



THE CENTER FOR ARTS EDUCATION

Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Education

Re: Preliminary Budget Hearing—Education

Delivered by Doug Israel, Director of Research and Policy

The Center for Arts Education

March 24, 2010

Thank you Chair Jackson and members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify today on the Department of Education (DOE) expense budget. I am Doug Israel, the director of research and policy for The Center for Arts Education, a not-for-profit arts organization committed to stimulating and sustaining quality arts education as an essential part of every child's education.

At the beginning of school year 2007-08 Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel I. Klein announced *ArtsCount*, a new set of strategies to enhance arts education in New York City public schools. Concurrently, the department for all intents and purposes eliminated Project Arts, a collaborative initiative instituted a decade earlier by the DOE, the Mayor's Office and the New York City Council, with little study or formal reporting on its success and failures.

ArtsCount, much like many of the DOE's recent initiatives, can be characterized by two dominant traits that are the core of the effort—data collection and principal autonomy over budget decisions.

ArtsCount has undoubtedly provided the public with the most comprehensive data the school system has seen for arts education.

Unfortunately, what is becoming apparent from the data that has been made public, is that the second pillar of the DOE's initiative, principal autonomy over school budgets, is leading to a disinvestment in the arts, at all school levels, but most glaringly in the city's vulnerable middle schools.

Under Project Arts, schools were given a per pupil allocation for arts education, to ensure that no matter what the circumstances, all students at all schools would receive a baseline level of arts instruction. As the data I am about to share shows, and which is provided as an addendum to this testimony, when this safety net was removed, budgeting for the arts declined—drastically—even though schools still receive a per capita allocation for arts education. When the strings were removed this money was shifted to other priorities.

Since the launch of *ArtsCount* there has been:

- A 68 percent decline in spending on arts supplies, instruments and materials—\$7 million less spent in this area alone;
- Almost 15 percent less budgeted to provide students with opportunities to access the city's cultural arts sector;
- At the middle school level budgeting for arts supplies and equipment has dropped by 79 percent;
- At the middle school level budgeting for partnerships with arts and cultural partnerships has dropped by 53 percent.

The one area that we have seen an increase in budgeting is for arts personnel. However, as Councilmember Lew Fidler pointed out at the last arts education hearing of the City Council in November of 2009, this is largely based on teacher salary increases and related costs.

To illustrate this point, we ask you to consider that at the middle school level there has been an 18 percent increase in costs related to personnel over the past three years, yet at the same time there has been a decline in the number of certified middle school arts teacher—dropping from 585 certified arts specialists to 557 during that time frame. In other words, schools are doing less for more.

Recent reporting by the DOE also shows that in New York City there is a widespread lack of compliance with state mandates for arts instruction:

- In the elementary grades, only 12 percent of elementary schools offer the four arts forms (music, dance, theatre, and visual arts) each year to every child as required by law;
- In middle school, almost 40 percent of schools are failing to ensure that every child receives the State Education Department's required arts instruction for grades 7 and 8;
- Nearly 20 percent of high schools do not have any certified arts teacher on staff despite state mandates requiring that students complete instruction in the arts taught by a certified arts teacher.

The current lack of compliance with arts education mandates, as well as the sharp declines in the two key areas of arts education spending, pre-date the fiscal downturn and are likely to be exacerbated by the education budget cuts being discussed.

That is why it is critical that we put back in place the mechanism that ensured accountability for arts education, and that provided an engine for the purchase of instruments and arts supplies, partnerships with cultural organizations, and the hiring of certified arts teachers.

We urge the City Council to work with the DOE to put in place the proper mechanism to ensure that the per capita budget line that principals receive for arts education is actually spent on arts education, now more than ever.

Thank you for your time today and your consideration of this testimony and request.