

Candidate Name: Norman Siegel

Signature of Candidate: Norman Siegel Date: 8/13/09

Candidate Questions:

1. If elected Public Advocate, what policies or initiatives, if any, would you pursue to improve access to arts education in the city?

First of all, we have to restore dedicated funding to provide a minimum level of arts education, an essential policy that was discontinued in 2007. As Public Advocate I would make this case vociferously. I would point out that not only do nearly all of our public schools fail to meet the state-mandated levels of art offerings, but that our children will have an acutely unrounded education as a result of this neglect. Not only must we remind people that nearly a third of public schools don't have a single art teacher on staff, but we must inform New Yorkers about how all aspects of a child's education improve once they are given an outlet for creative expression. Unfortunately, No Child Left Behind and mayoral control of NYC schools have left a legacy of education metrics that miss the point. I have heard from far too many parents that our schools increasingly over-emphasize standardized testing. I would set up a task force and public hearings into this allegation, since it is substantial. Teaching to the test may improve the surface appearance of city schools by boosting students' scores, but no approach to education should forget that our goal is not test scores, but rather teaching children how to express themselves and think critically. Moreover, I fear that evaluating our schools based almost entirely on standardized testing creates incentives for school officials to deemphasize aspects of education that such as the arts where success isn't as directly reflected by test results.

Once we address the mindset and political gamesmanship that has caused arts education to be such a low priority compared to high-stakes standardized testing, then our path towards restoring dedicated funding will be much easier. The fact remains that the state mandates elementary schools to offer four designated art forms to its students, and less than 10% of public elementary schools in the city are compliant. That is unacceptable, and I would use the fact that we are failing to meet the state mandate to hold public hearings. This is one of the most important features of the Public Advocate's office, and it will allow us to hear testimony from the relevant government officials to get to the bottom of why arts funding is being so neglected.

2. How can the cultural resources of New York City be leveraged to positively impact the lives of school children?

New York City has more art museums, art galleries, and artists than anywhere else in America, which makes it especially egregious that we do not have an educational infrastructure to take advantage of it. Clearly, where art programs do exist in our schools, they should be proactively seeking opportunities for field trips during and after school hours to our most respected cultural

institutions, and to venues that showcase the most current works the art world has to offer, as well as inviting working artists to make presentations to classes. Where viable art programs don't exist, these activities should still be arranged to provide an emergency level of arts enrichment. Of course, extracurricular activities are no replacement for an actual arts curriculum, so we must remain focused on our priority to make sure that every school engages its students artistically on its own premises.

3. What policies or initiatives do you propose to prevent drop outs and increase the city's graduation rates?

Under Mayor Bloomberg our schools have trended towards a more standardized approach to education. I believe more diversified offerings, including enhanced arts education, will decrease dropout rates, because they resonate with those most at-risk of dropping out (who are those most disillusioned with other offerings) by providing a creative outlet. Recently the Comptroller's office released a report that leveled the substantial accusation that the Department of Education's statistics showing improved graduation rates are improperly documented or inflated. Regrettably, this immediately became a political battle between the Mayor and Comptroller, who happen to be opponents in the mayoral race at this moment. As Public Advocate with oversight over the DOE, I would also release annual reports and recommendations; because I do not plan to run for any political office other than Public Advocate, I sincerely hope I could avoid the political fallout that so frequently accompanies such reports, no matter how well-intentioned.

4. Do you support the reinstatement of per pupil dedicated funding for arts education in all New York City public schools?

Yes. As I mentioned at the outset of this questionnaire, restoring per pupil dedicated funding is the simplest and most equitable way to address our most basic shortcomings in the area of arts education.

5. Should the New York City Department of Education lead remediation efforts or other interventions for schools found to be out of compliance with state arts education requirements?

Yes, and as Public Advocate I would use my oversight role to analyze the schools and hold the Department of Education accountable to abiding by the state requirements. However, we must be cautious when it comes to "interventions". The Bloomberg Administration has been too willing to penalize underfunded schools that they consider failing, and often these penalties and closings serve only a punitive purpose, rather than helping the students involved.

6. Should school *Progress Reports* include reporting on a wider array of factors, such as data from the *Annual Arts in Schools Report*, school compliance with state education requirements or other?

Yes, and as Public Advocate I would call for more diversified information to be made available so that it is easier to analyze where improvement in arts education is most needed.

7. What policies or initiatives, if any, would you support to prevent the loss of arts spaces in public schools due to overcrowding or other factors in schools?

We need to build more schools; the capital plan for schools is totally inadequate and should be drastically enlarged. It meets only about 1/3 of the current need to eliminate overcrowding and reduce class size, not even counting the rise in enrollment in neighborhoods throughout the city. We need a far better planning process so that schools are built along with new housing. We need better enrollment projections, put in the hands of City Planning, and an accurate needs assessment, developed by the Comptroller's office, with input I would provide as Public Advocate and public review in a transparent process. More funding should be directed into the capital budget for new schools, which would also provide a valuable boost to our economy, as the state automatically matches every dollar the city spends on new school construction.

8. Do you support the creation of a citywide task force to examine access to arts education offerings in city public schools?

Yes. As I mentioned in the first question, I would be willing to lead such a task force through the Public Advocate's office, appointing experts and stakeholders to speedily gather information, make recommendations, and if necessary, take action. My office would continue to analyze the short-term and long-term response.

9. Should the city expand career and technical education offerings to include more creative and innovative learning opportunities?

Yes. One of New York's most burgeoning industries is the creative class, and students who are creatively-inclined more than they are technically-inclined deserve career education oriented towards their specific interests and talents.

10. Do you support comprehensive pre-service training for principals and teachers in the area of arts education and arts integration?

Yes. They are necessarily involved in implementing art programs, so they should have the necessary background training to execute them successfully.