama, or foreign language spaces to general education classrooms during their tenure. If we extrapolate that to the whole system there are close to 400 schools that have lost an arts space in the recent past.

We are hearing additional reports of this being the case from parents and teachers as well. Music rooms, dance spaces, black box theaters and art studios have been divided, walled, and turned into academic classrooms or commandeered for other purposes. It's disheartening that in New York, the cultural capital of the world—renowned for its Broadway theaters, world class museums, and thriving music and art scene—that our schools are failing to provide the infrastructure, and even instructional time, to provide students with a world class education in and through the arts.

The loss of dedicated spaces for arts learning, which are invaluable to teaching and learning, is denying New York City schoolchildren the opportunity to receive the well-rounded education that they deserve. The value of these spaces is well-established and recognized publicly on numerous occasions by both the New York City and the U.S. Departments of Education. According to the U.S. Department of Education, "The spaces and facilities available in schools to teach the arts are important indicators of the level of commitment to arts education." This was shared in their report on the findings of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) that was released after the administration of tests in music, theater and visual arts in 1997. The report found that visual arts and

music students scored higher on either “creating” and/or “performing” on the NAEP test when they were taught in appropriately equipped facilities.

The value of these spaces was also affirmed by the New York City DOE in the 2006-2007 “Annual Arts in Schools Report.” I quote: *“The ideal physical environment for arts learning is one that is dedicated to the arts discipline and appropriately and comfortably equipped with the specific equipment and supplies needed to optimize students’ experience.”*

Without question easing overcrowding and providing adequate classroom space for our students should be a top priority of the city. However, this should not be done at the expense of providing students with the facilities necessary to support learning in the arts and other subject areas that require specialized facilities, such as science and physical education. These needs must be addressed in a coordinated fashion.

In order to ensure that New York City public schools are appropriately equipped with dedicated spaces for arts learning, and that all of New York City’s public school students are receiving the well-rounded education they deserve, we have called on the Department of Education and the School Construction Authority to:

- Ensure that arts spaces are incorporated into the design and construction of all new school facilities;
- Create a citywide plan to inventory and then reclaim lost arts spaces in public schools;
- Ensure that the formula used to determine capacity at the school level reflects the loss of arts and other cluster spaces and the need to reclaim and improve access of students to these and other common areas, such as auditoriums and gymnasiums.

We ask for your support in urging the DOE and SCA to make these considerations a key component in the development of the next five year school construction plan and in raising awareness around the need to protect critical arts spaces in our public schools.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to present testimony today.