



THE CENTER FOR ARTS EDUCATION*

Testimony to the New York City Council Committees on Education and Higher Education

Re: Oversight Hearing: *Are New York City's Public School Students Adequately Prepared for College?*

Delivered by Eric Pryor, Executive Director

The Center for Arts Education

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Good afternoon Chairman Jackson, Chairman Rodriguez and members of the Committee on Education and Higher Education. I am Eric Pryor, Executive Director for The Center for Arts Education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the subject of New York City public school student preparedness for college.

The Center for Arts Education is dedicated to ensuring that every New York City Public School student has quality arts learning as an essential part of their K-12 education. We've worked in city public schools for over 15 years, providing arts education programming, resources and professional development opportunities for school staff and leadership.

As a graduate of public schools, as a parent, and as the Director of The Center for Arts Education, I would like to talk today about the value of arts education in preparing students for success in college and career. I'd also like to share important findings from research conducted by The Center for Arts Education examining the relationship between arts education and graduation rates here in New York City high schools.

The arts are recognized as a core academic subject at the local and federal level and are widely regarded as an essential element of a well-rounded education. The arts are central to human development and are often overlooked in schools despite their value in preparing students for success in college and career.

America has always been a nation of inventors, dreamers and big-thinkers. Cultivating creativity, innovative thinking skills and the ability to tackle complex problems is key to maintaining that spirit and guaranteeing a bright future for our city's public school students. Rigorous and sequential arts-based instruction provides unique learning opportunities for students to develop these capabilities and more.

Learning in and through the arts enables students to actively engage in their learning, to develop discipline and a respect for process. The arts disciplines—music, dance, theater, visual arts, photography and other related studies—all require critical thinking, self-awareness, analysis and reflection. They provide students with confidence and empower them to tackle challenges and find solutions. These skills are recognized by educators, business leaders and others as key to student development and career success and are an intrinsic part of arts-based learning.

As we graduate the next generation of engineers, scientists, architects, painters, and computer programmers, we need to ensure access for all city students to a rigorous and engaging curriculum that includes the arts. Don't just take my word for it though. Former president of the General Electric Foundation and nuclear scientist Clifford Smith, said it well:

"GE hires a lot of engineers. We want young people who can do more than add up a string of numbers and write a coherent sentence. They must be able to solve problems, communicate ideas and be sensitive to the world around them. Participation in the arts is one of the best ways to develop these abilities."

President Barack Obama echoed this sentiment, "*the future belongs to young people with an education and the imagination to create.*"

Because quality arts experiences develop these important skill sets they are vital to ensuring students succeed not only in college, but in the competitive global economy and work place.

Exposure to the arts is especially critical for students that are struggling in school. Music, dance, theater and visual art have the ability to reach a diverse body of learners, allowing all students to access their strengths. The arts by their very nature embody multiple learning modalities—through sight, sound and touch—helping all students connect to the curriculum and ultimately, be more successful in school.

Research shows that arts exposure empowers students to stay in school and engage positively in the school community. They provide students with a voice and with the confidence which is a key to success across life's endeavors and can be the one most important experiences that keeps students that may otherwise drop out interested in school.

These benefits are supported by research conducted by the U.S. government in a prominent national study of at-risk students, and here in New York City, through research conducted by The Center for Arts Education. Our report, released in 2009, examined more than 200 New York City high schools and the arts education that they offered. We looked at nine key indicators of robust arts offerings, including the number of arts teachers on staff, the number of dedicated arts classrooms, partnerships with cultural organizations, and arts coursework completed, to mention a few. We found that schools with most well-developed arts offerings also had the highest graduation rates.

Our findings make clear that good schools have the arts and that if we are serious about improving the city's graduation rates, and preparing our students for success post-graduation, we would be wise to build more sustainable and vibrant arts programs in each school. This is one of the first steps in keeping students engaged and on track to graduate and prepared for college.

We look forward to working with the City Council, the Department of Education and other partners to ensure that all high schools are providing rigorous arts coursework, aligned with state standards and instructional requirements, and taught by top rate certified arts teachers.

The arts transform students' lives, schools and communities and should be accessible to all of our city's 1.1 million students. Let's work together to ensure that our students have an equal opportunity to succeed in college and their careers when they leave our schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.