



THE CENTER FOR ARTS EDUCATION

## **Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Education**

### **Re: Introduction 0155:**

*A local law to amend the New York city charter, in relation to requiring the chancellor of the city school district to submit to the council an annual report concerning school enrollment, capacity and utilization.*

**Delivered by Doug Israel, Director of Research and Policy**

**The Center for Arts Education**

**April 28, 2010**

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Thank you Chairman Jackson and members of the Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify today. I am Doug Israel, Director of Research and Policy for The Center for Arts Education (CAE). I am here today to express support for Introduction 155, legislation being developed to improve the city's annual data collection and reporting that is conducted to determine school enrollment, capacity and utilization.

The allocation of classroom space in city public schools is a critical issue, especially as it relates to schools and communities dealing with overcrowded school buildings and the loss of space available to students. The Center for Arts Education is particularly concerned with the availability of adequately equipped spaces for arts instruction (dance, music, theater, and visual arts) in city public schools.

According to the Department of Education's *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 this lack of dedicated arts space is growing. According to survey conducted last year by Class Size Matters, 25% of principals responding reported losing art, music, dance, drama, or foreign language spaces to general education classrooms during their tenure.

There are recent reports of the loss of cherished arts spaces from schools across the city, such as at PS 149 in Harlem, where the school has had to sacrifice its music room to make space for two co-located schools. The school has an array of instruments including violins and keyboards, and a talented music teacher, but can no longer use the instruments because there is no space to house them and provide the instruction.

These arts spaces are vital to the mission of schools to provide students with quality instruction and they are often the lifeblood of schools across the city. These spaces need to be more thoroughly accounted for, protected, preserved, and in many cases reclaimed and resurrected.

Without question, easing overcrowding and providing adequate classroom space for our students should be a top priority for 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.

As a first step, The Center for Arts Education has publicly called for more accurate reporting on the availability and use of “cluster room” space, specifically calling for a detailed accounting of the current arts spaces that exist, and the particular use, as well as an accounting of arts spaces in public schools that have already been converted to other uses.

The “true book legislation” being developed by the City Council represents a positive step to accomplish these goals. Specifically, the bill would require:

1) That schools actually provide detailed information on how cluster rooms are being used, providing much needed transparency and giving parents and decision-makers a better sense of the space needs of schools and the actual function of existing classrooms. The lack of specificity that is inherent in the term “cluster room” does a disservice to the school and its students and makes those rooms more expendable as schools deal with overcrowding and co-location pressures.

2) That schools report on the number of rooms that have been converted or repurposed and are no longer used for their original function. This first ever reporting requirement will help capture critical information about how schools use space and what losses have occurred in the recent past due to overcrowding or other factors. Providing a detailed account of the loss of arts spaces in public schools can help galvanize support for their protection and hopefully lead to the restoration of these spaces for their original intent.

We believe these, and the other reporting requirements described in the bill, will provide greater transparency and can play a role in halting the loss of critical arts spaces and have a positive impact on student learning at school in all five boroughs.

In addition to these measures, CAE has 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 improve access of students to these and other common areas, such as auditoriums and gymnasiums.

We are encouraged that attention is being paid to the importance of arts spaces in public schools and look forward to a review of final bill language.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.