

# TESTIMONY TO CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING

Friday, March 14, 2025

## 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 14, 2025  
Prepared by Melinda Wang, Research and Advocacy Manager 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. Our 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 action-oriented research and advocacy, Dance/NYC seeks to represent and advance the interests of the dance field. We embed the values of justice, equity, and inclusion into all aspects of our operations and make the following requests through this lens.

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

We specifically ask for the following:

- Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M): Following one-year funding to off-set expiring federal stimulus dollars and city funds, arts education programs—alongside early childhood, community schools, teacher recruitment, and more—are once again at-risk of being eliminated. We are in solidarity with the Coalition of Equitable Education Funding and call on the city to shift from a one-year restoration to an annual allocation to sustain arts education and other programs currently on the chopping block.
- Ensure Every School Has a Certified Arts Teachers (\$39.8M): Ensure that all schools have at least one certified arts teacher, closing the equity gap for at least 379 schools. This can be done in part by bolstering the pipeline of certified arts teachers via supplemental certification program (\$4M) or funding a [PE Works-inspired](#) improvement plan.
- Restore and Enhance “Support for Arts Instruction” initiative funding (\$6M): Build on the city’s down payment and boost allocation from \$4M to \$6M to meet city-wide demand.
- Require DOE arts funding be spent on the arts (\$12.5M): Boost the per student arts allocation from \$86.67 to \$100 and require this money be spent on arts education.
- Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M): Allocate funds for arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building via the arts.
- Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M)

Arts education is critically under-resourced and under attack.

For years, arts educators have been forced to make do with less for their students. 47% of NYC schools reported that funding for the arts is generally insufficient.<sup>1</sup> 379 NYC public schools—that’s about 1 in 5—lack a certified arts teacher.<sup>2</sup> Together, this leaves hundreds of thousands of students without the full support needed for a well-rounded education. Dance education, in particular, has been impacted. Dance educators represent just 12.5% of full-time and 7.2% of part-time certified arts teachers in NYC public schools.<sup>3</sup> This effect worsens through a student’s lifetime: only 76% of public elementary, 44% of middle schools, and 21% of high schools offer dance education.

These outcomes are poised to worsen in the current climate. Federal attacks on public education are escalating, with the Department of Education’s workforce slashed by half in just a few weeks. These cuts will disproportionately harm low-income, disabled, and BIPOC students, as many of the layoffs target staff in the Office of Civil Rights.<sup>4</sup> Already, schools serving predominantly low-income, Black, and Latinx students are the most impacted by limited access to arts education<sup>5</sup>—despite its proven role in supporting student success. Arts programs are often the first to be cut when resources shrink. As public schools across the nation face this sudden loss of support, it is critical for the city government to intervene.

Arts education is crucial to rise to the moment

Instead of responding to attacks on education by cutting the arts, we have the opportunity to take a different approach—one that recognizes arts education as essential to supporting students and meeting this moment. Arts education is not just optional enrichment, it is foundational to a well-rounded education that engages students academically, socially, and emotionally. Its benefits extend beyond the arts classroom, improving engagement and success across all subjects. This is especially true for low-income students, who are among the most vulnerable to today’s educational crises. Research shows that low-income students who participate in the arts are five times less likely to drop out and more than twice as likely to graduate from college.<sup>6</sup> In this way, arts education acts as a critical defense against larger disinvestment in low-income students and their families.

Moreover, art education fosters inclusion and belonging. Dance therapy, for example, supports emotional, cognitive, and physical integration, and has proven especially beneficial for people with chronic conditions. According to the National Dance Education Organization, dance also provides immigrant and non-English speaking students with a non-verbal way to express themselves and maintain aspects of identity not always supported in a new culture or language. Similarly, dance creates meaningful opportunities for cognitive development and inclusion for disabled students.<sup>7</sup>

Fully funding the larger arts ecosystem is key to supporting students

Arts education sits at the juncture of two concurring issues: disinvestment in education and disinvestment in the larger arts and culture ecosystem. Cultural organizations and workers across the city serve as vital community partners in education. More than 708 arts and cultural organizations partnered with NYC public schools in the 2023-2024 school year. 29% of all reporting schools used external funding provided by these arts and culture organizations.<sup>8</sup> Findings from Dance/NYC’s State of NYC Dance 2023 Report reveal that 54% of dancers in NYC are also educators.<sup>9</sup>

Our organizations and workers play a critical role in filling the gaps when educators aren't given the support they need—but we face our own financial challenges. 40% of NYC dance entities report their financial health as weak or very weak, and 58% of dance workers believe they do not earn fair wages.<sup>10</sup> Resourcing the arts ecosystem by baselining \$75 million for the Department of Cultural Affairs would help sustain the essential role we play in supporting our public education system.

For these reasons, we echo our colleagues across the sector in calling for full funding of arts education for every student across the five boroughs. Our students deserve an education that nurtures their humanity, creativity, and sense of belonging. In times of crisis, arts education is more vital—not less. We look forward to working with the City Council to defend every student's right to learn.

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Sources:

<sup>1</sup> [NYC Public Schools Arts Reporting, 2023- 2024.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Department of Education - Arts Education Report 2024](#)

<sup>3</sup> NYC Department of Education Arts Office, [Arts in Schools Report 2022-2023](#)

<sup>4</sup> Turner, Cory. ["The Education Department is being cut in half. Here's what's being lost."](#) (3/13/2025)

<sup>5</sup> American Academy of Arts & Sciences, [Art for Life's Sake: The Case for Arts Education](#) (2021)

<sup>6</sup> Americans for the Arts. [Arts Education Navigator: Facts and Figures.](#)

<sup>7</sup> National Dance Education Organization. [Evidence: A Report on the Impact of Dance in the K-12 Setting](#).(2013).

<sup>8</sup> [NYC Public Schools Arts in Schools Report 2023-2024.](#)

<sup>9</sup> [State of NYC Dance 2023: Findings from the Dance Industry Census.](#)

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