

# City schools arts funding drops dramatically

**Cuts come as pressure mounts to excel on the state math and reading tests and as the Department of Education's overall expenditures increases by 13%, or \$2.1 billion.**



*Buck Ennis*

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Funding for arts supplies and programs with cultural organizations in New York City public schools has fallen dramatically since the Department of Education ended dedicated per pupil arts funding three years ago.

According to an analysis released Thursday by The Center for Arts Education, budgeting for basic art supplies, ranging from crayons to musical instruments, decreased by a total of 68%, or \$7.2 million, since the beginning of the 2006-07 school year. Funding for city arts and cultural institutions to provide arts programs for students has dropped a total of 31%, or \$6.6 million.

The drop in arts funding came at a time that the DOE's overall expenditures increased by 13%, or \$2.1 billion.

“These declines began before the current economic crisis took hold,” said Richard Kessler, executive director of the Center for Arts Education. “As schools have been under pressure to focus on raising test scores in math and reading, vital components of arts education have gone on the chopping block.”

In the 2007-08 school year, the DOE ended Project ARTS, which used per pupil dedicated arts funding to incentivize schools to hire additional arts teachers, purchase art supplies, and enrich in-school programming by forming partnerships with cultural vendors.

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“A frame work that emphasizes test scores has resulted in a significant diversion of resources away from arts education,” said New York City Council Member Robert Jackson, chair of the education committee. “But 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.”

The Department of Education strongly disputes the report.

“While state cuts have strained school budgets over the last three years, the fact is that overall spending on arts education rose 5.5% in that same period,” a spokesman for the DOE said. “We’re proud that even in such tough budget times, we have added a large number of full-time arts teachers and boosted spending on arts education—both goals shared by the Center for Arts Education, but barely noted in its report. Instead, the Center makes selective use of data to highlight a decrease in funding for cultural organizations, whose financial support they rely on.”