

# TESTIMONY TO CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING

Thursday, March 21, 2024

## Testimony to City Council Committee on Education Preliminary Budget Hearing

By Dance/NYC

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*Submitted to the City Council Committee on Education on March 21, 2024*

*Prepared by Candace Thompson-Zachery, Co-Executive Director of Dance/NYC*

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony, submitted on behalf of Dance/NYC (Dance.NYC), a service organization that reaches over 6,000 individual dance artists, 1,700 dance entities, and the many for-profit dance businesses based in the metropolitan New York City area. Its areas of service are of special benefit to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color), immigrant, disabled, low-income, and small-budget dance workers. Through its action-oriented research and advocacy, Dance/NYC seeks to represent and advance the interests of the dance field. It embeds the values of justice, equity, and inclusion into all aspects of its operations and frames the following requests through the lens of those values.

Dance/NYC joins our fellow advocates to support the It Starts with the Arts coalition – calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts and dance education in NYC schools.

We specifically request the following:

- Hire certified arts teachers (\$38M): Ensure that all schools have at least one certified arts teacher, by bolstering the pipeline of certified arts teachers via a supplemental certification program and filling arts staffing gaps—closing the equity gap for more than 315 schools.
- Extend deadline for expiring Federal Covid-Era funds (\$30M): Save arts education programs on the chopping block due to \$1B in expiring federal funds, including arts initiatives, programming to support student social-emotional wellbeing and academic recovery through the arts, and Summer Rising.
- Continue and increase "Support for Arts Instruction" initiative funding: Build on city's down payment and boost allocation from \$4M to \$6M.
- Require DOE arts funding be spent on the arts (\$15M): Boost the per student arts allocation from \$80.47 to \$100, and require that money be spent on arts education.
- Improve data transparency by compelling NYC Public Schools to provide a school-by-school breakdown of the state of arts education in public schools via a Legislative Services Request, T&C, and/or Oversight Hearing.

### Why Art and Dance Education Matters

Arts education is a foundation for success in school and life and should be an essential part of every child's education. Arts education not only improves academic performance of students, but also supports their social and emotional well-being, while fostering creativity and critical thinking. Dance therapy, in particular, is used to promote emotional, cognitive, and physical integration, and has been found to be especially beneficial for people with chronic diseases. Arts education is key to producing future generations of cultural leaders, artists, and passionate supporters with keen knowledge and appreciation of the arts, which is why we understand the importance of incorporating arts and dance into the public school curriculum.

Arts education should be available to all students. Unfortunately, only 33% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year, and between 2020 and 2023, NYC public schools lost 14.8% full-time certified arts teachers – leaving thousands more students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. Proposed budget cuts and the loss of federal stimulus funding set to expire on June 30th will only widen this gap for years to come.

### Hiring More Certified Teachers Will Close the Equity Gap in Public Schools

Despite core arts instruction mandates, arts education in New York City's public schools has become inequitable and underfunded.<sup>1</sup> In 2022, NYC public schools saw the [highest attrition rates in a decade](#), with the total pool of teachers reducing by 2,000.<sup>2</sup> Retention rates are also low across NYC. Between 2021 and 2022, 8% of city teachers left the public education system, and studies show that teachers of color are more likely to leave the profession than their white counterparts.

Furthermore, 19% of DOE schools do not have a certified part-time or full-time arts teacher, including 25% of elementary schools (roughly 175 schools).<sup>3</sup> It is important to hire more certified arts teachers (\$38M) and ensure that all public schools have at least one certified teacher. This can be achieved by hiring certified dance, music, theater, and visual arts teachers from the CUNY pipeline or continuing the successful supplementary certification pilot for existing elementary Common Branch cluster teachers to earn their arts content certification. Bridging the current gap in certified arts teachers is a matter of educational equity, and there is still considerable progress needed to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to engage in arts education.

### Extending Deadline for Expiring Federal Covid-Era Funds Can Save Arts Education

Public schools across the city are having a hard time planning for the expiration of federal relief funding – including the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund which provides \$4.8B in direct funding to New York City's Department Of Education – later this year and are likely to eliminate arts program to grapple with limited resources. We request the extension of Federal Covid-Era funds (\$30M) that will save arts education programs from being slashed as \$1B in federal funds expire this summer. These include arts initiatives, social-emotional wellness programming, academic recovery programs, and the Summer Rising program, which provides academic and enrichment opportunities over the course of the day to K-8 students free of charge.

In FY24, the DOE is spending \$41M of federal stimulus money on arts education—\$25M goes directly to schools to support and \$16M

supports programs that were previously supported by tax levied dollars. There is not a plan in place on how to make up that gap when the money ends June 30th.

## Supporting Existing Arts Funding Initiatives Can Also Revitalize Arts Education

The new FY24 \$4 million Citywide initiative added to the budget, "Support for Arts Instruction," demonstrates a commitment from the City Council to finding a path to ensure that all New York City schools can provide every student with a rich, diverse arts education experience. In its inaugural FY23 year of \$3 million, this initiative impacted 19,787 students.<sup>4</sup> We look forward to working with the City Council, Mayor Adams' Administration, and the Department of Education to create this equity-rooted initiative that extends participation in arts education, especially in schools with limited access to arts instruction. We specifically ask to build on the city's down payment to meet city-wide demand for increased arts learning from \$4M to \$6M in FY25.

## Ensuring that Schools Spend Funding on Arts Education Is a Must

In New York City, there are no specific allocations or regulations requiring funding for arts education in schools. In 2007, Mayor Mike Bloomberg overturned a 1997 initiative that designated funding for arts programs based on student enrollment. This change allowed school principals to allocate previously earmarked arts funding at their discretion. Consequently, that year alone, the percentage of schools without a certified art teacher increased from 20% to 30%, and expenditure on art supplies plummeted by 63%.<sup>5</sup>

Last year, the DOE recommended allocating \$80.47 per student for arts funding, but these recommendations remain advisory. Although New York State mandates a certain number of hours dedicated to arts education in schools, it does not specify funding. NYC schools' compliance is tracked in the annual Art in Schools Report, which examines dance, music, theater, and visual arts in K-12 public schools.

While nearly all NYC public high schools offer at least one arts discipline, the percentage declines significantly to 63% for two disciplines, 25% for three, and only 5% for all four. The percentages are higher for middle and elementary schools.<sup>6</sup> It is imperative not only to raise the per student arts allocation from \$80.47 to \$100 but also to mandate that the Department of Education (DOE) ensures this funding is exclusively dedicated to arts education.

## Improving Data Transparency Will Create an Ecosystem of Accountability

The FY25 Budget should include a Term & Condition to require the DOE to provide a school-by-school report on compliance with State education standards, certified arts instructors, arts instructional hours, and the actual number of classes offered by type. The report should explicitly identify the number of students who are not enrolled in an arts class. This will provide a clear picture of the current state of arts education in schools. It would also allow legislators and city administrators to identify areas of improvement and determine the most effective way to allocate resources. Finally, it would give parents and other stakeholders an opportunity to provide input and advocate for their children's education. The DOE's annual Arts in Schools Report does not present an accurate picture of arts education in schools, and the DOE has not issued this annual report on arts education since December 2021.

Our City must reinvest in its fair share of arts education to more equitably reflect the value of the arts and culture sector in the city's economy and in our quality of life.

As outlined above, we join our colleagues in asking the city to:

- Hire certified arts teachers (\$38M): Ensure that all schools have at least one certified arts teacher, by bolstering the pipeline of certified arts teachers via a supplemental certification program and filling arts staffing gaps—closing the equity gap for more than 315 schools.
- Extend deadline for expiring Federal Covid-Era funds (\$30M): Save arts education programs on the chopping block due to \$1B in expiring federal funds, including arts initiatives, programming to support student social-emotional wellbeing and academic recovery through the arts, and Summer Rising.
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Let's prioritize our children's future and support programs that help them engage in learning, be creative, be healthy mentally, and rejuvenate our communities

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### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> American for the Arts. State of the Arts: A Plan to Boost Arts Education in New York City Schools (2014). <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/naappd/state-of-the-arts-a-plan-to-boost-arts-education-in-new-york-city-schools>

<sup>2</sup> Elevate K-12. How to Address the Teacher Shortage in New York City (2024). <https://www.elevatek12.com/blog/elevate-in-action/nyc-teacher-shortage/>

<sup>3</sup> Arts in Education Roundtable. It Starts with the Arts. <https://nycaieroundtable.org/advocacy/it-starts-with-the-arts/>

<sup>4</sup> Arts in Education Roundtable. It Starts with the Arts. <https://nycaieroundtable.org/advocacy/it-starts-with-the-arts/>

<sup>5</sup> HyperAllergic. As NYC Slashes School Budgets, Art Teachers Are Feeling the Squeeze (2022). <https://hyperallergic.com/744466/nyc-slashes-school-budgets-art-teachers-are-feeling-the-squeeze/>

<sup>6</sup> HyperAllergic. As NYC Slashes School Budgets, Art Teachers Are Feeling the Squeeze (2022). <https://hyperallergic.com/744466/nyc-slashes-school-budgets-art-teachers-are-feeling-the-squeeze/>

