

## **Testimony of the New York City Public Schools Before the NYC Council Committee on Education and Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations**

**April 8, 2025**

### *Testimony of Paul Thompson, Executive Director of the Arts Office*

Good morning, Chair Joseph, Chair Rivera, and all the Members of the Education & Culture Committees here today. I am Paul Jonathan Thompson, Executive Director of the New York City Public Schools' Arts Office. I am joined today by Cordelia Veve, Chief of Curriculum and Instruction for the Division of School Leadership at the New York City Department of Education, Hannah Berson, our Deputy Executive Director of the Arts Office, and other New York City Public Schools colleagues. We are honored to be with you all today to discuss the important topic of arts education in NYC public schools.

This Administration is dedicated to ensuring that all students receive a well-rounded, culturally responsive education, with arts education as a key focus. Dance, digital media, music, theater, and visual arts aren't just extras—they're vital parts of a complete education that enables students to thrive.

When I was appointed Executive Director of the Arts Office (AO) in September 2022, I was tasked with ensuring equitable arts support for all schools and was the first building leader and practicing artist to lead the AO in its nearly 30-year history.

The arts have always been personal for me. Growing up as an undiagnosed dyslexic in the Bronx during the 1970s and 80s, traditional school wasn't a safe or supportive space—but the arts were a safe space for me. Immersed in the emerging art forms of Hip-Hop, I discovered discipline, the ability to tackle complex challenges, and the life-affirming power of self-expression, ultimately leading to a Master of Musical Arts and a career in music, which most recently included being featured on the 2025 Grammy-winning *No More Water: The Gospel of James Baldwin*. As an educator, in 2005, I founded the Urban Assembly School of Music and Art, a general education arts high school for students who struggled in traditional settings, which I led for 18 years. In joining the Arts Office in 2022, I brought with me a wealth of experience and a deep belief in the arts as a tool for equity and transformation. Since then, I've focused on aligning our work for greater collaboration and impact—ensuring that every student has access to safe, creative spaces where they can thrive.

### **Shifts We Have Made**

After a thoughtful ten-month analysis of the Arts Office's staffing and programs, it became clear that while we were effective in supporting audition-based and screened specialized schools, we were falling short in meeting the needs of schools without the resources or expertise of these

premier programs. To address this gap, we developed a new logic model focused on expanding our reach and better supporting the arts aspirations of all NYCPS students—especially those in historically underserved schools. This model reorients our work around three core pillars:

- **Leadership Support:** Empowering principals and superintendents to integrate the arts into core instruction and SEL practices
- **Teacher Support:** Building teacher capacity in effective, Blueprint-aligned arts pedagogy to support academic and emotional growth
- **Pathways (Direct Student Programs):** Expanding student pathways to develop artistic talent, showcase work, and access college and career opportunities in the arts

By centering our work on these pillars, we are strengthening arts education citywide and ensuring that all students—regardless of background—have access to meaningful, high-quality arts learning experiences.

### **The State of the Arts in NYCPS**

To assess the state of arts education across NYC schools, the 2023–24 City Council Public Arts Reporting (Local Law 123) provides key data on arts access and instructional requirements. Some of the most important findings include:

- 92.5% of schools serving grades 1–5 offered at least one arts discipline to each grade, though only 24.4% provided all four disciplines.
- For 6th grade, 95.1% of schools offered at least one arts discipline, while just 10.1% provided all four.
- Among 8th graders, 91.2% received two half-units of arts instruction, but only 31.1% did so in two different disciplines as required, with just 21% of schools meeting this benchmark for 90% or more of their students.
- At the high school level, 99.8% of graduates met the arts instructional requirement.
- However, 73 of the 831 schools serving grades 7–12 (8.8%) lacked a certified arts teacher.

We're proud that over 90% of students participate in some form of arts instruction within their schools—a reflection of the dedication of passionate teachers, teaching artists, and school leaders across the city. However, we recognize that there is still much work to be done. The Arts Office is committed to reaching every student, ensuring that all young people have access to meaningful, high-quality arts education that amplifies their voices, honors their identities, and supports their dreams.



## **New Key Initiatives**

Since taking leadership of the Arts Office, a key part of reimagining our work has been the creation of the ArtsHub—a professional-grade facility in downtown Brooklyn featuring a black box theater, two dance studios with sprung floors, and a sound recording studio. Launched in the spring of 2023, the ArtsHub brings our strategy to life by serving as a space where students, educators, and artists can collaborate, create, and learn. It has energized our office by centering NYC’s world-class artistic talent, including *Resident Curator* Meshell Ndegeocello and *Resident Artists* like Jason Moran, Sanford Biggers, and the Labyrinth Theater Company. The ArtsHub enhances student engagement, offers top-tier professional learning for educators, and strengthens cultural partnerships. By scaling programs, piloting new initiatives, and fostering collaboration, it ensures arts education is accessible, sustainable, and deeply embedded in NYCPS. Full-scale operations are planned for spring 2025–26. Additional innovations include:

**Leadership and Teacher Supports:** Utilizing the ArtsHub as a launchpad, the AO has developed several new avenues to support school leaders and teachers. The *Principal Fellows* program equips school leaders with the tools and knowledge to integrate arts into their schools’ core instructional mission. To date we have supported 4 cohorts of Fellows totaling 170 Principals citywide. We’ve significantly expanded *teacher support*, providing ongoing professional development and resources to our almost 3,000 *licensed arts teachers*, and have enhanced *teacher leadership* through the creation of *Arts Office Leaders (AOLs)*, who champion arts initiatives and offer peer support within the districts and boroughs they work in. Additionally, we have fostered a vibrant model for teacher community-building, providing collaborative spaces where educators can share best practices and be reminded of the importance of continuing to practice their craft as artists.

**Pathways (Direct Student Programs):** The Arts Office’s new *Arts Pathways* pilot initiative aims to ensure that students and families have consistent, meaningful access to arts education from early childhood through high school. This work focuses on aligning arts programs across school levels—early childhood to elementary, elementary to middle, and middle to high school—by identifying gaps and collaborating with school and district leaders to create entry points for students along the way. The goal is to remove barriers such as inconsistent programming, lack of multilingual information, geographic challenges, and high material costs.

While long-standing summer programs like *Middle School Arts Bootcamp* and the *Summer Arts Institute* remain key to this framework, we’ve launched several new initiatives to expand access. In summer 2024, district- and borough-based programs brought arts instruction directly to communities with limited access—like an all-Bronx strings program for middle and high school students, and a dance bridge program in East Flatbush connecting elementary to middle school.

We also launched an *Early Childhood Strings Program* in three schools serving 3K/Pre-K, providing free, in-school violin instruction comparable to private offerings, including both group and individual lessons. In spring 2024, we piloted *Work-Based Learning* at the ArtsHub, offering

high school students project-based arts experiences, mentorship from educators and artists, and stipends. Following its success, the program is expanding this Spring to sites in East Williamsburg and Far Rockaway.

Additionally, we continue to offer *Arts Partnership Grants* to help schools bring in trusted arts partners. In FY25, we awarded \$4.7 million to 289 schools citywide. This includes the *Multilingual Learners/Students With Disability (MLL/SWD) Grant* (up to \$15,000 per school), which expands inclusive, in-school arts instruction for multilingual learners and students with disabilities, and the *Early Learners Grant* (up to \$10,000), which supports arts engagement in 3K–Kindergarten and strengthens family and community connections through the arts. The grant programs this year benefitted from a thorough inventory and reflection. Key staff members created rigorous logic models for both programs, identifying the specific outcomes each grant should help school recipients achieve. We then re-worked the grants’ processes and protocols – including the application materials, scoring rubrics, and grant timelines – to be aligned with these logic models, and even more rooted in schools’ real-world needs. No longer do schools and arts partners have to guess as to why they may or may not have been awarded a grant; the rigor of our program and processes are clear now.

We must also express our deepest gratitude to the City Council for its unwavering commitment to arts education, now in its third year of extraordinary support. This year, the Council has generously increased its support by providing \$4 million to the Support for Arts Instruction Grants, reinforcing its dedication to ensuring equitable access to the arts for all students.

In partnership with the Arts in Education Roundtable, the AO worked to organize the distribution of this critical funding, which has expanded arts learning opportunities to an additional 239 schools, enriching the educational experience of over 53,000 students across every City Council district. These students have had the invaluable opportunity to engage in meaningful, hands-on collaboration with the city’s esteemed cultural partners—experiences that not only nurture their artistic talents but also foster creativity, confidence, and a lifelong appreciation for the arts.

I now would like to turn to Intro 1125, which would require the NYCPS to report on school libraries and library access. The proposed legislation will provide essential data to identify and address shortage areas. Literacy remains a major priority for us, and we recognize the value of ensuring that every student has access to high-quality library materials, whether it’s in the digital library, the classroom, or the school. We are actively recruiting new librarians through our homegrown school librarian NYSED certification/training pipeline, Teacher2Librarian. Though there is still much work to be done in our school buildings, we are proud that over two million books have been borrowed from our digital library just this year alone! We also recognize there are some gaps in what data can be collected in our systems and look forward to working with Council to be able to accurately report on libraries.

## **Conclusion**

As we look toward the future, the arts will continue to play a critical role in shaping not just the cultural vibrancy of New York City but also its economic growth.

The arts offer critical social-emotional learning opportunities, helping students process emotions, build resilience, and develop empathy. Reimagining the Arts Office is essential to creating a more expansive and equitable arts ecosystem, ensuring that our programs meet today's needs and lay a foundation for the future. We are developing data-driven systems to measure progress, assess impact, and distribute resources equitably. These systems support responsive and sustainable initiatives, such as the ArtsHub and teacher development programs. Our vision is to provide every student, regardless of background, access to high-quality arts education and clear pathways for creative growth. Achieving this mission requires bold thinking, sustained investment, and a commitment to breaking down barriers, embedding the arts as a core element of education for the future success of our students and the prosperity of New York City.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify today and look forward to your questions.



New York City Council  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
Committee on Finance

**Oversight Hearing - Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts**

**Tuesday, April 8, 2025, 10:00AM – Council Chambers, City Hall**

**Testimony Presented by NYC Department of Cultural Affairs Assistant Commissioner for Program Services Audrey St. Clair**

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Good morning, Chairs Joseph and Rivera and members of the committees. I am Audrey St. Clair, Assistant Commissioner for Program Services at the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, here to testify in regard to today's topic: ensuring equity and access in arts education.

First, to introduce myself: I came to my role at DCLA in February of this year after serving for seven years in NYC Public Schools' Arts Office, where I was a member of Paul Thompson's incredible team of professionals. So today's topic is something that's very close to my heart. Most recently, I served as the Arts Office's Director of Arts Partnerships where, among other things, I co-facilitated the Support for Arts Instruction Initiative in collaboration with the New York City Arts in Education Roundtable and New York City Council. I also oversaw all aspects of Arts Partnerships Grants, a program that administers millions of dollars in grant funding to hundreds of schools across the city to bring programming from cultural nonprofits into the classroom. This experience has made for a great transition to my new position at DCLA, where I can continue to foster partnerships between our amazing cultural sector and the city's public schools.

NYC is home to one of the world's most remarkable cultural communities. This is a resource that our students deserve to be connected with, to learn from, to engage with. One study found that former arts students are 55% more likely to have completed postsecondary coursework by adulthood and 29% more likely to earn a four-year college degree by age 32. The arts help young people to express themselves, to understand the world around them, to build confidence, and develop their creative thinking. That's why I've dedicated my career to supporting arts education, and am so proud of the work being done both at DOE and DCLA to foster accessible, equitable arts education opportunities across the city.

At DCLA, we support arts education through several of our agency's funding programs. To start with my unit at the agency, Program Services, we support hundreds of arts groups doing this work each year. This support comes through programs like the Cultural Development Fund and through the City Council initiatives that we proudly collaborate with you to administer. For instance, in FY25, more than 420 CDF grantees proposed arts education projects. That's 400 nonprofits, working across disciplines in all five boroughs, to deliver high quality arts programs to students in our city. A few examples of the arts education programming and organizations we're currently supporting through the CDF include:

- **Arts Connection**, which offers comprehensive, innovative classroom-based and Professional Learning arts education programs and resources reaching over 25,000 NYC

public school students and educators across the five boroughs. Programs facilitated by 115 expert teaching artists span disciplines including music, dance, theater, media, visual arts, curatorial studies, and art criticism.

- **Dancing Classrooms** delivers social dance programs to more than 450 classrooms in 100+ Title I NYC Metro Area schools, serving at least 13,000 K-12 students in 2024-25. Activities include a 10-week Social Ballroom residency, 16-session Dancing with Rhythms & Stories, after-school Social Dance Clubs, and adapted Sensory Steps for students with disabilities.
- **Education Through Music**, which provides school-wide, curricular music programs for 20,000 students attending 55 under-resourced elementary, middle, PreK-8, and high schools in all five boroughs. ETM focuses on in-need schools located in low-income neighborhoods, primarily serving BIPOC children.
- **Marquis Studios' pARTnership Program**, which brings engaging arts learning to 10 high-needs schools in all five boroughs. pARTnership schools receive subsidized or no cost residencies in an array of arts disciplines, and four of the 10 pARTnership schools are in NYC's special education district, District 75, which exclusively serves students with multiple or severe disabilities.
- **Midori & Friends**, which works with 11 school partners in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens to serve 980 K-12 students. Play to Learn instrumental instruction at 8 schools teach students to play ukulele, harp, violin, woodwinds, and sing. Midori and Friends' Teaching Artists can provide services in English, Spanish, and Japanese.
- **Publicolor**, whose year-round Design Studio programs engage low-income NYC middle and high school students in project-based learning and creative problem-solving. This year, over 600 students will participate in Publicolor's school year and summer Design Studio programs.
- **Studio in a School's**, whose in-school visual arts education residencies are providing more than 9,000 students and 730 teachers across the five boroughs with high-quality arts education in the current school year.
- **Midtown Management Group**, whose "Engaging Emotions Through Theatre" utilizes hands-on, experiential musical theatre workshops to promote Social Emotional learning through the use of music, dance, acting, improvisation, theatre games and pre-selected books and themes.

Groups offering arts education programming are receiving \$27.1 million in support through the CDF in FY25. And as the programs I mentioned above prove: equity is woven tightly into how we distribute CDF support. This year, we were proud to introduce a new Equity Fund as part of the CDF, which provided 264 organizations operating in areas of New York City with the lowest median incomes and highest poverty rates with \$2 million in additional funding. This initiative helps to ensure that public resources are directed to areas of the city where they are needed most and makes a major investment in the overall wellbeing and vibrancy of some of New York's most vulnerable communities.

In addition to these hundreds of programs DCLA supports through the CDF, we also work with you to administer the Council-funded Cultural After School Adventures – or CASA – program. CASA provides a wide array of high-quality arts and cultural experiences to students enrolled in after-school activities in grades PreK-12. For FY25, DCLA's Program Services Unit distributed more than \$14 million in CASA awards to 139 arts and cultural organizations in partnership with 704 schools. In collaboration with their designated arts organization, schools participating in CASA programs engage in arts and cultural activities that aim to provide arts-rich experiences for students, staff, and families.

Another Council initiative we're proud to partners with you on is Art – A Catalyst for Change. For FY25, this program is providing more than \$400,000 to pair arts groups with 19 schools, empowering students to use their voices to raise awareness and, ultimately, end gun violence through art. This innovative program shows how the arts can be a driver not just of our city's economy – but of strong, healthy, safe communities across the five boroughs.

DCLA's Materials for the Arts program is another amazing, one-of-a-kind source of support for arts education in our city's schools. All 1,600 DOE schools are eligible to access to MFTA's programs and warehouse, which offers a huge range of free supplies that art teachers can receive, completely free of charge. Last year alone, nearly 700 schools received free supplies from MFTA, and the team in the MFTA Education Center works closely with DOE to make sure that teachers are aware of this remarkable resource, and to train educators how to bring "creative reuse" into the classroom. For example:

- MFTA's field trip program brought over 6,000 students from schools serving low-income students to the warehouse for arts enrichment and education activities. This year, for the first time thanks to support from a number of donors, these field trips were offered to hundreds of schools free of charge.
- MFTA's Teacher Training Courses offer week-long intensives of 36 hours each for over 250 public school teachers, with 90 scholarships targeting educators from schools in low-income communities.
- MFTA's in-school residencies embed teaching artists in 20 schools across NYC reaching over 8,000 more students and their teachers each year.
- In 2023 MFTA launched a new program called "After Hours Teacher Shopping." One day a month, the MFTA warehouse is kept open late specifically to accommodate the schedules of teachers.

Along with with off-site events co-hosted by MFTA and the DOE Arts office to bring the warehouse directly to schools in the five boroughs, MFTA has made a concerted effort to engage teachers and students in every corner of the city, and the high level of engagement from DOE teachers proves that it is paying off. I could go on, but suffice it to say: MFTA is a major way that DCLA and DOE collaborate to bring innovative, sustainable, and affordable arts programming to city schools.

DCLA's partnership with the 34 members of the Cultural Institution Group also provides our city's students with a remarkable range of experiences in science, arts, and cultural engagement. The CIG, which includes museums, performing art centers, zoos, and botanical gardens across the city, received over 1.3 million visits from students in the most recent year we have data for. Members of the CIG also have thoughtful, far-reaching education and youth engagement initiatives that involve young people deeply in their programming. For instance:

- **The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG)** runs school programs that see over 90,000 K–8 students participate annually, fostering a love for nature through hands-on learning experiences. The garden also offers Family Programming, such as the Edible Academy, where families can explore plant science, healthy eating, and sustainability through interactive activities.
- **Snug Harbor Cultural Center** has several programs for young people, including Youth Matters: Teen Ambassadors, a free, month-long weekend career exploration program for high school students. During school breaks, they offer a variety of programs to engage students, such as Heritage Farm Hay Day, Urban Wetlands Warriors, Forest Explorers, Garden Ecology and Design.
- **The Museum of the Moving Image** offers a semester-long after-school animation course through the Cultural After School Adventures (CASA) program, where approximately 160 6th-8th grade students learn how to create their own animated films through a combination of critical viewing, project-based learning, and workshops on visual storytelling and narrative structure.
- **Weeksville Heritage Center** runs the Steam Weeksville program, an after-school enrichment initiative developed with local organization DIVAS for Social Justice and teaching artist Pamela Tetteh. The program highlights the history of Weeksville and its contemporary relevance through STEAM-based enrichment activities.
- **The Public Theater's Teaching Teachers** program is an annual series of professional development workshops for elementary, middle school, and high school teachers across New York City that trains them in dynamic, performance-based approaches to Shakespeare's works.

Last but not least, DCLA's Percent for Art unit has worked closely with the Schools Construction Authority for years to commission permanent works of public art that enrich our public education spaces across the five boroughs. 251 projects have been completed since the program started 40 years ago, with 36 installed in the last three years. Recent highlights include artist Tijay Mohammed's mural "Respect for All" installed in the Bronx's Aurelia Greene Educational Campus; artist Daniel Bejar's "A History of US," an installation exploring US history in the new Academy of American Studies in Queens.





April 8, 2025

Arden Armbruster, Lead Budget & Policy Analyst, New York City Independent Budget Office  
on Cultural Development Fund Programs in NYC Public Schools  
Before the Committees on Education and Cultural Affairs,  
Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Good afternoon, Chair Joseph, Chair Rivera, and members of the Committees on Education and Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations. My name is Arden Armbruster, and I am a lead budget and policy analyst at the New York City Independent Budget Office (IBO). IBO is an independent, nonpartisan City agency that conducts fiscal and policy research for the City. Thank you for the invitation to testify today. I will be speaking about IBO's analysis of one aspect of NYC's arts education ecosystem: school-based programs funded through the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) Cultural Development Fund (CDF). The CDF provides funding to more than one thousand nonprofit organizations each year through a competitive peer review process. In fiscal year 2022, there were 1,019 grantees, with awards totaling just over \$50 million, including Council Member items. The average award was \$49,000, and the median award was \$28,000.

Using addresses of programs funded by the CDF from fiscal year 2022 provided by DCLA, IBO matched to public school addresses to identify CDF programs that occurred at public schools. IBO used 2022 data because they were the most recent data provided by DCLA at the time of analysis. IBO identified about 1,900 CDF-funded programs (30% of all CDF program locations that year) located at traditional public schools. IBO further examined the distribution of these programs and of full-time licensed arts teachers—teachers who are hired into arts teacher positions—across the 1,584 schools active during the 2021-2022 school year. These schools include those within Community School Districts 1 through 32 and District 75, the citywide special education district.

Figure 1

**The Majority of Public Schools Hosted At Least One CDF Program During Fiscal Year 2022**

School Borough	At Least One CDF Program	At Least One Licensed Arts Teacher	At Least One Certified Arts Teacher
<b>Citywide</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>81%</b>
Bronx	75%	72%	78%
Brooklyn	72%	74%	78%
Manhattan	90%	83%	85%
Queens	56%	82%	88%
Staten Island	66%	62%	71%

SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Cultural Affairs data and Department of Education HR data and New York State certification data, as of October 14, 2021.

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IBO found that 72% of public schools hosted a CDF program in 2022, and 77% of schools had a full-time licensed arts teacher on staff during the 2021-2022 school year, as seen in figure 1. Teachers are required to have a State certification in a subject to teach that subject, and they can hold multiple certifications. However, teachers can only hold one license at a time—generally the subject that they teach. As a result, IBO found a somewhat higher share of certified arts teachers working in schools, 81% citywide, suggesting there are teachers qualified to work in the field who were teaching a different subject.

New York State standards and City guidelines for arts education [differ by grade level](#). From 1<sup>st</sup> through 3<sup>rd</sup> grades, students are recommended to receive 101 hours of arts instruction over the course of the year, evenly split across dance, music, theater, and visual arts; that number decreases to 93 hours per year for 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. In 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, students must be provided with two semesters of instruction by a licensed arts teacher. High school graduation requirements include one year of instruction by a licensed arts teacher. IBO’s analysis showed that middle and high schools were much more likely than elementary schools to have a licensed arts teacher, but CDF programs were relatively evenly distributed across school levels.

Overall, the share of arts teachers has been steady in recent years. From school year 2021-2022 through 2023-2024, there were 3.8 full-time licensed arts teachers for every 100 full-time teachers citywide, as seen in figure 2. In the 2023-2024 school year, Manhattan schools had the highest ratio of arts teachers, with 4.7 arts teachers per 100 teachers. Staten Island had the lowest ratio, with 2.4 arts teachers per 100 teachers. At nine schools citywide, more than 20% of teachers were licensed arts teachers: four schools in Manhattan, two in Brooklyn, two in the Bronx, and one in Queens.

Figure 2  
The Citywide Share of Teachers Who are Licensed Arts Teachers Has Been Steady in Recent Years

School Borough	Average Share of Teachers Per School		
	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Citywide	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%
Brooklyn	3.9%	4.0%	4.1%
Bronx	3.2%	3.2%	3.4%
Manhattan	4.7%	4.7%	4.7%
Queens	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%
Staten Island	2.3%	2.2%	2.4%

SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education HR data and New York State certification data, as of the snapshot date each year.  
NOTE: These figures include schools in Community School Districts 1 through 32 and District 75: 1,584 schools in the 2021-2022 school year, 1,588 schools in the 2022-2023 school year, and 1,592 schools in the 2023-2024 school year.

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Looking at both CDF programs and licensed teachers in schools, 56% of schools citywide had both a CDF program and a licensed teacher in 2022, but IBO found substantial variation by borough, as seen in figure 3. Three-quarters of Manhattan schools had both, compared with 37% of Staten Island schools, with the other boroughs falling in between. On average, 21% of schools citywide had a licensed teacher but did not host a CDF program, with Queens far above the average at 37% of schools only having a licensed teacher.

On the other hand, 7% of schools citywide had neither a licensed arts teacher nor hosted a CDF program. In the Bronx and Staten Island, 9% of schools had neither. Brooklyn's share was 8%, and Queens schools were similar to the citywide average. In Manhattan, only 2% of schools had neither. These schools could be receiving services elsewhere; the [Arts in Schools](#) report from the 2021-2022 school year showed that 80% of schools had a relationship with a cultural arts education organization. That is 8 percentage points higher than the share of schools IBO found to host a CDF program that year, indicating as expected that schools are not solely reliant on the CDF to partner with cultural organizations. While Brooklyn and Staten Island schools had a somewhat higher likelihood of partnerships compared with the citywide average (82% and 84% respectively) according to the Arts in Schools report, the share of Bronx schools with an outside partnership was lower than average at 76%. This suggests that, compared with schools in other boroughs, fewer schools in the Bronx have partnerships with cultural organizations, whether through CDF or other programs.

<b>Figure 3</b> <b>Arts Teachers and CDF Programs Were Not Evenly Distributed Across Boroughs (2021-2022)</b>				
<b>School Borough</b>	<b>Licensed Teacher and CDF Program</b>	<b>Licensed Teacher Only</b>	<b>CDF Program Only</b>	<b>Neither</b>
<b>Citywide</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Bronx</b>	56%	16%	19%	9%
<b>Brooklyn</b>	54%	20%	17%	8%
<b>Manhattan</b>	75%	8%	15%	2%
<b>Queens</b>	46%	37%	11%	7%
<b>Staten Island</b>	37%	25%	29%	9%
SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Cultural Affairs data and Department of Education HR data and New York State certification data, as of October 14, 2021. NOTE: Rows may not sum to 100% due to rounding.				
<i>New York City Independent Budget Office</i>				

IBO also compared where CDF grantee organizations were based and the locations of the schools they served (figure 4). Manhattan-based organizations were much more likely to work outside of their home borough: 65% of school programs provided by Manhattan-based organizations were at schools outside of Manhattan. Manhattan-based organizations also conducted four out of every five CDF programs in public schools. In contrast, organizations based outside of Manhattan primarily partnered with schools in their own borough. Less than half of school programs by Brooklyn and Queens organizations were outside of the organization's home borough, and less than 10% of school programs by Bronx and Staten Island organizations were in other boroughs.



**Figure 4****Manhattan-based Organizations Were More Likely to Work in Other Boroughs**

CDF Grantee Location	Number and Share of Programs at Public Schools			
	Outside of Grantee Borough		Same Borough as Grantee	
<b>Citywide</b>	<b>1,114</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>794</b>	<b>42%</b>
Bronx	5	9%	50	91%
Brooklyn	116	42%	161	58%
Manhattan	970	65%	531	35%
Queens	16	46%	19	54%
Staten Island	1	3%	33	97%
Westchester	6	100%	-	0%

SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Cultural Affairs data and Department of Education data.

NOTE: CDF programs at school campuses that could not be assigned to a specific school are included in these figures. These programs are excluded from other analyses.

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The data IBO used for this analysis have some limitations. Charter schools and District 79 schools are not included. Where schools were co-located on a campus, IBO manually assigned programs based on location descriptions in the CDF location data. However, there were a very small number of programs on campuses where a specific school was not listed. This handful of programs is also excluded from most analyses. The intention of this analysis is not to equate CDF-funded programs to instruction by a licensed teacher, especially as the CDF data do not include the number or length of visits, nor do they specify the timing of the program. Some of the programs included in the data may be after school, for example. Rather, IBO's hope is that this analysis can shed light on the distribution of services to help plan and coordinate the many programs through which the City provides access to arts education.

In addition to the borough-level analysis presented above, IBO created a spreadsheet detailing the distribution of licensed arts teachers and CDF programs by Community School District. The spreadsheet and documentation will be available on our website.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'm happy to answer any questions.



Documentation for "District-level Analysis: IBO Testimony on Cultural Development Fund Programs in NYC Public Schools"

New York City Independent Budget Office

Last updated: 4/3/2025

**Description:** The "District-level Analysis: IBO Testimony on Cultural Development Fund Programs in NYC Public Schools" dataset is a supplement to the NYC Independent Budget Office's testimony at the New York City Council on April 8, 2025 about the distribution of the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) Cultural Development Fund (CDF) programs in traditional public schools and the distribution of full-time licensed arts teachers in those schools. Traditional public schools include Districts 1 through 32 and District 75. Licensed arts teachers are defined as teachers hired into arts teacher positions. The analysis uses DCLA data and Department of Education HR data and New York State certification data. This supplemental dataset provides the following by Community School District: the average number of licensed arts teachers per school (school years 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024), the average share of teachers who are licensed arts teachers per school (school years 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024), the total number of CDF programs (fiscal year 2022), and the average number of CDF programs per school (fiscal year 2022).

**Source:** New York City Independent Budget Office

**Contact:** [press@ibo.nyc.gov](mailto:press@ibo.nyc.gov)

Data Dictionary

Variable Column Name	Variable Description	Type	Notes
district	Community School District	Character	Includes Districts 1 through 32 and District 75. Excludes District 79 and charter schools. District 75 numbers should be interpreted cautiously, as D75 schools have multiple locations, which hindered the matching process. When identified, D75 programs that did not occur at the school's main location were assigned to the main location for the purposes of matching to school and teacher data.
avg_lic_teach_2122	Average Number of Licensed Arts Teachers per School, School Year 2021-2022	Numeric	Includes active, full-time licensed arts teachers (teachers hired into arts teacher positions). Excludes substitute and part-time teachers.
avg_lic_teach_2223	Average Number of Licensed Arts Teachers per School, School Year 2022-2023	Numeric	Includes active, full-time licensed arts teachers (teachers hired into arts teacher positions). Excludes substitute and part-time teachers.
avg_lic_teach_2324	Average Number of Licensed Arts Teachers per School, School Year 2023-2024	Numeric	Includes active, full-time licensed arts teachers (teachers hired into arts teacher positions). Excludes substitute and part-time teachers.

avg_arts_teach_share_2122	Average Share of Teachers Who are Arts Teachers per School, School Year 2021-2022	Numeric	Compares active, full-time licensed arts teachers (teachers hired into arts teacher positions) to the total number of active, full-time teachers. Excludes substitute and part-time teachers.
avg_arts_teach_share_2223	Average Share of Teachers Who are Arts Teachers per School, School Year 2022-2023	Numeric	Compares active, full-time licensed arts teachers (teachers hired into arts teacher positions) to the total number of active, full-time teachers. Excludes substitute and part-time teachers.
avg_arts_teach_share_2324	Average Share of Teachers Who are Arts Teachers per School, School Year 2023-2024	Numeric	Compares active, full-time licensed arts teachers (teachers hired into arts teacher positions) to the total number of active, full-time teachers. Excludes substitute and part-time teachers.
tot_cdf_prog_2122	Total Number of Cultural Development Fund Programs at Schools in District	Numeric	Note that the CDF data used for this analysis do not include the number or length of visits at each location, nor do they specify the timing of the program. Some CDF programs are after school, for example. Where schools were co-located on a campus, IBO manually assigned programs based on location descriptions in the CDF location data. However, there were a very small number of programs—26 out of 1,908—on campuses where a specific school was not listed. There were also three programs that appeared to be a traditional public school but could not be matched to a school in IBO's data. This handful of programs is excluded.
avg_cdf_prog_2122	Average per School: Number of Cultural Development Fund Programs	Numeric	Note that the CDF data used for this analysis do not include the number or length of visits at each location, nor do they specify the timing of the program. Some CDF programs are after school, for example. Where schools were co-located on a campus, IBO manually assigned programs based on location descriptions in the CDF location data. However, there were a very small number of programs—26 out of 1,908—on campuses where a specific school was not listed. There were also three programs that appeared to be a traditional public school but could not be matched to a school in IBO's data. This handful of programs is excluded.

## Shirley Aubin's City Council Testimony on April 09, 2025

Salutations! My name is Shirley Aubin and I am the Queens Borough President Donovan Richards' Appointee to the Panel for Educational Policy (QBPA PEP). Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am in support of amending the administrative code of NYC, a Local Law to require the department of education to report on school librarians and library access in NYC public schools. Our libraries will play a key support and pivotal role in ensuring equity and access in the Arts and a Cultural Relevant Sustaining Education.

Historical inequities, such as resources and opportunities, are commonly seen in underinvested schools and communities and marginalized communities and groups (special education, English language learners, less affluent communities, etc.). Our libraries, cultural arts institutions, and international intergroup relations can help closed the gaps in these inequities. The "Library" is the ultimate community center servicing from infants to seniors! Libraries are supplemental resources and support for all schools, especially in internet access, workshops, programs, technology and digital content. Libraries give you access to the Arts through books, films, pictures, music, etc. The direct link that libraries have to the Arts is the Cultural Pass to NYC Cultural Institutions. The library's Cultural Relevant Sustaining Education, Experience, and Environment along with the cultural arts institutions all linked to shaping a well-rounded scholar and community member. Picture mini libraries in our NYCPS!

Ensuring there are enough cultural institutions within each borough and having them partnered with schools within and outside the borough will prove to be extremely beneficial. Consistently studies show that exposure to cultural arts at a young age has **significant positive effects** on children's *cognitive, social, emotional, and academic development*. For instance,

- students with high arts involvement score better on tests
- low-income students highly engaged in the arts were **4x more likely** to be recognized for academic achievement and **3x more likely** to receive an award for school attendance.

Reemphasizing CRSE and the discovery of self-voice, the Arts has an enormous impact on the social and emotion wellness.

- Arts-rich environments increase emotional intelligence:  
Children engaged in art-based social-emotional learning programs showed:
  - **17% improvement** in peer interaction
  - **20% increase** in emotional regulation



- Increased confidence and resilience  
70% of students in after-school arts programs reported:
  - **Higher self-confidence**
  - **Greater sense of belonging**
- Providing aesthetic experiences and someone's artistic preferences, linking studies showed broad Improvements in student's emotional states that promote physical and psychological well-being.
  - Giving learners the time, space, and materials for creative expression can lower stress, improve memory, and make students feel more socially connected.
  - Educators can incorporate in their careers on bringing those experiences to scholars in various settings such as galleries, museums, or events by non-for-profits and community organizations.

**There are three (3) key points of:**

1. Despite disparities factors such as race, ethnicity, and family income can be overcome by ***Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts*** cannot be achieved by being the first to be cut. Seeking to improve student performance in math and reading does not have to the expense of art education. The Arts enhances, engrain and is the fabric of the core subjects. It shows the real life applications, making the lessons more relatable and relevant while providing SEL and CRSE.
2. Ensure EVERY school and student has more than minimum access to the Arts and an expansive cultural arts capacity by pushing for **STEAM**, not STEM.
3. We can ensure more access to multiple disciplines and certified art teachers with more ease by **diversifying and offer more pathways** for educators from marginalized communities to teach the arts.

The World's Borough President Donovan Richards Jr. put this into practiced by:

- Partnered with Carnegie Hall's School Fellowship program
- Invested with expense support in many city-wide non-profits focused on the arts
- Supported with \$28 million in the last three (3) fiscal years in supporting Queens-based cultural institutions.

Libraries and Cultural Arts Institutions ties to CRSE and Social-Emotion wellness which aligns with NYCPS' NYC Reads, NYC Solves, Count Art, and NYC Cares. These initiatives promote critical thinking and problem solving verses rote learning. Do we want communities that are filled with robotic like members or do we want caring, inspiring, innovative, solution based approach minded and productive community members? Making our city excel and beautiful.

### **Sources and Facts:**

Catterall, J.S. et al. (2009). "The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth," NEA)

CASEL & WolfBrown Evaluation of Turnaround Arts, 2016

Wallace Foundation Report on Arts for Youth Development, 2013)

University of Florida, 2025

NYC's Department of Education increased arts funding in underserved schools by 84% between 2013–2018, but many still fall short on per-student benchmarks - NYC Comptroller, 2019

Cultural Arts Institutions: in Queens include:

- **Queens Museum:** Known for the Panorama of the City of New York, a detailed scale model of the city.
  - They are opening a new early childhood center soon
- **Museum of the Moving Image:** Dedicated to film, television, and digital media, offering exhibitions on the history and impact of the moving image. [Queens Today](#)
- **New York Hall of Science:** Features over 450 interactive exhibits focusing on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). [Capture the Atlas](#)
- **Noguchi Museum:** Showcases the works of sculptor Isamu Noguchi, including sculptures, models, and designs. [Capture the Atlas](#)
- **Louis Armstrong House Museum:** Preserves the home of the legendary jazz musician, offering insights into his life and career. [WhichMuseum](#)

In Queens, New York, there are three (3) primary high schools specializing in the arts, each offering distinct programs (Frank Sinatra, High School for Arts and Business, and Motion Picture Technical HS) not to mention many other schools who have specialty programs in these specific fields.

The Queens Public Library operates in sixty-six (66) locations throughout the borough. These include branch libraries, a Central Library, seven adult learning centers, a technology lab at the Queensbridge public housing complex, a community learning center at the Ravenswood public housing complex, and five (5) Teen centers. Additionally, the library system features two bookmobiles and two book bicycles.



# SUPPORTS



The United Federation of Teachers represents more than 190,000 employees including teachers and classroom paraprofessionals, along with school secretaries, attendance teachers, guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, adult education teachers, administrative law judges, nurses, laboratory technicians, speech therapists, and 60,000 retired members. We also represent teachers and other employees at a number of private educational institutions and some charter schools.

## Committee on Education

**Int. 1125 (Restler): Requiring the Department of Education to report on school librarians and library access in New York City public schools.**

### Summary of Legislation

This bill would require the Department of Education (DOE) to report information about school librarians and library access in DOE schools annually. The DOE would be required to include in its report the number of certified and non-certified school librarians, the number of students who have weekly scheduled class time with school librarians, the average amount of weekly class time students spend with school librarians, the number of school libraries and the hours of operation of each school library.

### Statement of Support

The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) strongly supports Int. 1125, which would require the DOE to annually report information about school libraries and librarians. Having access to both a library and a librarian, also known as a school library media specialist, is vitally important for students' education. Librarians are essential members of the school community who support student learning, instruction and classroom teachers. They collaborate with content and grade-level teachers to improve students' reading and research skills, and they provide students with access to computers, databases, e-books and other technology. Librarians also maintain records of library use and expenditures and pursue grant opportunities that enrich school communities.

The importance and value of libraries and librarians is reflected in the UFT's collective bargaining agreement and the New York State commissioner of education's regulations. These documents require that every school has a functioning, well-stocked, technologically up-to-date library, and that school principals include librarian positions in their budgets.

Despite these requirements, far too many schools within New York City lack adequate libraries and fail to hire librarians. As of May 2023, there were only 260 certified school librarians for the city's 1,600 schools.<sup>1</sup> This negatively impacts our students and teachers, who miss out on the knowledge and expertise that librarians provide.

Further, this has a disproportionate impact on students at high-poverty schools, who are less likely to have a librarian than their peers. In 2023, over 81% of schools with poverty rates above

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2023/5/4/23711678/nyc-school-librarian-library-books-literacy-budget-cuts/>





# SUPPORTS



The United Federation of Teachers represents more than 190,000 employees including teachers and classroom paraprofessionals, along with school secretaries, attendance teachers, guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, adult education teachers, administrative law judges, nurses, laboratory technicians, speech therapists, and 60,000 retired members. We also represent teachers and other employees at a number of private educational institutions and some charter schools.

75% of students did *not* have a school librarian included in their budget, compared with 76% of schools with poverty rates below 75%.<sup>2</sup> This disparity further exacerbates the learning gaps among students in our city.

The UFT has continually advocated for there to be full-time certified school librarians in every school in New York City. Toward this end, we have negotiated agreements to make it easier for current teachers to become school librarians. The state and city education departments must enforce their regulations and ensure that principals hire school librarians. Requiring annual reports on school librarians and library access in DOE schools would ensure that we hold the state and city accountable.

**FOR THE ABOVE-MENTIONED REASONS, THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS SUPPORTS THE PASSAGE OF THIS LEGISLATION.**

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

**UFT OFFICERS:** Michael Mulgrew, *President* • LeRoy Bar, *Secretary* • Debra Penny, *Treasurer* • Michael Sill, *Assistant Secretary* • Thomas Brown, *Assistant Treasurer*  
**VICE PRESIDENTS:** Karen Alford • MaryJo Ginese • Anne Goldman • Leo Gordon • Janella T. Hinds • Richard Mantell • Mary Vaccaro

March 29, 2025

Honorable Members of the New York City Council,  
City Hall,  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Council Members,

On behalf of the New York City School Librarians Association (NYCSLA), we are writing to express our strong support for Bill NYC Int. 1125-2024, which would require the Department of Education (DOE) to report annually on critical information regarding school librarians and library access in DOE schools.

As advocates for equitable education and literacy development, we believe this legislation represents a vital step toward addressing the systemic inequities in library services across New York City schools. Currently, there is a troubling lack of transparency regarding the availability of certified school librarians and access to library resources. This lack of data hinders efforts to ensure that all students benefit from the proven academic and developmental advantages that robust school library programs provide.

The data outlined in this bill—such as the number of certified and non-certified librarians, weekly class time with librarians, and hours of operation for school libraries—will provide an invaluable foundation for identifying gaps in library services. This information is critical for:

- Promoting Equity: Many underserved communities lack consistent access to certified school librarians and fully operational libraries. Reporting will highlight disparities and guide resource allocation to ensure all students have equal opportunities to thrive academically.
- Improving Literacy Outcomes: Research consistently demonstrates that certified school librarians play a pivotal role in improving literacy rates and fostering lifelong learning habits. By tracking librarian availability and student interaction, policymakers can better address literacy challenges in underperforming districts.
- Supporting Policy Development: Transparent data will empower stakeholders to craft targeted solutions that expand access to certified librarians and enhance library infrastructure citywide.

## The Current State of School Libraries

As highlighted in recent reports, nearly one-third of schools required by state law to employ full-time librarians do not meet this mandate. Furthermore, only 260 out of over 1,600 schools currently have any form of librarian staffing—certified or otherwise. This stark disparity underscores the urgency of passing this legislation to illuminate the scope of the problem and drive meaningful change.

We urge the City Council to pass Int. 1125-2024 without delay. The annual reporting requirements outlined in this bill are not merely administrative; they are a necessary step toward ensuring that every child in New York City has access to the resources they need to succeed academically and personally.

Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue. The NYCSLA stands ready to collaborate with the Council and other stakeholders to advance equitable access to library services across our city's schools.

Sincerely,

New York City School Librarians Association (NYCSLA)

# CARNEGIE HALL

New York City Council Fiscal Year 2025

April 8, 2025

Oversight Hearing: Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts

Committee on Education and Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

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Chair Joseph, Chair Rivera and Members of the Council Committees on Education and Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations:

My name is David Freudenthal, and I am the Director of Government Relations at Carnegie Hall. Thank you to all the members of this committee and City Council for your support of arts education across New York City, and for the opportunity to testify about ways to prioritize and invest in equity and access for the arts in NYC schools and the longstanding partnership between Carnegie Hall and the Department of Education in service to our city's schools.

Carnegie Hall stands by our colleagues in the belief that arts education should be available to all students, not just some. Unfortunately, only 31% of eighth-grade students met state learning requirements for arts education last school year. The *term and condition passed by the Council last year* revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools) — leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. Furthermore, the combined implications of the Class Size Mandate rollout, the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our city to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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 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 to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.



- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Carnegie Hall is leader in creating far-reaching music education and social impact programs that inspire the next generation of music lovers, nurture musical talent, contribute to the evolution of music education, and explore how music can play a meaningful role in people's lives. Each year, these programs reach nearly 800,000 people in NYC, across the US and around the globe in schools, orchestras, arts organizations, homeless shelters, correctional facilities, hospitals, and more, supporting music learning at all levels.

Carnegie Hall is deeply committed to its partnership with NYDoE; 54,000 students and 550 teachers across 350 area schools are served annually by Carnegie Hall's programs. The Hall works closely with stakeholders throughout the education ecosystem—educators, parents, public officials, and young people—to ensure that our programs intentionally prioritize those who otherwise may not have access to these opportunities. Regarded by DOE's Office of Arts and Special Projects as a lead partner in music education, Carnegie Hall's school programs have effectively delivered the agency's standards for music education, providing high quality, fundamental music instruction and best practices by amplifying and celebrating the cultural richness of our city for over a decade. Our learning and engagement programs inspire the next generation of music lovers in NYC's K-12 classrooms and support local teachers in refining their skills. This year, the Hall supports school-based programs both in-person and remotely, including [Link Up](#) and [Musical Explorers](#) for elementary-age children, [Music Educators Workshop](#) for NYC teachers, and for middle and high school students through [Ensemble Connect](#).

- [Musical Explorers](#) connects 6,000 students in grades K–2 to NYC's rich and diverse musical community as they build fundamental music skills through listening, singing, and moving to songs from all over the world. Each season, students meet six artists who each represent a different musical genre and cultural tradition. Over the years Carnegie Hall has developed an online library of units for nearly 30 different musical traditions, and that list grows every year. Teachers have access to a free curriculum, professional development, and a culminating interactive concert for their students.
- [Link Up](#)—Carnegie Hall's longest running education program—equips teachers with the tools to help their students learn to read and play music, develop a music vocabulary, analyze orchestral repertoire, explore ideas related to the year's theme, perform alongside professionals and their peers, and connect musical learning with other areas of study and art forms. Link Up introduces the basics of orchestral music to over 11,000 local students and 165 teachers.
- [Music Educators Workshop](#) provides approximately 150 NYC K–12 music teachers monthly professional development each year, in a vital space for teachers to recognize their shared experiences and receive support, community, and professional growth. Educators receive 10 monthly four-hour Saturday sessions from September through June—three times the NYC Department of Education average of general professional development hours for music teachers. Teachers in the program learn from each other and guest faculty and explore their roles as instigators of creativity and musicality. By serving these 150 teachers, Carnegie Hall touches the education of more than 32,000 students each year.
- [Ensemble Connect](#) is a program of Carnegie Hall, The Juilliard School, and the Weill Music Institute in partnership with DOE. This two-year fellowship program prepares extraordinary young professional classical musicians for careers that combine musical excellence with teaching, community engagement, advocacy, entrepreneurship, and leadership. Ensemble Connect offers top-quality performance opportunities, intensive professional development, and the opportunity to partner with a New York City

public school throughout the fellowship. Ensemble Connect partners with 14 schools across the 5 boroughs.

- Carnegie Hall's early childhood programs encourage connection, well-being, and creativity for families, most of whom are facing challenging personal circumstances. Workshops have been operating continuously throughout the pandemic via online sessions. The [Lullaby Project](#) pairs new and expectant parents and caregivers with professional artists to write and sing personal lullabies for their babies, supporting maternal health, aiding child development, and strengthening the bond between parent and child. The first Lullaby Project took place at Jacobi Medical Center in the Bronx in December 2011, and since then more than 5,000 families have written original songs for their children, hundreds of which are available for listening and sharing on Carnegie Hall's Lullaby SoundCloud page. These families connect with the Lullaby Project through city agency partnerships including the NYC Departments of Education, Correction (DOC), Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and Homeless Services (DHS), the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), Health + Hospitals (H+H), and the Housing Authority (NYCHA). [Big Note, Little Note](#), is a music class for NYC families that offers a range of experiences for families and caregivers to engage with their babies through musical play, singing, instrument exploration, and more. The program is centered around community, and supports family well-being, early childhood development, and parent-child connection.

The Council's continued investment in these partnerships will be absolutely essential to maintaining the status of New York City as the cultural capital of the world, where people of all ages can learn and enjoy the arts. Carnegie Hall will never stop striving to fulfill its mission, but without the support of public partners, the work of bettering the lives of New Yorkers through music education would become that much harder. We thank the Committee for their interest in these programs, and we encourage the Council to invest in these opportunities and other programs by our cultural colleagues across the city.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with you individually to discuss these points, as well as Carnegie Hall's education and community programming partnerships in your district. Thank you for your support for and consideration of our requests, and thanks to our public partners, artists and arts organizations, teachers, stakeholders, and the talented young people involved in these programs for being a part of truly transformational changes.

#### **Testimonial from School Programs Stakeholders:**

"Carnegie Hall is the future. These workshops are extremely mindful of human connection and how music can be a catalyst for this connection and bringing people, nations, worlds together. It's a truly beautiful, gratifying, humbling, inspiring and passionate connection. It gives so many tools for educators to bring positive changes to, not only their classroom, but to their connections, personal and professional and of their self-improvement every day. I believe every educator should be part of this incredible program. And I feel extremely grateful to have the opportunity to be a part of it. Thank you!!"—Isabella Mendes, local Music Educators Workshop participant

"After watching Layths video, one of my students shared proudly with me that "he is a Muslim, too" Another one became interested in a violin because "it sounded beautiful" and some kids loved Bluegrass music and others fell in love with Chinese Traditional. We really opened up a varied musical world for them. Some of them were asking for more music from various cultures in various languages!" - Valeria Shkop, teacher at PS 193 (Musical Explorers)

"There is nothing that I can do to truly prepare my students for the adventure that they are about to begin. We learn the songs, we explore the activities, but it is not until they first step foot into the concert hall that they realize what a big deal this is. They have truly arrived at a musical, cultural landmark." - Ryan Mack, Teacher at P.S. 10K ([Link Up](#))

"Carnegie Hall always helps me expand what I believe is possible in the music classroom." - Kim Walton, teacher at Wadleigh Secondary School for the Performing and Visual Arts (Music Educators Workshop)

"When the pandemic first hit like most teachers I was at a loss on how to navigate through remote teaching and better yet what would work best for my students. I worked with my fellow, Nicolee Kuester, and we made a plan for students who had instruments versus those who did not. This was part of our foundation for the current school year. With the added resources that Deanna Kennett and the members of Ensemble Connect provided, Nicolee and I were able to solidify the students learning through the helpful videos of instruments, as well as their new form of interactive performances to help students engage in new ways. My students have especially loved the "Princess Bear Snake and Cowboy" performance as well as the one utilizing the concept of soundscapes. In a time when music is needed to help the students, Ensemble Connect was able to provide the students and teachers with various resources to not only help engage the students but also help drive their creativity." - Ensemble Connect Partner Teacher Laurél Hornick from Grover Cleveland High School

"I consider music to be the soundtrack of my life and was excited when the opportunity presented itself for me to introduce and bond with my son through music. In April 2021 while being on maternity leave, I enrolled in Big Note Little Note online music class with my 3-months-old son, Jacob. I looked forward to Wednesdays because it was something that helped with bonding and the development of my son. As a new mom, I realized that everything became a song. Even something as simple as changing a diaper. Jacob's face would light up with laughter when I sang or play music. He also had a favorite song from the class that I would sing to him. Lastly, I enjoyed fellowship with the other families. The weekly "music moments" were useful in furthering our connection with music outside the class. I really wish there was a Big Note Little Note Alumni music class as I think Jacob and I would love a continuation of such an amazing experience." - Stacyann Coley, Big Note, Little Note participant



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Education,  
Hon. Carlina Rivera and Rita Joseph, Chairs  
Hearing: Joint Oversight Hearing on Arts Education  
April 8, 2025

Thank you to Chair Rivera and Chair Joseph and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the It Starts with the Arts coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools. My name is Amanda Selwyn and I am the Artistic and Executive Director at Amanda Selwyn Dance Theatre/Notes in Motion in Manhattan.

Amanda Selwyn Dance Theatre/Notes in Motion engages communities in dynamic dance theatre and inclusive education programs. Through an interplay of athletic and articulate motion, Amanda Selwyn Dance theatre presents theatrical and immediate works that engage audiences from start to finish and beckon a response of thought, feeling, and soul. Notes in Motion brings dance education programs to the NYC Public Schools in styles including modern, ballet, tap, jazz, hip hop, Latin, African, and more. Programs are united by our pedagogical approach, *The Movement Exchange Method*, in which technique/skills-based instruction is coupled with creative exploration thereby empowering students as leaders and innovators. We aim to provide access to the art form of dance to inspire the next generation of dance appreciators.

Since 2000, Notes in Motion has reached over 175 schools and 230,000 students in NYC. We create long-lasting arts partnerships with schools that allow students to build on skills from year to year while inspiring greater school communities with the beauty, magic, and vitality of dance. Notes in Motion's programs serve disadvantaged young people and promote well-rounded learning, opportunities for academic achievement, parent engagement, individual leadership, and citizenship.

Budget cuts will significantly impede the effectiveness of Notes in Motion's Dance Education Programs, affecting its ability to deliver arts education to school communities. Reduced funding may force Notes in Motion to cut back on outreach programs, limiting access for underserved populations. Additionally, uncertainty about impending cuts can hinder long-term planning and partnerships, leading to delays or cancellations of scheduled programs. These budget cuts will disrupt daily operations and jeopardize the sustainability of Notes in Motion's initiatives, ultimately hampering its mission to promote dance education and appreciation.

Notes in Motion's programs promote positive youth development by providing access to dance and strengthening the arts infrastructure in communities. Our thoughtful instruction expands physical, technical, and creative skills, develops identity and leadership, and fosters class cohesion. We hear stories again and again of students who struggle in other subjects that find great success in dance. This success creates confidence for students to tackle the other challenges they face. Leading with our values of fostering inclusion and expression through dance, Notes in Motion promotes healing in our audiences and in our classrooms.

Notes in Motion offers many opportunities for families and community members to engage with students' arts learning, thereby activating the entire school community. Our programs ease anxiety, get people to move their bodies, and create joy and shared experiences for students and families. The positive impact of our programs was described in *NYFA's Current: A Magazine for Artists*: "At P.S. 78... Bronx, student attendance is erratic and parents' involvement in their children's education notoriously low. But something changed when the students performed in a Notes in Motion dance production at the year-end assembly: the parents showed up."

"The impact that Notes in Motion programs have had on my child is magical. My child is less shy to interact, dance, perform, and sing in front of crowds. She is absorbing it all like a sponge and enjoying every minute of it." - Parent

"The program promoted collaboration, understanding, and confidence. It also promoted diversity. Student writing became more creative as they learned new dance concepts." - Teacher, PS 83 X

Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Unfortunately, only 31% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. The [term and condition passed by the Council last year](#) revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools) — leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. Furthermore, the combined implications of the Class Size Mandate rollout, the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

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- **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 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 to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,



Amanda Selwyn

Artistic/Executive Director

Amanda Selwyn Dance Theatre/Notes in Motion

**NYC Council Hearing on Equity and Access to Arts Education**  
**Committee on Education Jointly with the Committee on Cultural Affairs**  
**Tuesday, April 8, 2025**  
**Lyndsay Werking-Yip, American Composers Orchestra**

Thank you Chairs Rivera and Joseph for the opportunity to testify. It's always a pleasure to be here among my peers and hear about all the amazing work that is happening across our city. My name is Lyndsay Werking-Yip. I am the Development Director for the American Composers Orchestra. I'm honored to be joined today by my friends and colleagues: Che Buford, a student alum; Arjan Sing, a trombonist, composer, teaching artist and administrator; and JL Marlor, a composer, vocalist, teaching artist and education coordinator for ACO. All of whom you will hear from shortly.

**OVERVIEW**

For 30 years, ACO's Sonic Spark Music Education Programs have positioned music composition as a gateway to creative thinking, problem-solving, and self-expression in partnership with New York City Public Schools. Long-term sequential residencies nurture imagination through creative rituals and play, cultivating personal, social, and academic growth.

Accessibility is a priority for ACO's programs. ACO Teaching Artists have dual language skills, extensive experience teaching classes with multi-language learners, and experience working with students with disabilities for each program.

A highlight of ACO's programs is that they teach music and equip young minds with the tools to create, innovate, and reimagine the lives that they lead. For example, early-career composers selected for ACO's EarShot Program this year visited every Sonic Spark class. These visits not only introduce students to diverse musical styles and some of the career possibilities available in music but also give young composers experience engaging with student populations. Engagement quality was consistently high and earned praise from our Teaching Artists and partners.

**RESEARCH WITH NYU**

Also in the 2023-24 school year, ACO's Sonic Spark Lab was the focus of a neuroscience research initiative from the NYU Music and Audio Research Laboratory (MARL) and Center for Music, Language, and Emotion, examining the impacts of ACO's creativity-based arts programming on mental and behavioral health. Initial data analysis exploring the impacts on a class of students at Fort Hamilton High School with little or no prior arts involvement showed consistent improvements in markers for engagement,

mood, anxiety, depression, fatigue, and self-esteem, as well as greater social comfort in their immediate school context.

## **LIVING COMPOSERS IN CLASSROOMS**

In 2023-24 school year, ACO piloted our first EarShot Publishing commission for youth ensemble and corresponding education module, supported by Sphinx Venture Fund. The first in a collection of eight works for youth ensemble, Kebra-Seyoun Charles' work, Counterclassical Treatise, is designed to use simple ornamentation as an entry point to improvisation. The module was piloted using two separate methods - the Celia Cruz Bronx High School of Music orchestra completed the module over two days, with Kebra as guest artist both days and a cadre of three additional ACO musicians providing support the second day. The Talent Unlimited High School Orchestra completed the module in short segments over the course of a week, culminating in an extended session with ACO Education Director Kevin James, serving as guest conductor, and seven ACO musicians sitting in the orchestra with the students. Both approaches successfully got the students to improvise and introduced the students and conductors to the new work. Furthermore, this activity is filling a frequent request from youth orchestras and high school ensemble directors. ACO receives many such requests for music composed by living American composers of color suitable for younger players.

## **ONGOING CHALLENGES IN NEW YORK CITY**

I meet weekly with ACO's Education Director Kevin James. We are regularly in touch to seek program funding and share recent successes from the classroom. Our biggest challenge is navigating the schedule and timing of applications and awards from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York City Department of Education. This is the single largest impediment to providing consistent services to our most needy students.

I call upon this Committee and the NYC Council to address the delays in the funding process and make it easier for organizations to partner with schools. We understand that the Council discretionary awards are for a single year only. These are incredibly important resources for arts organizations and schools. The very delayed timing of these awards is problematic as discretionary awards should be moved out to awardees asap after the Council makes designations. This year we waited until February for awards made last June.



## **CASE STUDY: M427 MANHATTAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LANGUAGE**

The 2024-2025 school year marks the third year of Sonic Spark Ensembles at M427, Manhattan Academy of Arts and Language, whose population consists almost entirely of newly arrived immigrants. Our success with the multi-language learners in this school has led us to consider offering a bilingual curriculum for all of our programs.

ACO's 2023-24 partnership with M427 Arts was funded by an Arts Partnership grant for Multilingual Learners and Students with Disabilities from the Department of Education. Our grants writer supported the creation of the grant proposal and reporting of the grant. We are grateful this funding exists, however, the DOE required that a school staff member submit the grant. As the service provider, ACO was preparing materials in partnership with the school but could not finish the final step. Although we managed to get this done, it was an undue burden placed on the school.

For the 2024-25 school year, not only was this funding not renewed, but the notification came during the final week of September. As a result, M427 told us they could not continue the partnership. This left no time to seek an alternative funding source to keep the two-year partnership moving forward.

Thanks to a surprise donation, ACO was able to continue the partnership into its third year. But ongoing funding is not guaranteed. The ability to seek and secure multi-year funding from the DOE would allow for more advanced planning, better integration into the school day, and deeper impact for the student receiving instruction.

## **TIMING OF FUNDING & BUREAUCRATIC BURDEN**

We need awards to be announced at the beginning of the fiscal year in order to provide the sort of consistent, year round, high quality services that our students deserve. Furthermore, our teaching artists deserve to know what classes they will be teaching and what income they will be receiving with more than a month's - or in extreme cases, a week's - notice.

ACO would also like to see the creation and expansion of programs that encourage linking and embedding arts programming with academic teachers and classrooms. This approach would deepen learning, inspire student engagement, develop both student agency and leadership, and demonstrate to teachers and administrators the transformative educational and social value of the arts.

Finally, we need to lighten the bureaucratic load on principals and assistant principals so that they have better bandwidth for creating connections between the activities going

on within their walls and the larger community. This overload is evident in almost all of our communications with partners. Even when we have an enthusiastic principal, funding in hand, and program ready to implement, the roll out can be delayed by weeks and months due to administrative burnout.

## **FY2026 REQUEST**

ACO is a national accelerator creating pathways for New Yorkers to pursue careers in the arts. Our EarShot initiatives are the first ongoing, systemic program for building relationships between composers and orchestras across the Americas. Since 2020, we have tripled our national footprint, increasing from 6 to 26 partners across 17 U.S. states and Canada; all of these partners are providing jobs to our artists. As mentioned above, through our education programs, early-career composers selected for ACO's EarShot Program this year visited every Sonic Spark class.

We respectfully request \$50,000 from the City Council to support ACO's work through the Speaker's Initiative or a new citywide initiative focused on music education or career pathways in the arts. These funds would enable ACO to add 5 annual composer residencies, providing paid opportunities to over 100 New York artists, and transformative musical experiences for many more NYC residents and young people.

Thank you.

## **New York City Council FY2026 New Initiative Proposal**

### *The New York City Council Three Chords Initiative*

**\$3,000,000**

#### *Rationale:*

Music education has been proven to enhance academic performance while fostering students' social and emotional wellbeing. This new citywide initiative aims to ensure all NYC students and young people have access to music education and its many benefits.

#### **Introduction**

Walk down any block in New York City, and music will fill your ears. It echoes across subway platforms, powers night life venues, and flows through public schools. Music created in New York City has changed the world from Bronx-born hip-hop to iconic Broadway showtunes heard across the globe. New York's deep musical legacy creates a responsibility to ensure that future generations have access to robust music education. Every classroom in New York City can help foster the next Alicia Keys, the next Lin-Manuel Miranda, the next Louis Armstrong, or an entirely new sound and voice we haven't imagined yet.

#### **Positive Impact of Music Education**

Music education has been proven to lead to positive outcomes for students. Music improves academic performance, fosters social emotional learning, promotes cross cultural understanding, and opens students eyes to viable career pathways in the arts.

##### *Improved Academic Outcomes*

Music education has been shown to help students learn more effectively in all subjects, including math, science, reading, and writing (Guhn, Emerson, & Gouzouasis, 2019). Music education supports brain development in young children, particularly in the areas of the brain responsible for sound, language skills, speech and reading comprehension (Habibi, 2022).

In addition, access to music education can lead to increased high school graduation rates and reduced school dropout rates. The National Endowment for the Arts followed more than 22,000 students for 12 years and found that meaningful engagement with arts education leads to students being five times more likely to graduate high school (Brown, 2017).

##### *Social Emotional Learning and Community Building*

Beyond the positive brain development of those who study music, research shows that another benefit is actually boosting overall wellbeing and strengthening connections to the school and community (Ilari & Cho, 2023). Music education can lead to feelings of belonging at school and improved satisfaction with the school environment (Eerola & Eerola, 2014). One study found that low-income children at risk for school problems benefited greatly from robust music education through increased positive emotions and improved emotion regulation (Brown & Sax, 2013). Music can also give students a sense of being able to accomplish one's goals and greater feelings of achievement and opportunity in school. (Eerola & Eerola, 2014) (Catterall, 2007). The arts have also been shown to increase civic engagement among students (Catterall, 2012).

## Cultural Competency

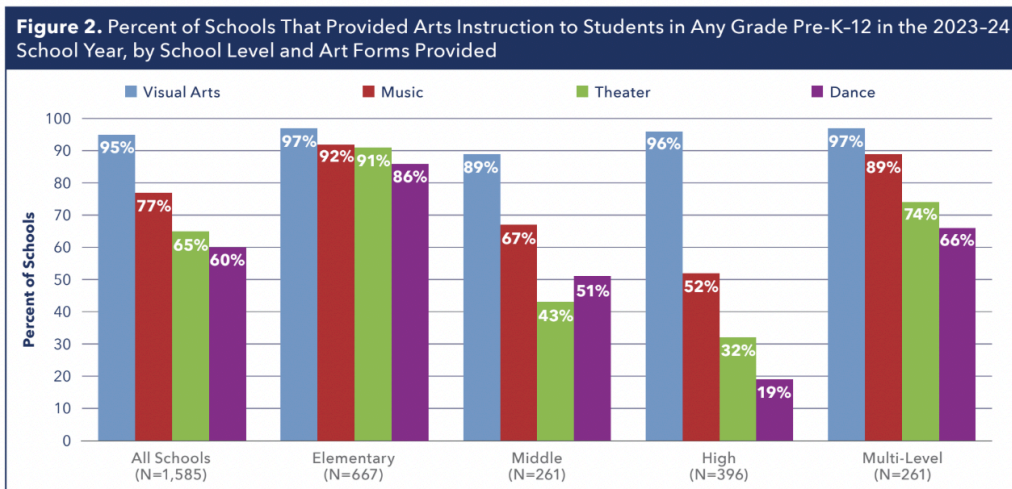
Music education helps to celebrate diverse cultural heritage and promote cross-cultural understanding. Researchers have shown that teaching music in elementary and secondary schools can help break down barriers among various ethnic, racial, cultural, and language groups (Cambell, 2018) Collaborating through music education has also been shown to increase positive interactions and relationships between children (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010)

## Career Pathways

Another benefit of increased music education in school is around workforce development and teaching students about potential career pathways into musical performance, composition, music production, teaching, music therapy, sound engineering, and music technology. According to a report conducted by the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment back in 2017, New York City is one of the world's most influential music ecosystems, supporting nearly 60,000 jobs, accounting for roughly \$5 billion in wages, and generating a total economic output of \$21 billion This same report noted that music-related jobs and wages are growing at an annual rate of 4 and 7 percent outpacing the overall New York City economy, where jobs and wages are growing annually at 3 and 5 percent, respectively.

## State of Music Education In NYC Schools

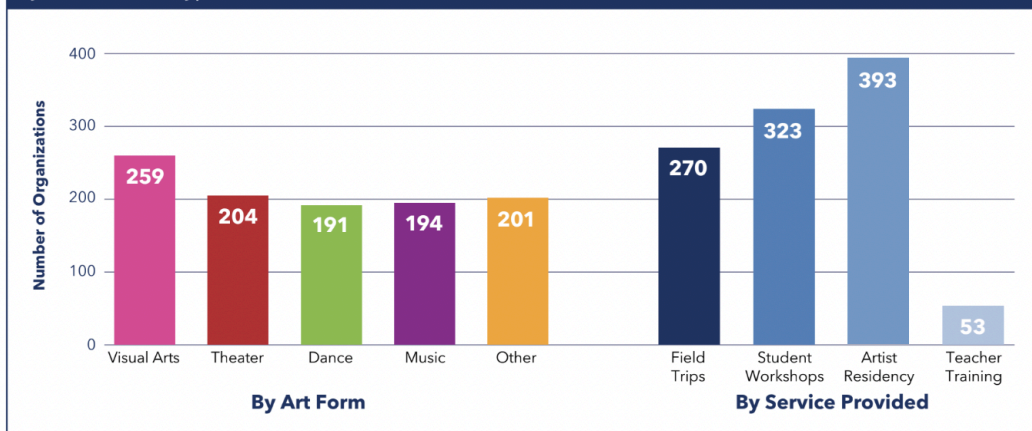
In an annual report on arts instruction on K-12 schools on arts instruction in individual schools for the 2023-2024 school year roughly 23% of schools do not offer music to any grade (358 schools out of the 1,585 included in the report). The figure below demonstrates how this number increases for both middle and high schools. In this same report, only 741 out of 1,585 schools report having a full time or part time music teacher.



Source: 2023-24 Annual Arts Education Survey and STARS Data

Our arts partners are critical to ensure that our students have access to diverse forms of music education and learn various types of music. In the 2023-2024 school year, NYC Public Schools partnered with 194 cultural arts organizations that provided music education services.

**Figure 10.** Number of Cultural Arts Organizations That Partnered with Responding Schools in 2023-24, by Art Form and Types of Services Provided\*



Source: 2023-24 Annual Arts Education Survey

\*Note that cultural arts organizations providing multiple services may be counted more than once.

- [Arts Education Report - NYC Council - Term and Condition](#)
- [2023-2024 Annual Arts in Schools Report](#)

## Designation Proposal

The new citywide initiative, the Three Chords Initiative, will give every child access to music education and its related benefits by supporting school arts partners and integrating music instruction into youth programs. The \$3 million initiative should be designated as follows:

### Arts Partners

**\$50,000 - \$250,000**

Music education providers from the City's cultural sector will offer school day and afterschool music instruction and education to NYC students and young people.

### DYCD Summer and After School Music Partners

**\$1,175,000**

New York City's afterschool and summer programs for youth recognize the importance of the arts and strive to connect participants to enriching learning experiences in the arts. With individual awards of \$25,000 for after school and summer DYCD programs, this initiative will extend arts opportunities to young people outside of school times.

# ARTHUR MILLER FOUNDATION

FOR THEATER EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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LYNN NOTTAGE

CHIKÉ OKONKWO

DIANE PAULUS

ANTHONY RAMOS

LIEV SCHREIBER

SHERIE RENE SCOTT

CINDY TOLAN

NIK WALKER

## Testimonial Letter for the New York City Council Joint Oversight Hearing on Arts Education, Hon. Rita Joseph and Hon. Carlina Rivera - April 8, 2025

Thank you to Joint Chairs Rita Joseph and Carlina Rivera and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools. I serve as the Executive Director of the Arthur Miller Foundation, an independent, grassroots non-profit organization honoring the legacy of the American playwright, Arthur Miller, and his New York City public school education, by increasing equitable access to quality theater education for New York City public school students.

The Arthur Miller Foundation (AMF) accomplishes our mission by certifying and supporting teachers to build sustainable in-school theater programs. In-school theater instruction provided by a full-time, certified theater teacher, and included as an integral part of a comprehensive K-12 public school education, ensures access to all students regardless of economic status. AMF currently supports 119 full-time theater teachers in NYC Public Schools, accounting for **50% of current full-time public school theater teachers in New York City. These teachers reach 59,500 students in all 5 boroughs of NYC.** Over the course of 3 years, theater teachers receive dedicated support to build sustainable in-school theater programs through mentorship, cultural partner residencies, classroom materials, Broadway tickets for students, and ongoing professional development. In addition to providing the only support of its kind to NYC theater teachers, we invest in the NYC cultural economy through partnerships with ten cultural organizations and their teaching artists.

The National Endowment for the Arts' recently published longitudinal study, *Snapshots of Arts Education in Childhood and Adolescence: Access and Outcomes* (2025), demonstrated that access to in-school arts education significantly enhances **social emotional learning and development**, including peer social support and perseverance in pursuit of a goal. Access to in-school arts education also directly correlates to **higher test scores, GPAs, and graduation rates.**

The following are recent quotes from NYC public school students who have been impacted by the teachers in our programs:

"Theater class taught me how to be brave."

"Theater has taught me to use my voice to facilitate change, challenge injustices, and inspire action."

"Theater class taught me how to empathize with other people."

"Theater classes taught me how to overcome any challenges life may throw at me."

The 2023-2024 Arts In Schools Report showed that only **14% of NYC Public Schools have a full-time, certified theater teacher.** The Arthur Miller Foundation is supporting all new full-time theater teachers in 2024-2025, ensuring that these teachers have essential support in their first three years. I am writing to request that any budget cuts we face do not affect the 239 theater teachers who are already severely underrepresented throughout NYC, when compared to other subject areas and arts disciplines. Furthermore, the combined implications of the Class Size Mandate rollout, the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come. We need your help for arts education to have an equitable seat at the table.

# ARTHUR MILLER FOUNDATION

FOR THEATER EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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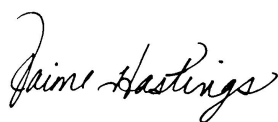
CINDY TOLAN

NIK WALKER

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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 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 to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.

In order to do our part to continue providing support for our theater teachers and students in NYC Public Schools, we must ensure the Arts Office and arts education infrastructure are not lost and that NYC Public Schools is able to continue hiring certified arts teachers. We cannot lose the progress that’s been made to this point when we still have such a long way to go. Please help us ensure that theater education is prioritized and considered a right — not a privilege. Thank you for your time.



Jaime Hastings

*Executive Director*





**New York City Council Written Testimony April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025**  
**Committee on Education**  
**File # T2025-3211**

Thank you to Chair Rita Joseph and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools.

My name is Rachel Watts, and I am the Executive Director of ArtsConnection a New York City based Arts Education organization whose core purpose is to connect educators, young people and their families with uplifting experiences that respect who they are as humans. We work in public schools throughout the city each year and directly with young people and families during out-of-school hours. Since 1979 we have been an integral part of the field providing programming in all art forms and impacting the lives of over 3 million young people representing all 5 boroughs of this beautiful city.

In New York State the arts are not required as a core subject in school. Only 29 states make this requirement including Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Utah. While we struggle to ensure all students have access to the arts in New York City, how the arts are taught is being attacked across the nation in states that ensured that students had access to the arts in their education. I realized recently that after 25 years working in this field, it is not that educators and policy makers don't understand the power of the arts, it is actually the opposite. They understand it so well they want to make sure we don't allow students to learn how to problem solve, how to work well as part of a group, how to develop empathy, and how to think critically and independently.

Every time I have a chance to visit a classroom, I am inspired to continue fighting for the arts in a young person's education. Most recently I was in a kindergarten class at PS 14 in Queens, where our puppetry artist was working with an amazing classroom teacher to help support literacy and language development for group of kindergarten students who speak a language other than English at home. Besides all the joy that was emanating from the students and adults in the room, I saw young people deeply engaged in the use of puppets, sound and movement to explore, develop, and express their own ideas. It was magical!

As you work towards a budget for next year, I implore you to help ensure that arts education is available to ALL students, not just some. Because we don't require the arts as a core subject, unfortunately, only 31% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. The term and condition passed by the Council last year revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools) — leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school.



Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our city to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Ensuring that every school has a certified arts teacher** through bolstering the pipeline of certified arts teachers via a supplemental certification program or funding a PE Works-inspired improvement plan.
- **Restoring and Enhancing the “Support for Arts Instruction” initiative funding** through boosting the allocation from \$4M to \$6M to meet city-wide demand.
- **Requiring DOE arts funding is spent on the arts** by boosting the per student arts allocation to \$100 from \$86.67 and requiring that money be spent on arts education.
- **Restoring and Increasing Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs,** ArtsConnection has had their funding from this agency cut by 66% limiting our capacity to raise the additional private and corporate funds that help us fill the gap with schools. In NYC about 400 arts and cultural organizations like ArtsConnection raise millions of dollars to ensure the arts is a part of a child’s education. **Please add \$30M to baseline funding to DCLA plus a one-time add of \$45M.**
- **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.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps from the many organizations that support NYC schools are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC contracting process within NYCPS).

Young people represent our future and what we do now impacts the city’s future. Please continue to prioritize investment in arts education and in NYC’s future because **success starts with the arts.**

Thank you for your attention and consideration,

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. W. H.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rachel Watts  
Executive Director

[WattsR@artsconnection.org](mailto:WattsR@artsconnection.org)

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Education,  
Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair  
April 8, 2025 Hearing

Thank you to Chair Rita Joseph and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools. My name is Keith Kaminski and I work ArtsConnection, and NYC nonprofit with over 45 years of service throughout the city. Additionally, I serve on the board of directors of the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable.

My entire career of nearly 24 years has been focused on expanding access to the arts for NYC youth. Throughout this time, I have seen the impact that high-quality arts education can have on students, teachers, families, and school communities across the five boroughs. I have always advocated for the importance of arts education and the need for equitable funding. However, the current political climate resulting from the current U.S. president's evil, corrupt, and aggressively anti-democratic actions have created a dangerous and confusing environment for our children. Our fundamental rights and our values as New Yorkers have never been more under attack.

We have a moral obligation to do everything within our power to protect our children, and to support their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The arts provide unique and powerful opportunities for young people to celebrate their identities and cultures, process their experiences, and envision possibilities for a better world. Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Unfortunately, only 31% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. The [term and condition passed by the Council last year](#) revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools) — leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. Furthermore, the combined implications of the Class Size Mandate rollout, the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future, and the need has never been more urgent. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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.
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- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

We must rise in this moment to take action to support the children of this city. They are our future, and our greatest resource. Thank you for your attention and consideration,



Keith Kaminski

Edward Miller, ArtsConnection

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Education Committee,  
Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair  
April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025, 10:00 am

Thank you to Chair Joseph and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm here to support the It Starts with the Arts coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools. My name is Edward Miller and I work at ArtsConnection as the Director of Teen Programs in citywide programming.

The mission of ArtsConnection is to create socially just learning environments that strengthen the diverse voices of NYC's children and youth, cultivating their arts and academic skills for success in a changing world. ArtsConnection. In 2024, ArtsConnection reached 26,580 students and over 1000 families through our in-school programming, 912 Teens in 117 schools through Teen Programs and over 1000 adults through professional learning.

Understanding that funding in general is tight, funding for the arts in New York City is essential. I work with teens. These teens are desperately looking for opportunities to gain skills in the arts, to be exposed to and interact with the rich artistic community that exists in the city. The goal, at this crucial point in their lives as artists is opportunity. Without funding to support arts programming, I fear that teens will not be able to find the opportunities that they seek to further their careers. At ArtsConnection, we work to provide those opportunities by taking them to see shows all over the city, by providing art exhibitions to showcase their excellent visual arts work and career development through college and career readiness programs such as ON TRAC and Teens Curate Teens. I am asking the council to restore and increase baseline funding to the Department of Cultural Affairs. ArtsConnection has been cut down at the knees by a 66% reduction in funding from DCLA in the last 4 years.

In the past few years, I have worked on in school projects that exposed children to puppet making, theater, dance and visual arts. All programs have made an impact, especially in puppetry. Although funding has been severely curtailed, we continue to work through the ELL/SWD grant with middle schools that use theater and dance to help students who are MLL, work on projects that foster English acquisition through theater and dance creation in small groups. Students engage, reflect and develop projects kinesthetically and hone English language skills. We need more funding to engage in this critical work with middle schoolers. Presently, I

am working with students through our Student Art Program. We work with NYC DOE art teachers who help students create art works for AC's themed shows. The works that we receive are genuinely complex, rigorous and artistically deep. I have noticed that more and more, students are submitting works that are smaller and on paper and not on canvasses. This leads me to believe that art teachers need financial support for supplies for student's exploration of art materials. I have also noticed that if there were more art teachers, I could potentially reach so many more students than I can from the elite high schools, who submit the bulk of the art work to our shows.

Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Unfortunately, only 31% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. The [term and condition passed by the Council last year](#) revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools) — leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. Furthermore, the combined implications of the Class Size Mandate rollout, the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars: Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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 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 to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.

- Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M): Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M): Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- 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.
- Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions: Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Thank you for your attention and consideration,  
Edward F. Miller III



## Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Arts Education

Hon. Carlina Rivera and Rita Joseph,  
Chairs  
April 8, 2025

Thank you to Chairs Rivera and Joseph and the City Council for your support of Arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools. My name is Stephen Yaffe, and I am the Chairperson of Arts for All Abilities Consortium in New York City.

The mission of Arts for All Abilities Consortium is to bring together stakeholders in Arts education provided students with disabilities (SWDs) who have historically not had sufficient opportunity to come together to address needs, develop solutions, deepen practice and the quality of Arts education provided SWDs in NYC. We work in all 5 boroughs, K-12, with those stakeholders – school and arts administrators, Arts specialists, classroom teachers, teaching artists, museum educators, occupational and physical therapists, speech/language pathologists, mental health counselors, paraprofessionals and parents. We have been doing so since 2007.

City funding does not impact our ability to work because we are for all intents and purposes a wholly volunteer organization of professionals with extensive experience, often national and international. City funding does, however, immensely affect our ability to work with effectiveness, meaning and impact. When Arts



education is not sufficiently funded,

- Outside cultural institutions lose the ability to sufficiently partner with schools, lose quality teaching artists
- Schools lose the ability to recruit and retain certified Arts specialists, sustain motivation and maintain structural supports that help provide quality Arts instruction and collaboration
- Students with disabilities lose what is often their best means of communicating – in school and the world beyond it, and a crucial means of revealing unsuspected and often unknown capacities that can be built upon and expanded beyond Arts contexts.

*[Making Room At The Table – A Needs Assessment of Arts Education For Special Needs Students In NYC Public Schools, VSA/The Kennedy Center, 2008, Yaffe.]*

Since our inception The Consortium has been responsible for, among other things,

- Important policy changes at the school and cultural organization level, including the incorporation of related service providers – occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech/language therapists – in pre-Arts residency planning meetings, thus integrating the goals and work of these key constituencies





- Provided professional development to, for and by Arts teachers, classroom teachers, teaching artists across the city
- Established an ongoing professional learning community, the Observation/Mentoring Initiative, which provides mentoring by Arts champion District 75 school principals to other District 75 principals, together with cultural arts administrators, observation of master classes taught by master Arts specialists and/or teaching artists and on-site debrief with them. This PLC, a first of its kind, is providing practitioners means to deepen the roots of the Arts in District 75 schools, deepen administrators' understanding and practice around funding, nurture, grow and extend collaborative partnerships in instruction, support, data collection.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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.
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- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service



gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Yaffe



**Written Testimony to the New York City Council  
Committees on Education & Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair // Hon. Carlina Rivera, Chair  
Hearing: Joint Oversight Hearing - Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts  
Tuesday, April 8, 2025**

Thank you Chair Joseph and Chair Rivera, esteemed Committee Members, and Council staff for your championing of arts education. My name is Kim Olsen, and I am the Executive Director of the NYC Arts in Education Roundtable. I'm here as part of the *It Starts with the Arts* coalition, echoing the urgent need to prioritize transparency in arts education across our city's schools and communities.

We deeply appreciate the commitment of this Council to ensuring equity and access in the arts, and we want to commend the work of the NYC Public Schools Arts Office for their ongoing initiatives to support arts education across the five boroughs. We also recognize the essential role of the Department of Cultural Affairs in enabling hundreds of organizations to deliver essential arts education services.

However, New York City cannot ensure equitable access, meaningful participation, or quality arts instruction for all students without greater transparency in how arts funding is spent and how student engagement is measured. Currently, our understanding is impeded by a reliance on broad reporting that doesn't always reflect the reality on the ground.

For example, the most recent Arts in Schools Report states that 99% of schools offer arts instruction. Yet this statistic doesn't verify actual access or participation for students. The current reporting methods also lack clarity on how "quality arts education" is defined and measured within our schools. The insufficient transparency also applies to funding allocation and spending, making it unclear how arts education dollars are distributed and utilized at the school level, and how this compares to recommended per capita allocations.

Furthermore, the lack of transparency extends to the partnerships between schools and cultural organizations. While over 700 arts organizations partnered with schools last year, delays in award letters, contract processing, and payments significantly hinder the good work happening.

Organizations are waiting years for MTAC contract approvals, leading to lost educational opportunities for students and financial hardship for both organizations and the thousands of dedicated Teaching Artists who rely on this income to live and work in NYC. Even the months-long delay of CDF award letters can have a devastating impact when you are living paycheck to paycheck like many in the Teaching Artist community. Additionally, the Arts and Cultural Education Services Guide, a tool intended to connect schools with arts organizations, has reportedly not been maintained or updated in years, limiting its effectiveness in showcasing available cultural resources to schools.

The reality is this: what gets measured gets done. We need a clear, comprehensive, and publicly accessible understanding of the current state of arts education in every school and a cross-agency plan to move towards universal access – including data on access across all art forms, student participation rates, the number of certified arts teachers and cultural partners, the resources being allocated at the individual school level, alongside clear benchmarks for goal-setting and measuring success. Without this, it is impossible to effectively identify and address existing inequities and ensure that resources are targeted where they are needed most.

Let us move beyond broad statistics and reports to gain a clear understanding of the challenges and the successes in arts education across our diverse school system and community. By prioritizing data transparency and investment in the arts, we can truly begin to build a stronger, more creative, and more equitable future for all NYC students. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Testimonial Letter to the **New York City Council Committee on Education** on April 8th, 2025  
Hon. Council Members Carlina Rivera and Rita Joseph  
April, 11th, 2025

Thank you to the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. My name is Eva Lia Pedriglieri, I am a **teaching artist**, a committee member of the [Arts in Education Roundtable](#), a grant panelist for [NYSCA folk arts](#), and currently the **field placement administrator for arts education at NYU Steinhardt**. I have been deeply committed to our city's youth since 2017, beginning my work in arts education as the Communications Director and Education Programs Coordinator for [City Lore](#), a non-profit based in the Lower East Side that brought a cultural and decolonial lens to arts education by centering culturally-rooted arts that connect to young people's own heritages, identities, experiences, and communities to their education. In 2021, I received a Fulbright grant to teach art and English language in Southern Italy—gaining an international perspective on how arts education profoundly and positively impacts language literacy and inter-cultural competency. I brought this knowledge back to my work as coordinator to implement arts residencies throughout NYCPS and in arts education evaluation and data analysis for grant reporting.

After joining NYU's Teaching and Learning department, I became a member of the **Arts Education Consortium (AEC)** at NYU Steinhardt, an interdisciplinary community of faculty and program leaders in teacher education that works across Visual Arts, Music, Dance, and Theater. Since fall 2023, our teacher education arts programs have collaborated with 90 unique cooperating teachers in the arts, in 60 Title 1 schools like **H.S. 442 The Celia Cruz Bronx High School of Music** and **P.S. 094 The Henry Longfellow**, spanning K-12 classrooms within public schools across all five boroughs. We have seen first hand, through our student teaching placements with cooperating teachers across schools and from our alumni, the need and *desire* for robust, equitable, and quality arts programming within the public school system.


I stand firm in my belief that every student—regardless of their background—deserves access to quality arts education. However, the reality is far from this ideal. Last school year, only 31% of eighth-grade students met the NYS learning requirements for arts education. [The recent findings from the Council](#) revealed a staggering truth: 379 NYC public schools—about 1 in 5—are without a certified arts teacher, leaving thousands of students deprived of the transformative power of arts education. As we commit to supporting the next generation of arts educators, we must bear in mind this reality and work to ensure the next generation of educators feel empowered to fill in the gaps. It is clear from research and data that creative literacy should be at the forefront of our education committee's priorities, and that this investment in arts education will impact students in the long run by fostering belonging and engagement in the classroom as well as elevating comprehension across all core subjects.

I call on the Mayor and City Council to join us in this commitment and to **increase vital arts education funding** in the education budget, **provide transparent assessment data** to the public for accountability on arts access initiatives and impact, and ensure **equitable allocation of these funds** for priority school districts lacking arts certified educators. I stand with our colleagues in the [Arts Education Roundtable](#) to urgently call on our City to

take immediate, decisive action to ensure that every student, in every community, has access to high-quality arts education. This must include:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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 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 to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Thank you for your attention and consideration,  
Eva Lia Pedriglieri

  
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**Ballet Tech Foundation, Inc.**

**Testimony**

**City Council Joint Oversight Hearing on Arts Education**

**April 8, 2025**

**Dionne Figgins**

Good morning. My name is Dionne Figgins and I am the Artistic Director of Ballet Tech Foundation. Our mission is to introduce NYC public school children to the beauty, integrity, and joy of dance, which we have been doing since the founding of our school in 1978. We have reached over 950,000 students with our tuition-free programming, giving students from every neighborhood in our city the opportunity to participate.

Since 1996, we have operated the 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade NYC Public School for Dance in partnership with the NYC Department of Education, and because of this, we are uniquely positioned to talk about the importance of the NYC government's support of arts education and the impact it has on the children of our city. Through this public-private partnership, our students receive a robust academic education, provided by the DOE, integrated with intensive dance training, provided by Ballet Tech.

It has been proven that arts integration in education contributes to the development of life and career skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, that are vital to the cognitive and expressive demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Because of our school's model, students who struggle academically but do well in dance have shown the ability to transfer learning in dance to other areas and demonstrate academic improvement over time. Our students' state test scores consistently far exceed citywide averages, and graduating 8<sup>th</sup> graders are regularly accepted into public arts high schools, distinguished ballet academies, and public high schools with strong academic programs.

Under one roof, our students develop the skills to succeed in whatever direction they choose because of their dual dance and academic education. Our alumni have gone on to become professional dancers in renowned companies such as New York City Ballet and Martha Graham, and have also pursued careers as lawyers, EMTs, chefs, and professional soccer players.

Investing in arts education is critical to the development of our city's children. The success of our students, many of whom would not have had the opportunity to learn dance without Ballet Tech's tuition-free programs, has been made possible by the city government's support, and we urge the City Council to prioritize universal access to arts education so that all of NYC's children can experience the same benefits of a robust arts education.

**Niko Siraisi**

Hello. My name is Niko and I am a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student at Ballet Tech. Every day at school I spend half of my day in academic classes and the other half in dance classes. I love being a student at Ballet Tech because we all share a common interest in dance and it helps create a very strong,



close-knit community. Learning dance teaches me discipline and persistence, which influences other areas of my life. If I am ever frustrated in my academic classes, the skills I've learned in dance help me to reset and center myself. This persistence helps me to improve and learn more in my classes. Dance is a big part of my life and it is something I prioritize both at school and at home. I want to be a dancer and choreographer when I grow up because I love sharing my technique with others. I think Ballet Tech is helping me to achieve this goal because I get a glimpse at the professional side of being a dancer. Getting to experience a daily rehearsal schedule and performances helps set me up for success. I think it is important that other students have the chance to learn dance or another art form because it is something that anyone can do. Dance brings so much joy to my life and I want to share that joy with other people. Dance also has the power to shape someone's future. So many professionals have decided to become dancers because of an experience they had with dance when they were young. Learning dance has taught me that I can be whatever I want to be if I put my mind to it and I think it is important that other students in NYC have the same opportunity. Thank you.

### **Julienne Buenaventura**

Good morning everyone! My name is Julienne Buenaventura, and I am a proud product of the magic created at Ballet Tech; I joined the school in fourth grade and graduated middle school in 2016.

Back in 2010, a team from Ballet Tech visited my public school in Queens to audition third grade students for their Introduction to Ballet program. I was one of three students from my school who participated in a weekly field-trip program to take beginner ballet classes on site, with transportation, dance clothing, and shoes provided.

At the time, I was already taking ballet classes at my local studio in Queens, but transferring to Ballet Tech's full-time school was a game changer for myself and my family. To have access to high level training from esteemed professionals in the field, in a historic building for the arts, completely free of cost, was an immense privilege; perhaps one that I didn't realize until I grew up.

Last May, I graduated from SUNY Purchase with a major in dance, and am currently choreographing around NYC and am a teacher here at Ballet Tech. I can confidently attribute many of my professional skills to my time here - self discipline and organization, expressing myself with passion, and caring for humanity, larger than myself.

I see now, in my twenties, how lucky I was to have a school as eccentric as ours in such a formative period of my upbringing. New York is a city where people make magic happen, a city where culture emerges and thrives. It is our duty to invest in the youth of NYC, to infuse their daily education with the arts, allowing our city to continue to be the arts capital of the world. It is my wish that all students in NYC will have access to the arts just like I did.

Thank you for having me speak today, have a wonderful day.



The launch of *Black Studies as the Study of the World: A PK-12 Black Studies Curriculum* was a significant milestone, and Chancellor Ramos words about the power of connection, engagement, and belonging truly resonates.

I am writing to express deep concern regarding the implementation of *Black Studies as the Study of the World: A PK-12 Black Studies Curriculum for New York City Public Schools*.

As the Chancellor have rightfully stated:

*“When students connect with the material, they are more engaged, develop critical thinking skills, and build a deeper sense of belonging. I am proud to lead a school system that values inclusion and the powerful truth that our diversity is our strength.”*

To ensure these words translate into meaningful action, I am hopeful that NYCPS is still committed to the plans we made together, in 2024.

#### **Immediate Requests for Clarification and Action**

1. **Formal Confirmation of Implementation** – Has NYCPS’s position on full integration across all NYC schools changed?
2. **Superintendent & Principal Accountability** – How can NYCPS partner with grassroots organization like Black Edfluencers-United (BE-U) in ensuring that mechanisms are in place to ensure schools are actively using the curriculum, and how will this be monitored?
3. **Sustained Professional Development** – How is the NYCPS moving forward with concrete plans for ensuring educators receive ongoing training to effectively teach Black Studies?
4. **Public Accountability & Funding** – How will NYCPS and NYC City Council ensure transparency in implementation, funding allocation, and long-term curriculum support?

Black Studies is not an optional add-on—it is an essential, fully funded curriculum designed to align with NY State Standards in Social Studies and English Language Arts and equip students with a richer, more truthful education. New York City has the opportunity to lead the nation in institutionalizing Black Studies as a model for public education. After the launch, there have been questions from various stakeholders regarding next steps. We urge NYCPS to take immediate, decisive action to ensure this curriculum is fully implemented with fidelity, transparency, and accountability.

I look forward to New York City Council’s response on these critical matters, and the continued work, for students and communities across NYC.

Dr. Shango Blake  
Education Equity Action Plan Coalition, (EEAPC), Spokesperson  
Black Edfluencers- Unites (BE-U), President



## **Statement for Arts Ed City Hall Hearing, 4.8.25:**

Good Day, Chairs Rivera and Joseph & City Council Members,

My name is Judith Insell & I am the Executive Director of the Bronx Arts Ensemble...& I have a superpower:  
**I am a professional musician.**

Like Spiderman, I was at my Bronx middle school decades ago, & I was bitten by the “bug” to learn how to play the viola. Throughout each week, mostly during evenings & weekends, I transform from an arts administrator into a professional violist, playing in major concert halls, jazz clubs & Broadway show orchestra pits.

Fortunately, my middle school had an incredible string orchestra program, and I was assigned to play the viola. I was in the 5th grade, with no idea what a viola was, but the instrument quickly became my primary form of self-expression.

I urge you to provide more funding to arts education programs in the New York City Public School System, particularly in the Bronx. It will help create pathways to careers in the arts and culture sector for all students, particularly neurodiverse students, students with disabilities, & English language learners who may struggle with academic achievement.

My organization, the Bronx Arts Ensemble, annually provides 5,000 students with arts education courses in music, dance, theater, & visual arts, taught by professional Teaching Artists onsite in Bronx Public schools during in-school and after-school hours. I am particularly proud of our newest violin program for Pre-K students, 3 & 4 years old, at Bronx PS 32 through the Department of Education’s Arts Office’s “Early Childhood Strings Pathway Program.” If the city government provides more funding for programs like this, it will bring the promise of future Bronx-born professional musicians just like me.

So if you see someone on the stage of Carnegie Hall this Friday night playing the viola that looks like me...yes, that’s me. If you see someone who looks like me leaving the stage door of the Alicia Keys Broadway musical “Hell’s Kitchen” carrying a viola on her back this Saturday evening ...yes, you caught me again in full superpower mode.

If you have any doubt that supporting New York City kids with arts education programs in public schools can open up a career pathway, just remember that Judith Insell was only able to become a pro because she was provided with instrumental music classes in her Bronx middle school, I. S. 181, The Pablo Casals School.

**New York City arts education stories are superhero success stories!**

Thank you.

# BROOKLYN ARTS COUNCIL

## **Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Education and Committee on Cultural Affairs**

**Hon. Council Members Rita Joseph and Carlina Rivera**

**April, 8, 2025**

Thank you to Co-Chairs Honorable Council Members Rita Joseph and Carlina Rivera and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the It Starts with the Arts coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools. My name is Skye E. Kowaleski, and I am the Director of Artist Programs, Learning, and Engagement at the Brooklyn Arts Council.

Brooklyn Arts Council centers and empowers artists through programs that build and invest in a self-sustaining Brooklyn artist community. We envision a Brooklyn in which authentic and diverse creative voices are accessible to all; and where artists are supported, thriving, and recognized as fundamental to a healthy and engaged society. We know that a core piece of realizing this vision is ensuring that every student across Brooklyn has access to quality arts education.

We employ 32 teaching artists across 50 residencies, in over 80 classes, serving an estimated 2,500 students across Brooklyn each year. We offer a wide array of programming for students in digital, literary, performing, visual arts, and STEAM. Our collaborative process allows for customized programming, enriching hands-on experiences, an enhanced depth of knowledge, and artist practices that are responsive to the communities we serve. Teaching Artists build skills and engaging participatory practice to inspire lifelong learning in the arts.

We are also proud to partner with organizations like the Arts in Education Roundtable to forward equitable labor practices for our Teaching Artists so that we can ensure they have the resources they need to continue to deliver and responsive arts education to students across the borough.

Approximately 83% of our funding for these programs comes from partnerships with the city through a combination of CASA and Catalyst grants. We could not operate these programs without the steadfast support of our council members and the Department of Cultural Affairs and are ever grateful for your support.

However, each year, uncertain budgets, and delays in funding notifications and city payments mean that we are either fronting money to deliver our services or we are significantly delaying our programs resulting in a loss of art education for the students. Programming is most effective when it begins at the start of the school year so that students can create a routine they can depend on. The current funding structure does not allow for us to start before January at the earliest which we can only do by taking out a bridge loan to hold us over

until we receive city funding which comes with significant administrative costs. We have also been in the position where we have not been able to begin our residencies until the middle of the year due to the timeline and delays in funding allocations. This creates significant difficulties for both students and administrators. For example, last year, due to funding delays we could only complete a four week residency at one of our schools rather than the 10-14 weeks we typically provide - an upwards of 60% reduction in arts programming that is entirely avoidable.

Overarchingly, inflation, and rising costs of labor and administration has left us operating these programs with a growing shortfall. Between 2022 and 2024 our operating costs rose 35%, yet the funding stayed stagnant. Cuts and continued stagnation in funding has and will continue to necessitate cuts to our programming. If we cut, for example, just two weeks of programming from each of our 78 in school residencies in approximately a loss of 300 hours of arts education each year. That's an upwards of 300 hours of childcare that each student's caregivers are losing as a result, and 300 hours less investment in the livelihood of our teaching artists. It's 300 hours that could be spent nurturing students' creativity and innovation, helping them become less shy or insecure, developing critical thinking, academic performance, motor skills, problem solving skills, decision-making skills and more.

I recently visited a participatory African Dance performance lead by teaching artist Shaneeka Nicolson and her performance group Watonnabe Dance Group at the Janice Marie Knight School - P.S. 235, Flatbush - the students smiled as they focused on remembering and performing the steps Shaneeka had taught them and shrieked with joy as she brought their teachers onto the stage to dance. She and the teachers commented on how student concentration had improved in the weeks they'd been there as school principal Nicole Grant and I schemed for future expansions of programming.

Last year, one of our Teaching Artists Abby Walsh taught a puppetry residency at P.S. 288 to small classes of first and third graders with IEP's/neurodiverse/disabled/behavior needs. Our schools programs coordinator Allie Marotta, attended the culminating event and got to witness one student (who was historically labeled as non-verbal and did not speak at school) narrate the puppetry performance at the culminating event. Teachers were so thrilled he felt comfortable speaking and were able to incorporate speaking through puppets as a strategy for him going forward.

Using our Arts as a Catalyst for Change (Anti-Gun Violence) funding, one another Teaching Artist, Hildos Alba conducted an impactful painting & drawing residency at Liberation Diploma Plus school two years ago where students came up with their own anti-gun violence campaign and made posters to go up in the school. Hildos also reflected about how the residency alleviated students' fears about creating art: "One student was slow at the beginning because she was afraid that her artwork looked bad. With some guidance she explored new techniques, and used her bare hands to dive into her work and collaborate with her friend to do hand stamping on her artwork on the final canvas." This kind of learning to face fears and develop new skills and ability to collaborate is also translatable far beyond the arts.

These are only a few examples of the positive impact reports we receive each year. Yet, this impact is only possible if we have the funding to sustain, and even grow this integral programming.

I would not be submitting this testimony today were it not for the benefit of childhood art education and the impact it had on my life. A benefit I had the privilege of accessing because where I grew up, the school

districts I was educated in, and what my parents could afford. But arts education shouldn't be a privilege. Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Each year we strive to expand programming to target districts (districts we've identified as having limited access to arts education by other means). However without additional funding allocations - we are limited in what we can accomplish.

Furthermore, across the city only 31% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. The [term and condition passed by the Council last year](#) revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools) — leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. Furthermore, the combined implications of the Class Size Mandate rollout, the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M)** alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars: Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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 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 to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a

timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Thank you for your attention and consideration,

Skye E. Kowaleski

Director of Artist Programs, Learning and Engagement  
Brooklyn Arts Council





## **Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs and Committee on Education**

**Hon. Council Members Carlina Rivera and Rita Joseph, Chairs**

**April 8, 2025**

Dear Co-Chairs Rivera and Joseph and Members of the City Council,

Thank you for your continued support of arts education across New York City. I am writing to voice my strong support for the *It Starts with the Arts* coalition and to urge our city to prioritize sustained funding for arts in NYC schools.

My name is **Lucia Scheckner, and I'm Co-Executive Director, Education at BAX/Brooklyn Arts Exchange, located in Park Slope, Brooklyn.** Founded in 1991, BAX is a multigenerational arts organization that nurtures creative expression and artistic process through education, residencies, and performance at the intersection of arts and social justice. For over three decades, we have honored the power of performing arts to connect and transform individuals and communities. As an incubator for artists of all ages—from young children to award-winning professionals—BAX provides artist residencies, affordable rehearsal space, and youth education programs that engage over 10,000 students, families, artists, and audiences each year. Our programs center embodied practices such as dance, movement, theater, and multidisciplinary performance, with a focus on experimentation, process, collaboration, and mentorship. Above all, BAX is committed to building equity and access in the arts, prioritizing historically underrepresented artists and fostering vibrant, interconnected communities.

### **The Impact of City Funding on Arts Education**

City funding plays a critical role in ensuring that BAX can continue to provide accessible and inclusive arts education to students and families across Brooklyn. These funds sustain our school-based partnerships, free and low-cost community programming, and sliding-scale tuition options, removing financial barriers to participation in the arts. With continued city support, BAX can offer high-quality arts education that nurtures young artists, fosters creative expression, and strengthens community bonds. This investment not only benefits individual students but also contributes to a more vibrant and equitable cultural landscape across our city.

At BAX, we have seen firsthand how arts education transforms lives. In our long-standing arts partnership with PS 146/Brooklyn New School, for example, students in the annual 4th Grade Musical develop confidence, collaboration skills, and creative storytelling abilities—skills that extend into all aspects of their learning. Similarly, through our Performance Workshop Program and our free teen festivals, YouthWorks and Teen Artist Exchange, we have watched young artists discover their creative voices, with many BAX student alumni pursuing careers in the arts. Our school break programs provide crucial arts access for families while also



# BAX BROOKLYN ARTS EXCHANGE

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offering early career opportunities for aspiring arts professionals. These successes demonstrate how cultural education fosters self-expression, critical and creative thinking, and collaboration—essential skills for a thriving society.

Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Unfortunately, only 31% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. The [term and condition passed by the Council last year](#) revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools) — leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. Furthermore, the combined implications of the Class Size Mandate rollout, the Governor’s proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. **Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education.** This includes:

- Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars: Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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 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 to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
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- Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M): Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.

# BAX BROOKLYN ARTS EXCHANGE

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- 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.
- Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions: Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge the City Council to stand with *It Starts with the Arts* and ensure that arts education remains a vital part of every NYC student's learning experience.

Sincerely,



Lucia Scheckner  
she / her / hers  
Co-Executive Director, Education

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**Testimony of  
Adrian Benepe  
President & Chief Executive Officer  
Brooklyn Botanic Garden**

**New York City Council  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
Jointly with the Committee on Education**

**Oversight – Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts**

**April 8, 2025**

Good afternoon, my name is Adrian Benepe and I am the President and Chief Executive Officer for Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about how Brooklyn Botanic Garden is ensuring equity and access to the Garden.

**ABOUT BBG**

Founded in 1910, Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG) is an urban botanic garden that connects people to the world of plants, fostering delight and curiosity while inspiring an appreciation and sense of stewardship of the environment. Situated on 52 acres in the heart of Brooklyn and open year-round, the Garden is home to over 12,000 kinds of plants and more than 30 specialty gardens.

**ENSURING EQUITY AND ACCESS**

The mission of BBG, approved by our Board of Trustees in 2013, reflects the organization's core belief that equity and access are core to the very existence of the Garden:

“In the Garden, in its community, and well beyond, BBG inspires people of all ages through the conservation, display, and enjoyment of plants; with educational programs that emphasize learning by doing; and with research focused on understanding and conserving regional plants and plant communities.”

Our work is focused on lowering and removing barriers so that everyone, regardless of who they are, where they live, how much money they have, the color of their skin, how they identify, their disabilities, etc. We have employed the following strategies to ensure access for all to the Garden:

- Diversified Leadership and decision-making:
  - Diverse Board of Trustees: BBG has a Board of Trustees that represent Brooklyn, New York City, and the tri-state area. Our Trustees hail from a variety of field of practice ranging from law to architecture to philanthropy and beyond, and its composition reflects diversity in race and gender.
  - Include voices of underrepresented groups in programming and hiring: BBG hires staff to perform all types of jobs ranging from horticulture, education, security, fundraising and administration. Those employees are a diverse group of union and non-union employees, whose voices are obvious in everything we do. Our programming promotes a diversity of viewpoints, recognizes and elevates underserved and under represented groups and communities, and honors the important historical significance of the Garden in Brooklyn's cultural heritage.
- Community Engagement
  - Building long-term relationships with communities: core to BBG's founding is how deeply embedded we are in the Crown Heights community and all of Brooklyn. Whether it's the relationships we maintain with the surrounding community, stakeholders involved in BBG's work, or the relationships with local elected officials and community board, BBG has over 110 years of experience cultivating relationships with our community.
  - Create events and programming with community, not just for them: we work with local cultural and non-profit organizations to create events and programming that are relevant and important to our neighbors, members and staff. Work is done collaboratively and ownership is shared, as is the successes we see from those events and programs.
- Remove Economic Barriers
  - Free Community Tickets, low cost tickets: BBG has a long history of providing free and low-cost options for access to the Garden. Whether it's the over 260,000 free tickets given out every year, or the low-cost and discounted ticket options for our premium events, the Garden wants to be a place for everyone to enjoy the splendor and beauty of nature.
- Prioritize Accessibility
  - Always working to improve physical accessibility for people with disabilities: our Best Practices working group of outside advisors assists our staff in making sure all decisions have a lens towards full accessibility. Our staff is constantly making improvements to signage, wayfinding, and our print and digital publications, to make them fully accessible. Additionally, BBG is working with our sister gardens in the other boroughs to advance a new citywide initiative called "Rooted in Accessibility" to expand and improve on the work we're doing to make BBG accessible for all.
  - Provide ASL interpreters, audio assistance , and sensory-friendly amenities: whether its BBG's first-of-its-kind Fragrance Garden our our audio walking

tours, the team at BBG is always looking for innovative and class-leading improvements to our offers that make our Garden a leader in accessibility.

- Promote Diverse Stories and Narratives
  - Share stories about different cultures, histories, and experiences: whether its our upcoming Hanami Nights celebrating Japanese culture, or our curated exhibit of Trees of Little Caribbean, or our Shinnecock Oral History exhibit and audio tour, BBG goes to great lengths to ensure our programming, exhibits and events promote a wide array of cultures and stories.
- Be Accountable
  - Adapt and improve with data: data often drives decision making, and yet BBG uses data as one element of our overall decision making. We want to know who is visiting, why they're coming to the Garden, and how we can make their experience more enjoyable. Without that data, we wouldn't have a full picture of the impact we're having with our visitors.
  - Be transparent about goals of the organization and our work on equity: the Garden is going through the development of a new Strategic Plan, a revised mission and vision, and a Greenprint that'll guide the next 20 years of campus development. All of this will be shared with the public, our stakeholders, and anyone interested in learning more about what the future has in store for BBG.

## **EDUCATION PROVIDES ACCESS AND NURTURING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS**

As a botanic garden and informal science institution situated in an urban environment where green space is limited and economic disparities persist, BBG plays a crucial role in nurturing future generations of environmental leaders. BBG works to address the need for equitable and sustainable communities by ensuring its educational programs for children and teens are offered free or at minimal cost so that financial limitations are not a barrier to participation. It also matters greatly that the next generation of environmental stewards includes the voices and experiences of children from a wide range of backgrounds.

There are more than a dozen Children's Education programs at the Garden. Children and teens are planting and harvesting in the Children's Garden, BBG's youngest visitors are socializing and engaging in the "please-touch" Discovery Garden, and field trips offer tours of the Garden virtually or on-site. Children's Education Programs provide formative experiences that connect young people to the world of plants, fostering delight, curiosity, and a deep-seated appreciation of the environment that inspires lifelong environmental stewardship. They also nurture social and emotional well-being by providing opportunities for children to spend time in nature with peers and caring educators. Programs are offered at low or no-cost and prioritize engaging historically marginalized communities.

Here are BBG's education programs, providing over 250,000 children annually free access to the Garden:

- BBG education programs focus on children and families:
  - Discovery Programs, our drop-in initiative for families, camp groups, and school field trips serve over 15,000 children of all ages. Participants use their senses to explore nature, insects, water, fruits and vegetables, and pot up a plant to take home, free with admission to BBG.
  - Self-Guided Tours serve tens of thousands of children in school and camp groups. Teachers are invited to plan free, self-guided tours with readily available educational materials including curriculum guides, activities, and children's field journals, available online for advance printing. This program aims to help independent learning groups connect their visit to BBG with classroom learning and catalyze curiosity among young visitors.
  - School Workshop program serve more than 7,000 students grades pre-K to 8. These are BBG instructor-led programs designed for student groups. Topics include Exploring Trees in the Garden, Investigating Life in Water, Tropical Adventures, and more. Exploration Tours take place on site and include a potting up activity.
  - Children's Garden Programs serve 1,000 children ages 2-13. They plant their own crops and flowers and harvest them under the guidance of Garden instructors. Younger children combine planting, tending, and harvesting with craft making and creative play. Older children engage in lessons in science and urban ecology.
  - Project Green Reach (PGR) serves 1,800 students and 100 teachers in Title I K-8 schools. PGR is an award-winning 30+-year-old, inquiry-based science program for Brooklyn classrooms that provides curriculum, live instruction, plants, BBG tours, and teacher training over the course of a semester. A summer component, Junior Botanists and Plant Investigators, gives up to 25 teacher-nominated young plants enthusiasts the chance for in-depth engagement with science and nature at BBG. programming
  - Garden Apprentice Program (GAP) serves 55 teens each spring and summer season. GAP is an environmental leadership program that provides New York City teens with experiential learning opportunities that underpin future success, from college to the workforce to civic engagement. Apprentices teach in the Children's and Discovery Gardens, tend to garden plots, engage in science research, and more.
  - Brooklyn Academy of Science and the Environment (BASE) serves 300-400 students annually. BBG has been a lead partner to BASE since co-founding the school in 2003. The BASE Partnership connects students to extracurricular activities, environmental internships, field studies, and the resources of a world-class botanic garden to support academic excellence and rigor.
  - Teacher Education serves over 1,000 teachers annually. The Garden equips teachers with the resources and skills needed to implement high quality, hands-on science lessons through P-Credit courses, fee-for-service classes,

Urban Advantage (a partnership between NYC science institutions and the Department of Education); and District 75.

- Building strong educational partnerships
  - NYC Department of Education: The NYC school system is the largest school district in the United States. Of its 1 million students, 70.1% are economically disadvantaged and 20.6% have disabilities. BBG supports the NYC DOE through teacher trainings and supplemental science programs, reaching students and teachers in Title I and District 75 schools across the City.
  - Urban Advantage: BBG is a partner institution of Urban Advantage, a group of eight NYC cultural institutions that work with the Department of Education to support effective science instruction in the City's middle schools. Urban Advantage impacts science instruction at nearly half of the City's public middle schools, including many Title I schools.
  - Cool Culture: Cool Culture and BBG partner to connect to historically marginalized families with young children who are enrolled in schools and early education centers. Cool Culture offers free admission to BBG and other cultural institutions to more than 50,000 high-need families across NYC.

We want all New Yorkers and visitors from around the world to come visit and learn at Brooklyn Botanic Garden! People who come to the Garden enjoy its beauty and splendor and walk away changed by those experiences. We think everyone should be able to experience that and have no barriers to entry.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any of your questions.

City Council Hearing – Committee on Education jointly with the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations  
Testimony on behalf of Brooklyn Maqam, Inc.

Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts

**Hello members of the committee, and thank you for the opportunity to testify.**

My name is Firas Daaboul, and I am here on behalf of Brooklyn Maqam, an organization that presents Arabic and Middle-eastern music events and educational programs in Brooklyn and NYC. We've been around since 2018 and became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 2023. In 2024, we presented over 35 concerts at 10 venues, and 24 educational programs and workshops, serving approximately 2,500 New Yorkers.

A significant portion of our audience and participants are Arab Americans, who are not only under-represented in NYC's arts and culture landscape, but who are also subject to severe negative stereotyping and racism, especially in the current climate. We believe that uplifting Arabic culture through music not only challenges these negative perceptions but also strengthens community ties within the Arab population here.

Many of our programs are participatory – such as our monthly Arabic Music jam sessions at Sisters restaurant, where musicians and singers of all levels of experience and abilities are welcome to attend and make music together. We also host classes in Arabic singing and music theory, Arabic Percussion, and the Oud (a fretless plucked string instrument that is the ancestor of the European Lute and Guitar). And some of our artists offer education programs and assemblies in NYC public schools.

In 2025, we launched the first ever New York Arabic Chorus, led by the talented Palestinian vocalist Mona Miari. Nearly 100 people wanted to participate in the project, and we were overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and support – but we had to limit participation to 34 people due to funding and it being our first attempt. The impact has already been significant—we've seen how the chorus strengthens intergenerational connections within the Arab American community and helps preserve cultural heritage.

Without Brooklyn Maqam, there would be many fewer Arabic music events in NYC - we currently organize roughly half of them. Like many small, culturally rooted organizations, we are a vital part of ensuring equity and access to the arts in this city. At present, we receive support from the Brooklyn Arts Council, a few small grants, ticket sales, and donations. We're not yet a CDF organization and have been almost entirely volunteer-led, but we are in the early stages of building our organizational capacity. We've submitted several discretionary funding requests to the City Council, and we hope you will consider supporting us in continuing the New York Arabic Chorus, the Oud Festival, and our educational programs.

FOR THE RECORD



We also fully support the cultural sector's call to baseline an additional \$75 million to the Department of Cultural Affairs. Expanding the CDF funding pool would allow emerging organizations like ours to benefit when we become eligible to apply in the coming years.

Finally, we support the call by the Coalition for Equitable Educational Funding to baseline \$41M in arts education funding. Arts education in schools is already limited, and both working artists and small organizations rely on this funding to operate. At present, Brooklyn Maqam delivers a small number of in-school programs, but we'd love the opportunity to expand Arabic music programming in schools if sufficient funding were available. A cut of \$41 million for arts education programming would harm the young people of New York – we urge you to restore and baseline this funding.

Thank you very much.

## **Testimony in Support of Equity and Access in the Arts**

April 11, 2025

To the Committees on Education and Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations:

My name is Molly Senack, and I am the Education and Employment Community Organizer for the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY).

The impact that artistic instruction can have on child development is well-studied. As such, the NYS Education Department (NYSED) has an established set of standards regarding arts education in NYC schools. These standards reflect the educational value to arts programming (involvement in the arts has been linked to higher test scores in reading, writing, science, and math, as well as higher overall GPAs and graduation rates), reflect the psychological value of arts programming (studies consistently show that art therapy can help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety), and reflect the intrinsic value of arts programming: simply put, the arts are fun.

And this element of fun is something the 1 in 5 NYC students with disabilities are too often denied. Arts programs are incredibly popular: when asked about their favorite classes, students often cite art classes, and applications to enroll in arts-focused schools are notoriously competitive. While it is undoubtedly important that there is evidence suggesting art classes could enhance the effectiveness of related services, and that NYC is experiencing a youth mental health crisis arts programming could help abate, the enjoyment aspect of arts programming shouldn't be undervalued. Students with disabilities experience disproportionate exclusion from recreation: 43% of the students who rely on school buses that don't run past 4pm have at least one disability and cannot take part in any after school program or extracurricular activity that exceeds the time constraint of their available transportation. The same is true for Summer Rising: students with disabilities who depend on school buses have access to the instructional sessions in the morning, but cannot take part in the recreation-centered afternoon sessions. Similarly, schools with high concentrations of students with disabilities are less likely to fulfill the arts program guidelines set by NYSED than schools with lower concentrations of students with disabilities: 20-25% vs 35%.

There is no denying that both of those numbers are too low. Many NYC students, with disabilities and without, are not getting the arts education that NYS mandates they receive. However, as the Council, the Department of Education, and the schools themselves seek to implement changes to improve these programs- by providing designated accessible art spaces, by ensuring students don't have to miss art classes to receive their mandated services, by

better integrating those art classes in the first place, by making programming more culturally inclusive- it is important to note that, if arts funding is lost, there will be no programs to improve.

\$41 million in funding for arts programming is currently at risk of being left out of the FY 26 budget. We thank the Council for their efforts to restore this funding, and for its inclusion in the Council's response to the Mayor's FY 26 preliminary budget. We ask for their continued support in ensuring this critical programming is not rolled back, and for their continued support in ensuring students with disabilities have full access to an arts education.

Sincerely,

Molly Senack (She/Her)  
Education and Employment Community Organizer  
Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York  
Email: [msenack@cidny.org](mailto:msenack@cidny.org) Phone: [REDACTED]

Dear NYC City Council,

I'm writing on behalf of Cosmic Writers, a creative writing education nonprofit that works in the NYC public school system, in order to add our testimony to the many others demonstrating the deep and vast impact of arts education.

Here are a few lines of a short story written by a 12-year-old student during a residency we conducted in her Humanities class:

"The sharp sound of the bell rings in my ears. I look up feeling the tears slowly come back. Ava stops fidgeting with the sandwich and drops it on the floor. She is now staring at me, her brown hair swaying as all her friends look at me and giggle.

"Aww are you gonna cry now?" she asks and begins to laugh like it was the funniest thing she's ever heard.

She runs away, leaving me on the ground next to the reeking milk and the sandwich. I watch as the sandwich slowly gets soaked in the rotten milk, turning yellow. One of the cooks comes up to me and she sighs. I know she is tired of having to clean this up, just as much as I am having to deal with Ava."

This excerpt captures what I believe is so special about arts education: it helps students to develop a combination of core educational skills and social/emotional skills, through a format that gets them truly invested in their learning. In the case of the student who wrote this story, she was improving her literacy at the same time as she was processing the painful dynamics of preteen bullying. At the end of the project, she had produced a piece in which she took enormous pride, even accepting an opportunity to read her story at a showcase in front of 50+ audience members.

Other forms of arts education bring together various types of learning in similar ways. When a high schooler plays a piano piece, she combines mathematical skills and self-expression. When a kindergartener paints his first watercolor scene, he builds his fine motor skills while discovering new ways to process his emotions. And when both of these students present their art to their peers and family members, they are telling us that they have been personally motivated to learn and grow.

Thank you for continuing to provide opportunities for our students to experience the magic of arts education.

Sincerely,

Rowana Miller

Founder & Executive Director, Cosmic Writers

**TESTIMONY**

**NYC COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
CHAIR, RITA JOSEPH**

*Oversight - Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts*

**Presented on  
Tuesday, April 8, 2025**



**SINCE 1962  
COUNCIL OF SCHOOL  
SUPERVISORS &  
ADMINISTRATORS  
Local 1:AFSA, AFL-CIO**

**The Council of School Supervisors and Administrators  
Henry Rubio, President  
Dale Kelly, Executive Vice President  
Stamo Karalazarides Rosenberg, First Vice President**

**40 Rector Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10006  
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Good morning, Chair Rita Joseph, and members of the City Council Committee on Education, and thank you once again for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). My name is Henry Rubio, and I serve as President of CSA, representing over 17,000 in-service and retired New York City public school leaders—our principals, assistant principals, supervisors, administrators, and early childhood education directors. We are unified in strong opposition to any proposed cuts to arts education funding in New York City public schools. We must work collectively to ensure equity and access to the arts for all students.

Every day, our school leaders witness the transformative impact of arts education on our students. We know from firsthand experience that the arts are essential to the healthy development of our children. Simply put, the arts help educate the whole child—heart, mind, and spirit. From schools that host vibrant spring musicals to those that partner with cultural institutions, school leaders know that the arts create thriving school cultures. We believe any cuts in arts programming would be an impactful mistake that undermines our students' academic success, emotional well-being, and preparedness for the future.

Extensive research and a lifetime of anecdotal observations confirm that arts education yields significant academic benefits. The arts often engage students in ways that other classes cannot, leading to improved attendance, motivation, and performance. Arts education leads many students to become more invested in their learning and demonstrate better social-emotional skills, all while maintaining performance in core subjects. Studies of arts education initiatives have found measurable gains in student engagement, writing skills, and behavior.

The benefits of arts learning extend beyond test scores. The arts teach critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. Students in arts classes learn to persevere through practice, to observe and reflect, to give and receive constructive feedback, and to express themselves. These experiences build well-rounded, resilient young people.

Arts education is a powerful driver of equity and opportunity; it helps keep our most vulnerable students connected to school and on track to graduate. The students who lose arts access during budget crunches are often those who can least afford to find alternatives. Wealthier families may be able to pay for private music lessons or museum programs; low-income families rely on public schools to provide these opportunities.

The need to invest in arts education is even greater as we continue to address the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Five years ago, students experienced an unprecedented period of isolation, trauma, and disruption, particularly within underserved communities. Rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges have climbed among young people. For many students, arts education is a lifeline. The creative arts provide healthy outlets for emotion, avenues for social connection, and tools for processing experiences. Neuroscientific studies confirm what our school leaders see daily: the arts can play a therapeutic role in helping children heal and reconnect by fostering joy, focus, and self-expression.

Investing in arts education is not only about addressing current needs—it is about preparing our students for the future. With rapid technological change, automation, and artificial intelligence, the skill sets that will set our children apart in the workforce are uniquely human qualities like

creativity, innovation, adaptability, and empathy. The arts train students to think outside the box, to envision multiple solutions to a problem, and to embrace the unknown. The arts and culture sector is a significant part of New York's identity and workforce, and our students deserve the chance to become the artists, designers, and creative leaders of tomorrow. We should be doubling down on arts programs to ensure our graduates are adaptable and innovative in any career path they choose.

Last year, the City Council restored over \$40 million in arts education funding that was previously propped up by expiring federal relief dollars — in addition to more than \$50 million to cultural institutions. We commend you for fighting for that funding during budget negotiations, and we urge you to provide additional funding once again. The state class size law may have the unintended impact of pushing schools to convert arts spaces into classrooms. Principals are put in a tremendously difficult position when budgets are tight. They do everything in their power to preserve arts programs, but when faced with cuts, they are often forced into untenable choices. Thankfully New York State mandates a certain number of hours of instruction in the arts (101 hours a year in grades 1-3, 93 hours a year in grades 4-6, 54 hours per semester in grades 7-8 by a licensed art teacher, 108 hours of instruction annually in grades 9-12 by a licensed art teacher, and any school operating a 3-K, pre-K or kindergarten program must establish an arts program). This mandate helps guarantee that students are provided with the amount of arts instruction they deserve, but obviously if a school doesn't have enough funding, staffing, or space, there are challenges complying.

Clearly, the Council understands that even a relatively small investment can go a long way in enriching students' experiences. Our school leaders deeply appreciate these efforts. Our advocacy is grounded in our daily experiences leading schools. We have seen shy children find their confidence through drama club. We have seen students with disabilities thrive in adaptive art and music classes. We have seen attendance and grades improve when a school revitalizes its arts offerings. We have also, sadly, seen the vacuum that is left when arts programs disappear.

The arts must be treated as a fundamental budget priority, not a dispensable line item. Our school leaders stand ready to do our part by hiring great arts teachers, forging community partnerships, and ensuring every dollar for the arts is used effectively. We ask the City Council and the administration to do its part by providing the necessary funding and policy support. We recognize the fiscal pressures — declining enrollment, the end of federal aid, and new mandates like lowering class sizes. But balancing the budget on the backs of arts education is a shortsighted solution that will harm children.

Arts education should never be a grudging expense but as a high-impact investment in our youth. This means rejecting proposed cuts to arts education and continuing to expand programs until every school and every student has access to the rich arts curriculum they deserve. Our city's school leaders know from our combined decades of experience that cutting arts programs to save dollars now will only cost us far more in the long run — in student morale, in engagement, in talent development, and in the cultural vibrancy of our schools.

Sincerely,  
Henry D. Rubio  
CSA President



**Cultural Museum of African Art Inc.**  
**The Eric Edwards Collection (CMAAEEC)**

1360 Fulton Street Brooklyn, New York 11216 [REDACTED]

efedwards@att.net [www.CMAAEEC.org](http://www.CMAAEEC.org)

**NEED TO SUPPORT MUSEUMS**

*MISSION STATEMENT*

**The Cultural Museum of African Art**

**“THE CULTURAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART'S MISSION IS TO EDUCATE AND INFORM ALL PEOPLE OF THE WORLD THROUGH ITS ARTIFACTS COLLECTION, WITHIN A CULTURAL CONTEXT, OF AFRICA’S IMPORTANCE, AND ITS’ GIFTS TO MAN AND WOMANKIND, THROUGH THE STUDY OF ART AND ITS’ HISTORY. WE STRIVE TO EMPOWER ALL PEOPLE WITH A TRUE SENSE OF PRIDE, AND AMONGST ALL ETHNIC GROUPS, FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF MUTUAL RESPECT, DIGNITY, AND UNDERSTANDING THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.” IT IS THROUGH MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING THROUGH KNOWLEDGE WHICH BRINGS TRUE EQUALITY.**

**The Cultural Museum of African Art**

**“THE CULTURAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART'S MISSION IS TO EDUCATE AND INFORM ALL PEOPLE OF THE WORLD THROUGH ITS ARTIFACTS COLLECTION, WITHIN A CULTURAL CONTEXT, OF AFRICA’S IMPORTANCE, AND ITS’ GIFTS TO MAN AND WOMANKIND, AND WHAT THE AFRICAN PEOPLE CONTRIBUTED TO THE GREATNESS OF THE UNITED STATES, THROUGH THE STUDY OF ART AND ITS’ PEOPLE'S HISTORY; WE STRIVE TO EMPOWER ALL PEOPLE WITH A TRUE SENSE OF PRIDE, AND AMONGST ALL ETHNIC GROUPS, FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF MUTUAL RESPECT, DIGNITY, AND UNDERSTANDING**



**THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.” IT IS THROUGH MUTUAL RESPECT AND  
UNDERSTANDING THROUGH KNOWLEDGE WHICH BRINGS TRUE EQUALITY.**

**\*\*We have been issued 501 (c) (3) Tax Exempt Status from the Federal  
Government as a Charitable & Educational Institution as of April 22, 2015.**

**EIN-# 90-0907203**

**\*\*The Cultural Museum of African Art received its charter from The New York  
State Board of Regents on November 18, 2014.**



**Ensuring equity and access to the arts in school and community settings**  
**New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs & Committee on Education**  
**Testimony prepared by Nicole Touzien, Executive Director**  
**April 8, 2025**

Chair Rivera, Chair Joseph, and members of the committees, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Dancewave, where I serve as Executive Director.

Over the twenty nine years that Dancewave has served NYC, we have been intentional with our efforts to increase accessibility to empowering dance experiences for all. We explicitly name equitable access as part of our mission, vision and core values, and we also back this promise through focused action.

Dancewave was founded on an idea that young people have voices that deserve to be heard – which we believe now more than ever today. Dancewave’s keystone program originally brought together youth from across NYC, regardless of their background in dance, to study and perform alongside professional choreographers. Now called the Dancewave Company, it has evolved into a year-round pre-professional performance training program for young artists ages 7-18. We invite students participating in our CASA, Cultural Immigrant Initiative, Arts Partnerships, and Discretionary-funded residencies at over 50 NYC School sites citywide to join us at no cost, fundraising to award \$50,000 in full- and partial scholarships each year. With the investment of the City, private foundations, and generous individuals, we are able to provide 250 hours of free, pre-professional dance training and mentorship year-round to the most deserving and under-resourced NYC youth.

“[Dancewave] reaches communities and students who might not otherwise have access to dance education in this way”

*- Andrea Brodine, NYC Public School educator*

While we are proud to report that our efforts are effective in providing young people with affordable access to this future-affirming program, we acknowledge that inequity takes many shapes and that there are many other barriers to participation that we must address. To that end, with prior funding from the NEA we were able to pilot a Community Company program which allows us to bring our signature Dancewave Company curriculum from the Dancewave Center and out to partner sites. For young artists living far from our Gowanus, Brooklyn center, the Community Company opens up new opportunities for pre-professional dance training. In communities where programs like this do not exist, Dancewave is able to provide real and needed solutions.



Dancewave Through College and Beyond (DTCB) is another key program seeking to tackle systemic inequity, specifically regarding access to college and careers in the arts. DTCB provides high school youth and their parents with the information, tools, networks, and support necessary to navigate the higher education application and selection process for dance and adjacent programs. We are committed to ensuring that this program is accessible to all, ensuring that all youth interested in participating are given the opportunity to do so. Aligned with the college admissions timeline, this year-long program provides education, preparation support, and direct access to 50-60 college representatives and – importantly, the opportunity to audition for collegiate and professional programs without having to shoulder the burden of funding travel and audition fees at each individual school. There is no other program like DTCB providing this level of access and support for young artists. As a testament of the program's success, we transition 400 youth each year into collegiate and professional training programs, with \$1M in scholarships awarded to participants.

"DTCB played a pivotal role in [my daughter's] college decision-making process. The opportunity to meet representatives from numerous colleges and universities in one location in New York was invaluable. This experience allowed us to discover many institutions that we otherwise might not have considered, and vice versa. Through these interactions, several colleges and universities have recognized [her] potential and talent. I highly recommend this event to both students and parents. It is a crucial step in the college selection process and can be a decisive factor in determining the right fit for higher education. Overall, Dancewave's contribution to [my daughter's] dance and personal development has been instrumental over the years. The artistic instruction and more importantly, the sense of community fostered by Dancewave are truly remarkable."

*- Pascale Flessel Guirand, parent of a Dancewave student*

Each program we offer is designed to increase equity and access to the arts, and annual program data and participant feedback confirm that our actions are effective at producing positive results:

- 120 no-cost dance programs help close curricular gaps in NYC Public Schools<sup>1</sup>, empowering young people with the skills necessary to be thriving members of their community
- 800 emerging and established artists' creative processes are bolstered by rehearsal space subsidies, sustaining our diverse arts community despite rising costs of living
- 520 young artists are guaranteed free and low-cost access to dance and performance training, with mentorship and support as they transition into careers in the arts and beyond

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<sup>1</sup> 40% of NYC Schools do not offer dance, with 81% of schools lacking a full-time dance teacher



“Through its commitment to accessibility, education, and artistic expression, Dancewave nurtures creativity, confidence, and collaboration among dancers of all ages. By offering high-quality training, mentorship, and community engagement, it not only develops skilled dancers but also fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment. Dancewave’s impact extends beyond movement—it cultivates lifelong connections, inspires personal growth, and strengthens the cultural fabric of the community.”

*- Poshia Derival, dance educator*

Despite all current attempts to defund and disrupt the work of community based organizations committed to ensuring equitable access to the arts, Dancewave remains steadfast in stewarding life-affirming arts experiences for all New Yorkers. We look to our elected leaders in the New York City Council to stand with us, to advocate for our work, and to ensure that the City of New York remains the cultural capital of the world by deepening its investment in the arts and cultural organizations that keep our city thriving. Thank you for your time and interest in learning more about Dancewave’s work and deep commitment to realizing a more equitable NYC.



**New York City Council Committee on Education  
Jointly with the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
Oversight Hearing on Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts**

**April 8, 2025**

**Eve Wolff  
Executive Director  
Dancing Classrooms New York City**

Good morning, Chairperson Joseph, Chairperson Rivera, and members of the Committees on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Eve Wolff, Executive Director of Dancing Classrooms. On behalf of our committed staff, our inspiring teaching artists, our partners in the It Starts With the Arts coalition, and the thousands of students we serve, I thank you for holding this important hearing.

The Council's support for arts education has been—and remains—critical to enabling every student, regardless of background or ability, to reap the academic and developmental benefits of the arts.

Through the joyful art and practice of social dances, Dancing Classrooms cultivates engaged learners, collaborative leaders, and inclusive spaces. We are proud to be one of the largest dance education partners to New York City schools. Each year, our teaching artists bring our culturally responsive programs to more than 12,000 students at over 100 schools and after-schools across all five boroughs, at no cost to students or families.

These days, students of all ages face tough hurdles on the path to learning. School leaders need creative solutions that support their students' well-being so they can be ready to learn, grow, and thrive. Access to dance education in school and after school equips kids against mental health challenges like isolation and low self-esteem. In particular, social dance education offers a powerful antidote to disconnection, fostering empathy, respect, and collaboration in ways that are both immediate and lasting. And like physical education, it can contribute to helping children meet the 60 minutes of daily moderate to vigorous physical activity that health experts say is necessary—and encourage lifelong healthy habits.

Principals and teachers have seen how our programs foster creative, academic, and social-emotional skills—like motivation, perseverance, connection, and listening—that help students become engaged learners and successful students.

A recent evaluation of our early elementary programs in Community School District 6, conducted by Metis Associates, showed clear gains in student engagement and attendance on days when Dancing Classrooms was offered. As one teacher put it: *"After the students had dance class, they returned to the classroom in good spirits and energized. It definitely motivated them—especially students who struggle in the classroom."* Even our young participants recognized the impact. A second grader, previously routinely late for school, began arriving to school early, sharing that she did so just to dance with our Teaching Artist—and that in dance class she was learning to move her body *"without judgment!"*

These outcomes reflect what we see every day: dance not only supports physical activity and self-expression, it also builds confidence, connection, and a stronger sense of belonging in school.

Additional third-party research has shown that our programs result in a real, measurable boost in the behavioral and social skills kids need to succeed. After experiencing our 10-week program, 95% of students—almost all of them—showed increased engagement and motivation, and 89% saw an increase in self-discipline and focus. 93% strengthened their collaborative and team skills, and 71% demonstrated greater social confidence.

For 30 years, Dancing Classrooms has been a trusted partner in NYC schools, providing high-quality, standards-based dance education to over 12,000 students each year. This is in a system where fewer than 19% of schools have certified dance teachers. The need for equitable access to the arts—especially dance—is urgent and ongoing.

However, the current contracting structure severely limits our ability to meet this need. Schools can only pay for about half—or less—of what it actually costs to deliver our programs. To continue serving students, we are forced to rely on a patchwork of funding streams, including contracts and grants from the Department of Education, Department of Youth & Community Development, Department of Cultural Affairs, City Council initiatives, and more.

Despite our efforts to close these funding gaps, we are hearing from more and more principals who tell us they can no longer afford to bring Dancing Classrooms to their schools—not because the need has gone away, but because budget uncertainty has made it impossible to plan.

Cuts to arts and arts education funding—and the failure to restore and baseline those funds—put essential school partnerships like ours at serious risk. These cuts will hit hardest in schools and communities without alternative funding sources, such as strong PTAs or the ability to pay for private dance classes, leaving the most vulnerable students with the least access to the arts.

As the title of this hearing underscores, the funding decisions you make as our elected council members are the key to ensuring equity and access to the transformative power and defiant joy of creative learning across our schools. The benefits of arts education should be available to *all* students, not just some.

To that end, I proudly join my colleagues in the It Starts With the Arts coalition in urging our City Council to maintain its strong support for high-quality arts education, with a focus on those who have the greatest needs.

We were pleased to see that the Council's preliminary budget response calls for baselining \$41 million in critical funding for arts instruction and cultural organizations that provide essential arts education. In addition, our coalition calls on the city to:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) to an annual allocation:** Principals have told us this dedicated funding allowed them to offer dance education to their students. We stand 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.
- **Restore and enhance “Support for Arts Instruction” initiative funding (\$6M):** Build on city's down payment and boost allocation from \$4M to \$6M to meet city-wide demand.

- **Ensure every school has a Certified Arts Teacher (\$39.8M):** Ensure that all schools have at least one certified arts teacher, closing the equity gap for at least 379 schools. Equitable access to arts education can only be achieved through the combined efforts of schools, educators, and NYC's diverse cultural partners; schools should not be forced to sacrifice one for the other.
- **Require DOE arts funding be spent on the arts (\$12.5M):** Boost the per student arts allocation to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS). We have twice had to make withdrawals from our endowment to cover costs while waiting on City contract renewals, as recently as December 2024, endangering the fiscal health and sustainability of our organization.
- **Center arts and culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and increase baseline funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.

Thank you for the opportunity to add my voice to the chorus of support for quality, equitable arts education. I am grateful to the members of these committees for your commitment to our City and our students. We are proud to partner with New York City to deliver the world-class education that will empower all our children to lead healthy, productive, and rewarding lives.



**Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Education, jointly with the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations**

Hon. Carlina Rivera, Chair / Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair

April 8th, 2025

Thank you to Chairs Carlina Rivera and Rita Joseph, and to the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City.

DreamYard joins our comrades and colleagues in supporting the **It Starts With Arts Coalition**, imploring our city officials to prioritize the funding necessary for all students to have access to high-quality arts education.

[DreamYard](#) is a social justice based, arts and education organization located in the Morrisania section of the Bronx. We collaborate with Bronx youth, families and schools to build pathways to equity and opportunity through the arts. We work with 40 public schools, we are the lead community Partner in the DreamYard Preparatory HS, and we offer summer, Saturday and after school programming at two community centers—the DreamYard Art Center and the DreamYard Design Center. DreamYard provides art centered education opportunities to over 10,000 Bronx youth annually.

We join our fellow advocates in urging our City to take action so that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extending and baselining at-risk arts education funding (\$41M):** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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.
- **Ensuring 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.

- **Restoring and Enhancing “Support for Arts Instruction” initiative funding (\$6M):** Build on city’s down payment and boost allocation from \$4M to \$6M to meet city-wide demand.
- **Requiring DOE arts funding be spent on the arts (\$12.5M):** Boost the per student arts allocation to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Centering Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restoring and Increasing Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **Improving 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.
- **Prioritizing timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

## Arts Education opens pathways to academic success, SEL development, and civic engagement

The arts provide young people with profound experiences that translate into valuable life skills. 94% of young people who took part in DreamYard’s artistic creative career pathways programs demonstrated significant growth in essential skills such as self management, effective communication, collaboration and growth mindset. Studies show that low income students who are highly engaged in the arts are more than twice as likely to graduate college as their peers with no arts education.

But equally as powerful is the actual testimony from those young people that directly benefit from arts based education. The following narratives highlight the value of arts based education, and the potential it holds for positively impacting the lives of our youth.

### Testimony from DreamYard Program Graduates

*“DreamYard has been a part of my life for many years. In second grade, my first DreamYard Teaching Artist came to my class and taught poetry. I remember being completely captivated by the idea that I could share my work and words on a stage.*

*Later, in sixth grade, my DY theater Teaching Artist, Robyne Walker Murphy, brought theater into my social studies classroom. From her, I learned how powerful and revolutionary storytelling can be—especially when it connects to history. In high school, arts education became a central part of my extracurricular life. DreamYard offered more than just art classes; my Teaching Artists challenged me to examine the world around me and ask. “How can I make this world a better place through art?”*

*Because of the influence of art, and phenomenal educators like Austin Greene and Ama Codjoe, I went on to study Arts Management and Sociology in college. Today, I carry those lessons of creativity and civic engagement into my work in political media.*

*Arts education unlocks the ability to engage in vital conversations. It helps young people understand—and rise to the sociopolitical moments that shape their lives, just as it did for me.*

*—Jossalyn C.*

*“I am 27 years old and finishing my second year as a teacher in a Yonkers charter school. So much effort goes into planning and grading that it is easy to overlook how much effort goes into classroom management and relationship building with the students. I see new teachers hired and fired at my school regularly, but I’m the first ELA teacher to [hold the post] longer than a year, and I feel as though I owe DreamYard for that.*

*I had the pleasure of being a student in DreamYard’s A.C.T.I.O.N. project, and [after graduation] I also had the pleasure of working alongside the wonderful teaching artists and administrative staff at DreamYard. Without that program in my life, I might not have gotten into college. I definitely would never have developed the skills and confidence needed to succeed in my field.*

*I owe DreamYard and the A.C.T.I.O.N. Project in particular a tremendous debt. [My experiences in the arts] helped prepare me with the tools I needed to be successful in the real world.*

*—Samuel T.*

*“This is the first time that I’ve felt 100% sure on what I want to do for a career. Ever since I graduated high school I’ve been trying different jobs to save up for college and just gain experience but I can say without a doubt [that] working at DreamYard is the best job I’ve ever had; the people there are amazing, smart, and*

*fun to be around. The people at DreamYard saw something in me that I didn't see in myself and I am forever grateful for that because it allowed me to grow as a person, which is why I would do anything to get another chance to work there.*

*—Kyle S.*

*“DeamYard has been an invaluable resource for me as a proud Bronx resident/ The organization and its commitment to arts education has provided me with opportunities to travel, opportunities to connect with community, opportunities for professional development, and access to alternative academic supports that bridged the gaps in my school learning and provided experience and access into the field that would go on to transform my career in public relations, graphic design, and education. Without organizations like DreamYard, the youth and families of NYC are forced to remain behind those who have the flexibility and financial freedom to buy the high quality access that every student deserves.*

*—Chelsea J.*

These are just a few examples of how experiences in the arts open pathways for the young people of NYC. DreamYard joins our colleagues across NYC Arts and education sector; we are adding our voices, and adding the voices of several DreamYard alumni to urge our city to take action. We ask city officials to ensure that the young people of New York have *open* and equitable opportunities through the arts. Those opportunities come with funding, and we hope that our city officials will do what's necessary to invest in the arts, invest in our children, and invest in our future.

Sincerely,

Austin Greene  
Director, DreamYard Art Center

**New York City Council - Committee on Education, Jointly with the Committee on Cultural Affairs**

**DreamYard - Arts and Social Justice Education Impact Testimony 2025-04-07**

*Submitted by Tim Lord*

*Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director*

*DreamYard Project, Bronx, New York*

DreamYard is an arts and social justice education organization that works closely with Bronx youth, families, schools and communities to build pathways to equity and opportunity. We would like to begin our testimony thanking our City Council members in the Bronx, led by Council members Althea Stevens, Rafael Salamanca Jr., Eric Dinwitzer and Oswald Feliz, for their leadership support in making our programs possible. Thanks also to Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson.

DreamYard works with 40 public schools K-12th Grades to build arts and social justice programs and projects side-by-side with public school teachers, builds and runs after school programs, including as a SONYC provider at MS 390 and as a Community Schools partner at P.S. 51, and offers summer, Saturday and after school programming at two community centers- the DreamYard Art Center and the DreamYard Design Center. DreamYard works with over 10,000 Bronx youth annually in these year-long residencies. We work in a community that was redlined for decades, and despite those challenges is one of the most culturally rich and diverse communities in the country.

One way to demonstrate the power and impact of arts and social justice education programming, what we call Creative Youth Development programs, is to measure academic and attendance impacts. I would like to start with some data with you that tells the story of DreamYard program impacts as a way to illustrate the deep and fundamental importance of funding these types of programs citywide, regardless of external economic and budgetary pressures.

Several years ago, DreamYard and 6 Bronx middle schools received federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education to conduct a double-blind study as to the attendance and literacy impacts of poetry and theater programs in the academic lives of 5th and 8th grade students. When compared to a control group in the exact same schools, young people in DreamYard Creative Youth Development programs, within each year and over the course of three years, demonstrated **5-8% higher attendance on the days when they were offered DreamYard programs and scored 5-7% higher on state standardized tests**. Equally important, a district literacy specialist's research showed deeply significant growth for young people in creative youth development programs (year-long DreamYard theater and poetry workshops with teachers and teaching artists) in their **vocabulary, their writing stamina and in the richness of their language** usage. **These Bronx young people were much more powerful**

**communicators as a result of having taken part in a year-long, high quality arts in education program.**

DreamYard is the lead community partner in the DreamYard Prep High School, an unscreened, neighborhood high school in the Taft Educational Complex. When the Taft High School was closed and smaller high schools opened in the building in 2006, it was graduating 12% of its Senior class on time.

The DreamYard High School, founded in 2006, has built an educational community and program based on several essential principles and values. We center **arts and social justice pedagogy** in an environment of deep coaching and **dedication to teaching practice** by school leaders. Students choose an **Arts Major** after their sophomore year. In 2012 we established **Restorative Justice** practices and Circles at the center of our community and practice. Suspensions dropped from over 160 days in 2012 to 2 in 2024. In 2021 we were named a School Based option for SYEP programming- DreamYard creates summer internship employment opportunities for our young people based on their passions and interests- and we are now a **Future Ready** school.

**All of these factors, and of course strong leadership and an outstanding faculty, led to DreamYard Prep graduating 91% of our Seniors on time in the Spring of 2024. 12% to 91%.**

Career readiness measures using a national impact measure developed by nationally-renowned researcher Kim Flores and her team have shown that **94% of young people** who take part in DreamYard's creative career pathways based **SYEP and FutureReady programs demonstrate significant growth** in essential skills such as **Self Management, Effective Communication, Collaboration and Growth Mindset** as a result of the program.

**This is not an accident or a surprise, These results are the outcome of investing in the arts and in career readiness. We, alongside our many colleagues here this morning, urge you to fight and advocate for increased funding for the arts and education for our most vulnerable young people in the Bronx and beyond.**

**Education Through Music's Testimony to NYC Council Committee on Cultural Affairs,  
Libraries and International Intergroup Relations and the Committee on Education**

Hon. Carlina Rivera, Chair

Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair

*April 8, 2025*

Good morning Chair Rivera, Chair Joseph and esteemed members of the committee. My name is Dr. Janice Weinman-Shorenstein, and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of Education Through Music, a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing music education to underserved students to Title 1 schools in New York City. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I am here today to emphasize the urgent need for increased city funding to support arts education in our public schools and to express deep concern over the proposed amendments to the Foundation Aid formula, which are projected to reduce New York City's public school funding by \$350 million.

54% of New York City schools still lack a full-time certified music teacher on staff, leaving many students without access to the transformative power of music education. For over 30 years, Education Through Music (ETM) has provided music education for under-resourced schools as part of their core curriculum, ensuring that students—particularly those in Title 1 schools—receive a comprehensive and equitable education. ETM is currently partnered with 55 schools to support 20,000 students across all five boroughs, providing trained music teachers, instruments, a robust curriculum, and professional development for educators.

Research consistently shows that music and arts education improve student engagement, enhance academic performance, foster social-emotional learning, and even contribute to higher graduation rates. The National Endowment for the Arts and the Arts Education Partnership have documented that students who participate in music programs achieve higher GPAs, test scores, and cognitive development compared to their peers who do not. Furthermore, music has been shown to play a critical role in helping migrant and low-income students feel a greater sense of belonging in schools, increasing their engagement and overall well-being.

We are deeply concerned that the proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula will only widen this gap, disproportionately affecting students who rely on public education the most. If enacted, the amendments could lead to the elimination of essential arts programs, depriving tens of thousands of students of the opportunity to engage in music and creative learning.

The New York State Education Department has a responsibility to ensure that all students, regardless of socioeconomic background, have access to a well-rounded education. As

the State reexamines its funding formula, we urge policymakers at both the City and State level to explicitly incorporate dedicated support for arts education. Other states, such as California, have successfully allocated a percentage of their education budgets specifically for the arts, ensuring that all students, regardless of zip code, receive the education they deserve. New York should follow this model by creating a sustainable funding stream for music and arts education within the Foundation Aid framework.

We urge the City Council to prioritize investments in arts education, ensuring that organizations like Education Through Music can continue providing their life-changing curriculum amid the looming \$350 million cut to New York City public schools under the revised Foundation Aid formula and potential federal reductions to the Department of Education. By committing funding for the arts in Fiscal Year 2026, you will not only safeguard these vital programs but also empower students with the creativity, critical thinking, and social-emotional skills essential for success in today's world.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to the future of New York City's students.



**Testimonial Letter to the NY City Council Committee on Education, Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair  
and Committee on Cultural Affairs, Hon. Carlina Rivera, Chair  
Hearing: Joint Oversight Hearing on Arts Education, April 8, 2025**

**Testimony of Ambreen Qureshi, Executive Director, Educational Video Center**

Thank you Chair Joseph, Chair Rivera, and the City Council for your steadfast support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing as a member of the *It Starts with the Arts* coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts education. My name is Ambreen Qureshi and I am the Executive Director of EVC, the Educational Video Center.

EVC's media-arts education programming and broader initiatives help young people heal, grow, and thrive as learners, leaders, and artists; build capacity of teachers and public schools to create transformative learning environments; and use original media to disrupt systems and narratives harming BIPOC youth and their communities. We work to ensure that NYC's youth remain in and emerge from high school prepared to succeed in college and career pathways during a time when education has been profoundly disrupted. Especially, youth of color who are disproportionately impacted by systemic inequities and structural oppression.

For the last 40 years, EVC has supported positive life and career pathways for over 30,000 BIPOC and working class young people, trained over 1,100 teachers, and created 245+ highly acclaimed youth-produced documentaries that have gone on to win over 180 awards including 2 White House honors and an Emmy! Alumni from our programs have gone on to work at the [Urbanworld Film Festival](#), [CNN](#), and become members of the [International Cinematographers Guild](#).

Annually, over 15,000 global viewers see EVC videos and hear the voices of youth speak out on critical issues that also matter to you and your constituents. Issues like workplace exploitation of migrants in the 2024 EVC youth-produced film ["The Grass Isn't Always Greener."](#) divestment in under-resourced communities in the 2021 film ["Unjust and Unequal: Education in Black and White,"](#) and rampant gentrification in the 2016 film ["Stealing Home: Gentrification in Washington Heights."](#)

As the economy tightens and more budget cuts loom, financial constraints are already impacting the EVC community and everyone here today. Some of our partner schools simply do not have the funds for art teachers. Yet their students, already facing barriers to graduation, require arts credit to graduate. These schools increasingly rely on EVC as a provider of credit-bearing arts programming to ensure that their students stay on track to graduate, whilst also exploring possible careers in the media arts. Yet, we often have to waitlist schools and students because the demand is so high and funds are scarce.

Over the last 3 years alone, EVC has served almost 1,700 students who have secured over 2,500 credits towards high school graduation, and earned over half a million dollars in paid internships. Students use their EVC films and portfolios to apply to colleges, including youth like [Alexus](#) from Brownsville who had never made a film before EVC. She received a full scholarship to Ithaca College, graduated from a top film school in NY, and is now working as a production assistant on Marvel's *Daredevil*.

Without access to our free programs, Alexis and many young people like her, might never realize their dreams to become artists and help make our city a more vibrant, creative, and inclusive democracy. Alexis is an inspiration for many, like our current student [Franny](#) from East Harlem who will share her own testimony next. **We join everyone testifying here today in asking the city to prioritize funding for arts education programs that foster student engagement, creativity, mental health, career exploration, and community advancement. We also encourage the City Council to increase its overall allocation to the citywide Afterschool Enrichment initiative.**





### **Testimony of Franchesca Thomas, EVC Youth Producer**

Good Morning everyone my name is Franchesca Thomas, but you can call me Franny.

I am a youth producer at Educational Video Center, or EVC as we like to call it.

I am currently a senior at Lower East Side Preparatory High School. I am from East Harlem - born and raised! I have been in New York City my whole life.

I am the daughter of 2 immigrant parents from Honduras. Immigrants deserve to be heard and share their stories. And not be judged for the color of their skin.

My journey at EVC has been a long one! I've been in EVC's Youth Documentary Workshop program for 2 years now and have made 7 documentaries about stories that me and my peers want to tell from our perspective. All these documentaries I did with a group of students from diverse backgrounds and I really liked working together with them. We learned from each other.

EVC is a safe space where students can be themselves and we work together as equals in our classroom. I have learned and grown a lot at EVC over the last 2 years. I really like interviewing, doing research, using the green screen, and editing on Adobe. I like helping my peers who are just learning to edit too. And did I mention I like making new friends?

I am currently making my final documentary this semester on the housing crisis in NYC, before going off to college. I am proud to share that I pitched this topic to my group and students voted on it.

A film that I made with other students last year called "The Grass Isn't Always Greener" about workplace exploitation of migrants was selected to the Haitian Dominican Film Festival and I got to attend. It was the first film festival I have ever been to and our film was the only one made by high school students.

I was nervous because I didn't know what to expect from people watching the film, but they loved it, and we won an award! At the festival I realized how much EVC has changed my life and how much work me and the group put into this documentary. It was a special moment I won't ever forget.

I will be attending City College in the fall and will be studying film production. If I didn't have access to EVC's program, I wouldn't know what I wanted to do in the future. I would have been stuck for the rest of my life trying to figure things out.

I am speaking out today because I want to make sure all students across New York also get access to life changing arts programs, like I did. This will make our city a better place.

I think the City Council should fund organizations like EVC, and many more arts organizations, because they bring diverse students together to just create. They help build young people's confidence inside and out and help make art about social issues in New York City and the rest of the world as well.

If funding is cut for arts education across all schools, it would be very sad because art is a way for students to express themselves, and also to learn skills for future jobs.

Also EVC stands on business all the time!

Through making films, EVC has helped me and other youth to speak up, standing on what we believe in, and fighting for our power and rights, and not letting others tear us down. We all have a story to share.

Thank you!



City Council Hearing – Committee on Education jointly with the  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations  
Testimony on behalf of Flushing Town Hall (aka Flushing Council on  
Culture and the Arts, Inc.)  
Sami Abu Shumays

Ellen Kodadek  
Executive & Artistic Director

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April 8, 2025

## Ensuring Equity and Access Through The Arts

My name is Sami Abu Shumays, and I'm Deputy Director at Flushing Town Hall, one of the small CIGs, and a steering committee member of both the LatinX Arts Consortium of NY (LXNY) and the Cultural Equity Coalition of New York (CECNY). Flushing Town Hall serves Queens and all of New York City with extraordinarily diverse culturally-relevant programs, including music, dance, visual arts, and theater programs, arts education programs for students and senior citizens, and regrants and professional development programs for artists and small organizations in Queens. "Ensuring Equity and Access Through The Arts" is basically our mission statement at Flushing Town Hall – we were founded in 1979 with the mission to present and uplift the arts and cultures of the diverse and rapidly-growing immigrant communities in Queens, and to promote intercultural exchange.

The social impact of the arts have been well documented – in neighborhoods with robust cultural institutions the health, well-being, educational outcomes, and community cohesiveness of residents is greater. Including the arts in education helps to make kids more engaged, and leads to better academic performance in other areas. The perspective I'd like to offer here is that Equity is about more than just making sure that everyone has equal access to the arts – it is also a question of *which* arts and cultural forms people have access to, especially young people.

NYC DOE arts education offerings should reflect the rich tapestry that is New York City. Forms such as Western classical music, ballet and fine arts have been rightly celebrated in our schools. But, by way of example, so too should other classical and folk art forms, such as Chinese Opera, Indian Kathak dance and Korean Minhwa painting be celebrated in our schools; as well as other arts forms that have been passed down through generations. Whether our students come from households that play salsa or Chopin, they should know their arts are valued and uplifted as much as their neighbors'. They should understand that their creative spark, and their cultural heritage, matters.

When we uplift the arts and cultural forms produced by people from around the globe, it can be a transformative experience – building stronger community, as well as spreading the benefits of the arts and culture more justly. Representation is important – not just in our faces, but in our languages, musics, dances, cuisines, religions, and social forms. The message to our children is that they have value, their voice matters, their participation in school matters, their participation in our City matters.

*Flushing Town Hall (1862) is a New York City landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.  
In 1996 the facility became an officially designated cultural institution in the City of New York.*



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City Council Testimony, April 8, 2025  
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At Flushing Town Hall, we have always insisted on this type of inclusive representation in the arts and culture that we share – and like many of our fellow cultural institutions, we are able to provide arts education programs to NYC schools that DO include diverse global cultural forms, **which otherwise would not be available**. In FY2025 some of our CASA programs include:

- Traditional Mexican Dance
- Korean Dance, Music, & Painting
- Colombian music & Dance
- West African Dance & Drumming (Ivory Coast)

And our roster of master teaching artists includes tradition bearers giving instruction in:

- Indian Dance & Cuisine,
- Mexican Paper Arts,
- Jazz & Hip Hop Dance,
- Native American History & Culture (two members of the Matinecock tribe of Long Island/Flushing),
- Japanese Dance,
- Traditional Chinese Dance,
- Caribbean Drumming, Andean music,
- Traditional Chinese Juggling

This is one reason among many that Cultural Institutions are a necessary partner of the DOE and need to be funded in order to survive and continue to provide our services to New York's students, and to our diverse population of Senior Citizens and general audiences.

We need to make sure that we're adequately funding cultural institutions in each neighborhood, so that every area of the city benefits from the arts. Local institutions often partner best with local schools, because they are parts of the same communities and populations.

The Mayor's preliminary budget shows deep and drastic cuts for cultural institutions – for Flushing Town Hall it is a cut of 53% from FY2025 to FY2026, which could decimate us if we do not see a restoration; and we need an increased baseline so we're not vulnerable to this type of instability every year.\* We NEED you – We, every cultural institution large and small across all five boroughs of NYC, CIGs and CDFs, NEED you to **Baseline \$75 million for Culture in Fiscal 2026**.

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We also strongly support **the call by the Coalition for Equitable Educational Funding to baseline \$41M in arts education funding.** Schools have barely enough arts education as it is, and many working artists and small organizations also rely on this funding to operate. A cut of \$41 million for arts education programming is shortsighted and deeply harmful to the young people of New York – please restore and baseline it.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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*\*In the Mayor's FY2026 Preliminary Budget, Flushing Town Hall's operating support allocation from the DCLA drops from \$803,895 in FY2025 to \$375,292 in FY2026, a cut of \$428,603 – 53%. This figure represents a cut of 12% of our TOTAL annual budget (\$3,704,148), and could necessitate us having to lay off up to seven or eight of our full-time employees, or greater than 40% of our 19 full-time employees! Like our other colleagues in the Cultural Institutions Group, we use city funds to pay the salaries of full-time employees, and cuts of this magnitude from the city represent the livelihoods of thousands of individuals across the city.*

*ALL the cultural institutions are in difficult financial positions - not just those that are publicized - especially when projecting into the next few years. We all face common challenges around uncertain and declining funding from donors and foundations, slower audience growth post-COVID, against significant expense growth among all categories. The organizations of the CDF are in even more dire straits – between significant cuts and delayed funding, many have had to reduce services, reduce employment, and many are in danger of going out of business entirely if the city continues along the path of stagnant funding to the cultural institutions with significant cuts and unpredictability every year. As a steering committee member of the Cultural Equity Coalition of NY, we see the need from the sector expressed in the CDF-impact surveys conducted by Dance/NYC and A.R.T./NY over the last three years, and advocate for baselined operating support funding for the CDF organizations so that they have the necessary stability to survive. The CIGs need stability, as well. We NEED you – We, every cultural institution large and small across all five boroughs of NYC, CIGs and CDFs, NEED you to **Baseline \$75 million for Culture in Fiscal 2026.***

*Especially when our sector faces so many threats from other sides, New York City government has to have our back, in the way that we, the cultural sector, has the city's back: in times of crisis, in the way that we uplift and sustain communities, in the way that we keep the city vibrant and attractive to visitors, in the positive economic impact we have on the city, and the livelihood we provide for the tens of thousands of city residents who work in the arts and culture sector.*

*I can best express why baselining is important to the sector by talking about how it affects us at Flushing Town Hall. For over a decade, our baseline has remained at \$375,292. Thanks to increases added at adoption every year, the generosity of the city council, and funds from the DCLA designed to increase equity within the CIG such as the MET funding and Supplemental Support, our annual allocation has grown to \$803K. Sounds great, right? However, this growth-to \$803K from a low of \$350K in FY2011 actually represents nearly ZERO growth from our FY2007 allocation of \$777K, and our FY2008 allocation of \$763K, because we took a cut of 41% to our operating support budget in*

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*FY2009 – this necessitated the layoff of nearly two thirds of our staff. Our funding declined again in FY2010 and FY2011. In other words, we’re just catching up to our allocation levels from 18 years ago, and we’re under constant threat because most of that allocation isn’t baselined.*

*We’ve just now managed to rebuild the organization to the same level we were at a decade and a half ago. That’s what stagnant city funding and potential cuts every year does to cultural institutions that provide public service – it makes it impossible to plan strategically and prudently, keeps us from growing our service to New York’s communities and reduces the livelihood of New Yorkers.*

*A cut of 53% in FY26 to Flushing Town Hall’s operating support allocation from New York City will be devastating to us, and we face a similar threat every single year. BASELINE US. Baseline the entire arts and culture sector. We need to be held steady, as does everyone else. Our story is the same story in 1,000 different forms across DCLA’s grantees. The DCLA’s budget is a miniscule 0.25% of the city’s budget, Baselining should not be so difficult. Although we also desperately need more significant investments in our sector, in the longer term, this modest baseline is an achievable and essential first step to ensuring that our cultural organizations can continue to exist, serve and impact New York’s communities in the way that you, the city, need and ask us to. We need you to have our back, especially in these times.*

*I do have one more note specific to Flushing Town Hall. In the preliminary budget the mayor added \$3 million for NEW CIGs, potentially up to 5. That would represent a baseline of \$600,000 for the new CIGs; while we, having been in the CIG for almost 30 years now, still have a baseline of only \$375,292. It’s not enough funding to support the mandate to serve the public, while stewarding public land, and partnering with the city in the many ways we CIGs do, from IDNYC to COVID relief and testing. Please don’t add new CIGs **without also baselining** those of us already in the CIG with baselines under that minimum realistic figure of \$600,000.*

*I’d like to thank the City Council and the DCLA for recognizing our impact, for continuing to fund us, for continuing to fight for us ALL in the city budget, for saving us every year. I also applaud the efforts of the DCLA and the City Council over this past year to get contracts fulfilled in a more timely fashion. While more work needs to be done, it has been a noticeable improvement. What we need from you, our city government, most of all is to baseline \$75 million for the entire sector – anything else threatens our survival and well-being every budget cycle.*



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs and Committee  
on Education,

Hon Carlina Rivera and Rita Joseph, Chairs

4/8/2025

Thank you to Chairs Carlina Rivera and Rita Joseph and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools. My name is Sam Metzger, and I work at the Irondale Ensemble Project in Fort Greene.

The mission of Irondale is to help audiences, artists, and students make sense of today's world. At our theater space in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, we host a middle and high school ensemble company that each meet weekly at our theater throughout the school year, with each company putting on two productions each year. Both programs are entirely free of charge for our students, and we serve students from all five boroughs. Each year we also travel with our high school ensemble to see a handful of shows at other cultural institutions in NYC. We work in-school and after-school at four schools in Brooklyn, including New Bridges Elementary School, where we deliver after-school programming through a CASA grant.

Each school year we begin working at New Bridges uncertain of whether we will receive funding for the current school year, however, we choose to begin regardless, deciding that we would rather eat the cost if we were to ever not receive funding (which has not happened: thank you!). We do this because we believe that having robust after-school arts programming ought to be available to all NYC students at no cost to them.

While we can provide programming at our theater at no cost to students, it is city funding that enables us to deliver such after-school programs directly to students at their schools. This increases the likelihood that students who would not otherwise seek out our programming outside of their school might develop an interest in the arts, or encounter a teaching artist who encourages their self-expression.

We've heard from multiple students who go on to audition for high school arts programs that it



was the consistent presence of arts programming at their school that encouraged them to feel confident to audition for these programs. Students who don't go on to audition for these specialized high schools, still regularly cite access to arts programming as an important space for their own self-expression and an increased enjoyment of their experience of school.

When students feel comfortable expressing themselves and are encouraged to do so, they become more comfortable taking risks and placing themselves in environments of moderate discomfort, which evidence demonstrates is essential for learning and growth. Arts programming is a phenomenal tool to encourage students to take risks and embrace their "mistakes" as a means of self-improvement. Particularly in this post-COVID era, where many students lost opportunities for social expression and the development of social skills, it is crucial we encourage students to build the social and emotional skills that arts education can help to build.

Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Unfortunately, only 31% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. The [term and condition passed by the Council last year](#) revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools) — leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. Furthermore, the combined implications of the Class Size Mandate rollout, the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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 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 to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Thank you for your attention and consideration,

Sam Metzger





**Leonard Jacobs**  
*Executive Director*

**Courtney Ffrench**  
*Artistic Director*

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## **TESTIMONIAL LETTER TO THE JOINT OVERSIGHT HEARING ON ARTS EDUCATION**

April 8, 2025

**Hon. Carlina Rivera**  
**Hon. Rita Joseph**

My name is Leonard Jacobs. I am Executive Director of the Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning (JCAL) in Southeast Queens. I'd like to thank you for supporting arts education in NYC with authenticity and passion. I am living proof that arts education changes lives.

The year is 1977. I am 9, living with my working-class parents in Kew Gardens Hills, Queens. NYC was famously broke: *Ford to City: Drop Dead* was the federal government's brutal attitude. Yet, for all of NYC's problems then, my public school, PS165, still had art teachers, still had music teachers, still held annual dance festivals, and we performed plays and musicals—often for kids, often even *by* kids.

Arts education, in other words, was woven deeply into my learning.

Arts education taught me to think and feel; to analyze, socialize, and civilize; to collaborate; to celebrate. It is scientifically proven fact, not spin, that arts education forms, shapes, and empowers the minds and voices of our youth—in 2025, just as it was in 1977. That I've spent the entirety of my life making a living in arts and culture isn't the point: Arts education would have shaped my life, and my work, no matter which profession I would have ever joined.

America is strong, and NYC only stronger, when we invest in the creative power of our youth. Today, you hold the power to support the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition, which demands that NYC prioritize funding for arts education in our schools. I urge you to start exercising that power *now*.

At JCAL, our mission is to offer quality visual and performing arts, and to provide accessible education programs to encourage participation in the arts. Over 53,000 New Yorkers visited JCAL's buildings in FY24; our teaching artists serve hundreds of young people and their families through the City Council's CASA initiative right now as I speak.

CASA is only one of the ways that the Council can use its power to support arts education in our schools. Legally mandating DOE to spend arts funding on the arts is another.



Eviscerating arts education funding in our schools, by contrast, will drive a stake through our city's heart. It will destroy and put out of business nonprofits that everyone knows full well are teetering on the brink. The coffin of American democracy doesn't need yet another nail hammered into it by cutting arts education.

Today, I respectfully ask you not to vote for any FY26 budget that doesn't do the following:

- **Require** DOE arts funding to be spent on the arts.
- **Guarantee** every public school has a certified arts teacher and bolster the pipeline.
- **Restore and enhance** "Support for Arts Instruction" initiative funding.
- **Restore and enhance** DCLA baseline (\$75M, *not a penny less*).
- **Center** arts and culture youth development programs.
- **Improve** transparency by compelling public schools to provide data.
- **Prioritize** timely processing of contract renewals and extensions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Leonard Jacobs  
Executive Director  
Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning



April 6, 2025

Councilmember Rita C. Joseph, Chair  
Committee on Education

Councilmember Carlina Rivera, Chair  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations

*Re: Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts*

Thank you, Chair Joseph, Chair Rivera, and Committee Members for taking the time to explore the topic of Equity and Access in the Arts. My name is Tony Mazzocchi and I am the Executive Director Designate at Kaufman Music Center, as well as the Director of the John J. Cali School of Music at Montclair State University. I deeply appreciate the chance to provide testimony today on behalf of Kaufman Music Center.

Located in Lincoln Square, we are home to a concert hall (Merkin Hall), community arts school (Lucy Moses School), and K-12 public school (Special Music School), all housed at 129 West 67th Street. Our programs provide affordable music education and performances to approximately 50,000 community members each year, including 5,000 students of all ages from across the five boroughs.

Thanks to a unique partnership with New York City Public Schools, we provide the Music Program at Special Music School to 300 young people from across the five boroughs annually, at no cost to students and their families. Our rigorous offerings include private lessons; small and large ensembles; music theory, history, and technology; mentorship and performance opportunities; and much more. This innovative curriculum prepares students for bright futures—whether in music or in other areas—and students’ impressive test scores attest to the efficacy of this model. Our students consistently rank among top performers on state math and English exams, and our High School boasts a 100% graduation rate and college acceptance for seniors. Graduates regularly advance to Columbia, Cornell, and Harvard, as well as prestigious conservatories like Juilliard and Eastman.

A recent survey revealed that 55% of all High School students at Special Music School are first-generation musicians—a notable indicator, given the challenges that young musicians face when they do not have musical influences at home. Responses also indicated that 83% felt their musical education improved their performance in other academic subjects. These impressive results are backed by data by the American Psychological Association which showed that high levels of music engagement were related to higher performance in subjects like math, science, and English. According to a 2020 study, “highly engaged instrumental music students were, on average, academically over 1 year ahead of their peers.”

Given that 31.5% of our K-12 students are on the Economic Need Index and 25.2% live in poverty, Special Music School is serving a vital role in New York City’s landscape, promoting musical and academic excellence among youth of all income levels and safeguarding

affordable music education amid challenging budgetary circumstances. Yet, pervasive barriers persist that limit students' ability to audition for and successfully gain entry to schools like Special Music School. Thus, Kaufman Music Center's newest program, Pathways, is preparing students for acceptance into Special Music School High School and other institutions that require auditions for entry.

Through Pathways, Kaufman Music Center is providing middle school students with individualized musical training and resources including, but not limited to: fully subsidized private lessons or stipends for private study; fully subsidized instrument rentals; support for transportation to and from instruction; scholarships to pursue group ensembles or music theory classes at our Lucy Moses School or another organization; and more. Each student benefits from a personalized plan that addresses their specific barriers to music study and helps them achieve musical and academic goals. In this way, Pathways is creating a vital pipeline for talented students to pursue transformative musical opportunities at schools like Special Music School.

Consider Leonardo Dominguez Morales, a 10-year-old trumpet student recently enrolled in Pathways who often wakes up at 6 a.m., eager to practice his trumpet. Leonardo's favorite thing about the trumpet is its loudness and versatility, and while his mom, Elena, lauds the impact of his musical studies which have strengthened his concentration and enhanced his reading and math skills. Leonardo is thriving in his first year in Pathways, and we hope that, in time, he will advance to a program like Special Music School, where he can continue to pursue a quality education at no cost. Leonardo dreams of becoming an engineer or a trumpet player, and we are confident that our offerings can help him on either path to success.

Programs like Special Music School and Pathways are playing a vital role in New York City's landscape, making state/national standards-aligned music instruction affordable and attainable for young people who may not otherwise be able to afford the high costs of a music education. Any student is welcome to apply to Special Music School, while Pathways continues to grow thanks to outreach to public schools and other partner organizations throughout the City. Kaufman Music Center invests between \$6,000 and \$12,000 for each student's musical education in these programs each year, and funding is urgently needed to continue this vital work.

We thank you, Chair Joseph, Chair Rivera, and the New York City Council for considering our Discretionary Requests for Special Music School and Lucy Moses School (including Pathways), as well as our Special Initiative Funding request for support to the Special Music School Music Technology Program. We thank you, also, for your attention to this critical issue and look forward to working together to make the arts a cornerstone of New York City's public schools. Such that we can continue to serve as a resource or a model for the Council's efforts, we would welcome the opportunity to do so.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Mazzocchi'.

Tony Mazzocchi  
Executive Director Designate



**The New York City Council  
Committee on Education and Committee on Cultural Affairs,  
Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
Testimony Regarding Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts  
Submission from Legal Services NYC  
April 8, 2025  
Testimony Provided by Nancy Bedard**

My name is Nancy Bedard, and I am a Senior Staff Attorney in the Education Project at Brooklyn Legal Services, part of Legal Services NYC (“LSNYC”) (<https://www.legalservicesnyc.org/about-us>). Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing and for your ongoing efforts to support students in our public schools. We are deeply grateful to the City Council for its sustained support for LSNYC and championship of our mission and our work.

LSNYC provides high-quality, innovative representation to low-income communities throughout New York City. Our mission is to fight poverty and seek racial, social, and economic justice for low-income New Yorkers. We are the largest civil legal services provider in the nation, serving over 100,000 people each year. LSNYC Education Projects across all five boroughs assist children and families with general and special education issues, school discipline matters, and advocacy to challenge inequities in education affecting New York City’s communities of color and immigrant populations.

As advocates representing children in New York City, we urge the City Council to fully fund and support equal access to the arts across NYC public schools and provide quality arts education to all students, regardless of their zip code, economic status, or race.

**Demand Justice.**

**I. A Substantial Number of NYC Public School Students Do Not Receive NYSED-Mandated Arts Education Even Though Arts Education Improves Academic Achievement and Mental Health, and Decreases School Suspensions**

For decades, studies have shown that education in the arts not only decreases the odds of school suspension, but also improves students' academic achievement, behavior, and occupational aspirations.<sup>1</sup> While all students benefit from an arts education, students with low socioeconomic status make the most significant gains. Studies have found that low-income students with experience in the arts remain in school longer than their peers, are three times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree, and much more likely to work in professional careers such as law or medicine.<sup>2</sup> Access to the arts improves academic performance for low-income students and can serve as a potential means to education reform.

Suspensions from NYC public schools remained high during the 2023-24 school year, with 27,724 total suspensions, and the data showed significant disparities: about 38% of all suspensions went to Black students and about 38% to students with disabilities, though these groups make up just 20% and 22% of the school population respectively.<sup>3</sup> When students are suspended, they are more likely to struggle academically, engage in risky behavior, drop out of school, and end up with lower paying jobs.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kimberley Brown, *The Arts and Dropout Prevention: The Power of Art to Engage*, National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (Oct. 2017), <https://dropoutprevention.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/arts-and-dropout-prevention-2017-10.pdf>; Adam Winsler, Taylor V. Gara, Aleniamie Alegrado, Sonia Castro, and Tanya Tavassolie, *Selection Into, and Academic Benefits From, Arts-Related Courses in Middle School Among Low-Income, Ethnically Diverse Youth*, (Feb. 7, 2019), <https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Faca0000222>.

<sup>2</sup> James S. Catterall, Susan A. Dumais, & Gillian Hampden-Thompson, *The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies*, National Endowment for the Arts (March 2012), <https://www.arts.gov/impact/research/publications/arts-and-achievement-risk-youth-findings-four-longitudinal-studies>.

<sup>3</sup> Alex Zimmerman, *Suspensions declined last year, but NYC schools issued more lengthy punishments*, CHALKBEAT (Nov. 26, 2024), <https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2024/11/26/nyc-school-suspensions-decline-but-superintendent-suspensions-tick-up/>.

<sup>4</sup> See ACLU Washington, *How do suspension & expulsion impact students, schools, and community?* (2019), [https://www.aclu-wa.org/sites/default/files/media-documents/aclu\\_factsheet\\_howsuspensionexpulsionimpact\\_feb2019.pdf](https://www.aclu-wa.org/sites/default/files/media-documents/aclu_factsheet_howsuspensionexpulsionimpact_feb2019.pdf).

## II. History of Discrimination in Arts Education in NYC Public Schools

New York City is a global cultural capital and one of the most diverse cities in the world. Historically, neighborhoods have been segregated based on income and race, and our public education system has failed to provide arts education programs equitably or sufficiently.<sup>5</sup> As a result, access to arts instruction in schools serving low-income and Black and brown communities has been disproportionately limited.<sup>6</sup> Disinvestment in arts education has plagued NYC public schools since the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, leading to campaign after campaign to restore and increase funding for arts in the schools.

In 2007, the NYC Department of Education aimed to address these inequities through policy initiatives—but in practice, the gaps only widened. In 2008, the NYC Office of the Public Advocate published a survey finding that the vast majority of NYC public schools did not meet New York State Education Department (NYSED) arts education requirements.<sup>7</sup> In 2014, the NYC Comptroller released a report indicating that schools in some of the poorest neighborhoods – including the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn – consistently fell short of compliance with these requirements.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Sarah Cascone, *New York City's 2021 Budget Slashes Already Modest Funding for Public Schools Arts Education by 70 Percent*, AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS (July 6, 2020), <https://www.americansforthearts.org/news-room/new-york-citys-2021-budget-slashes-already-modest-funding-for-public-school-arts-education-by-70>.

<sup>6</sup> Jacoba Urist, *The Country's Cultural Capital Has a Big Arts-Education Problem*, THE ATLANTIC (May 28, 2014), <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/05/the-countrys-cultural-capital-has-a-big-arts-education-problem/371658/>.

<sup>7</sup> Office of the New York City Public Advocate, *Out of Tune: A Survey on NYC Students' Access to Arts Education*, (June 2008), [https://www.nyc.gov/html/records/pdf/govpub/moved/pubadvocate/ArtsEducationReport\\_web\\_.pdf](https://www.nyc.gov/html/records/pdf/govpub/moved/pubadvocate/ArtsEducationReport_web_.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Office of the New York City Comptroller, *State of the Arts: A Plan to Boost Arts Education in New York City Schools* (2014), [https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/State\\_of\\_the\\_Arts.pdf](https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/State_of_the_Arts.pdf).

### **III. Present Inequalities in Arts Education Impact Students of Color Negatively**

The NYC DOE's 2023-2024 Arts in Schools Report indicated that 69% of eighth grade students in NYC public schools were unable to meet the NYSED arts requirement due to the lack of arts education resources.<sup>9</sup> Most students who graduated middle school in the Bronx and Central Brooklyn did not receive the NYSED requirements for arts education: in the Bronx (District 7, 9 schools), 76% and 98% of students; and in Central Brooklyn (District 16, 17, and 18 schools), 79%, 69%, and 86% of students, respectively.<sup>10</sup> Students who live in lower-income school districts, who are primarily Black and brown students, make up the majority of those not receiving even the minimal arts education required under New York State standards.<sup>11</sup>

The current reporting system and the high level of discretion given to school leaders allows principals in lower-income, academically disadvantaged school districts to redistribute funds away from the arts and towards more traditional, testable subjects.<sup>12</sup> This results in an inequitable and discriminatory system that often deprives Black and brown children of access to the arts education that many students in predominantly white middle schools receive.

### **IV. Ensure Equity and Access to the Arts to Remedy this Discriminatory Impact**

The City can and should remedy this practice and take immediate steps to mitigate the current disparities in access to arts instruction, increase public awareness of these inequities, and ensure that all students, regardless of their neighborhood or race, receive at least the minimum arts instruction required by the NYSED. Where, as here, school administrators have discretion in allocating funding and determining curriculum, oversight and budgeting accountability measures

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<sup>9</sup> New York City Department of Education, Arts in Schools Report 2023-2024, <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/academics/annual-arts-in-schools-reports>.

<sup>10</sup> Id.

<sup>11</sup> Siena Stanislaus, A CHANCE AT THE ARTS, 46 COLUM. J.L. & ARTS 487, 489 (2023).

<sup>12</sup> Id.



are vitally necessary to help eliminate discriminatory impact. The City Council can play an important role in ensuring equity in arts education.

**V. Black and Brown Children in NYC Public Schools Have a Right to Equal Access to Arts Education**

LSNYC represents low-income students and families who want well-resourced schools that provide arts educational services to their children. The City Council and NYC DOE can address the ongoing disparities in access to the arts by proactively ensuring that every NYC public school meaningfully invests in the future of its citizenry by providing all students an equal opportunity to benefit from a quality education that includes the arts. This must include ensuring that every NYC public school student receives the arts education required by the NYSED. Black and brown children should be free of discrimination in school, and should have an opportunity to be creative and develop their many artistic talents, especially where statistics show that students with access to the arts benefit in most other spheres of life.<sup>13</sup>

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Bedard,  
Brooklyn Legal Services/Legal Services NYC  
Education Rights Project

  
[nbedard@lsnyc.org](mailto:nbedard@lsnyc.org)

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<sup>13</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, New NEA Research Report Shows Potential Benefits of Arts Education for At-Risk Youth, <https://www.arts.gov/news/press-releases/2012/new-nea-research-report-shows-potential-benefits-arts-education-risk-youth> (“At-risk students who have access to the arts in or out of school also tend to have better academic results, better workforce opportunities, and more civic engagement.”).

**April 8, 2025: Committee on Education Jointly with Committee on Cultural Affairs,  
Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations**

**Testimony: Jenny Fox, Librarians = Literacy**

**INTRO 1125: School Librarian bill**

I'm Jenny Fox from Librarians = Literacy, a parent-led campaign to get school librarians and libraries back into New York City Schools. I want to start by thanking Council Members Joseph and Restler who have been fighting alongside us since 2022.

We're now in 2025—and living in the era of Project 2025, Moms for Liberty, book bans, and the obliteration of DEI initiatives. **Make no mistake** there is a reason why school libraries are a part of this playbook—a fact that only confirms how crucial they are for our students and our society.

Educating our kids—our future populace—is more important than ever.

We must do all that we can to protect against—

Those who seek to stifle literacy

Those who seek to stifle access to information and the skills to evaluate it

Those who seek to erase representation for our most vulnerable student populations.

SCHOOL LIBRARIANS are on the FRONT LINES of protecting our students' rights to access information, to read freely, and to be represented. School librarians are not just "a nice to have" they are now more critical than ever. Sadly, New York City Schools

have lost an estimated 80 percent of certified school librarians in the last 20 years—shuttering school libraries across the city.

There are people sitting in Washington right now who would like *nothing better* than an ignorant, illiterate New York City populace. Are we going to give them what they want? **OR** are we going to become a beacon for other cities—a bastion of literate, information-savvy, next generation New Yorkers.

Intro 1125 is a first step in solving the school librarian loss problem. **A first step.**

Pass this bill but don't take your foot off the gas. Pass this bill, double down, and go harder. Ensure that our schools are meeting every literacy need of every student—not just those in the wealthiest neighborhoods.

Make New York City schools models of literacy, intellectual freedom, equity, and representation. Give them librarians and libraries.

Thank you.



## **Librarians = Literacy, Testimony April 8th, 2025, Intro 1125**

Rachel Cohen, Brooklyn

My name is Rachel Cohen. I'm the parent of a first grader at PS 261 in Boerum Hill Brooklyn and an activist with the public school parent campaign Librarians Equal Literacy, which is fighting to bring back school librarians in all NYC public schools.

Before my daughter started kindergarten last year, I just assumed that the library in her school was staffed with a school librarian and she'd get to go there at least once a week, just like I did growing up as a public school student in a very small town in New Jersey.

Soon after the school year started, I was very excited to see there was a Banned Books Week event planned and I would be able to see the library for myself and meet the librarian there. It was only at that event that I learned that our school had not had a librarian for over a year and the library was being used as a meeting room. I also learned that our school was not the exception but the norm as New York City public schools had lost about 80 percent of their public school librarians over the last 20 years. I loved my school library as a kid, so I knew I wanted to join with other parents to raise awareness about the dire loss of librarians and functioning libraries and to fight to bring back our librarians.

Like me, many families often assume a certified librarian is still a given in their child's school, but NYC's 1,600 public schools only have about 260 certified school librarians on staff, leaving the vast majority of schools lacking librarians. Without certified librarians in place library programs can't function, even when the physical facilities are present. Students' access to books, media, and library lessons is choked, and they miss out on the numerous data-backed educational benefits of an active school library program.

Many of the librarian-less schools throughout the city include middle and high schools—which are mandated to have librarians under New York State Law—and high-poverty schools are even less likely to have a librarian in their budget.

A school library is the best, most equitable opportunity for many students to access and learn to navigate and evaluate an array of books, media, and information technology. Librarians are uniquely trained to curate diverse, culturally-responsive collections, including materials representing all students' lived experiences. This makes students feel seen and valued and allows them to learn about others.

Having librarians is also proven to boost school-wide literacy, research skills, test scores, and graduation rates. In a climate of censorship, librarians also safeguard students' freedom to read.

Librarians and libraries in our public schools are in grave danger of becoming extinct with little notice. New York City must fund quality education—including librarians and libraries—to give all students' the tools they need to achieve literacy and future success.

The Librarians Count Bill, as we have been calling Intro 1125, is a crucial first step— we need to know the size and shape of the problem before we can fix it.

But once we have the information on librarians and library access, we must fight to have a librarian and a library in every school.

We are calling on the Mayor, the Chancellor and the New York City Council to:

- **ACKNOWLEDGE** the data-backed school-wide benefits of certified librarians, who enable school libraries to function, boost student academic success and serve as reading, research and media literacy leaders to both students and fellow teachers.
- **COMMIT** to safeguarding ALL students' rights to access and freely read from a robust collection of diverse books, media, and information technology, including materials representative of their own lived experiences.
- **STAFF AND FUND** certified school librarians in all public schools in all neighborhoods and districts in NYC, not just the wealthiest.

# Lincoln Center

70 Lincoln Center Plaza, New York, NY 10023-6583 | [LincolnCenter.org](https://lincolncenter.org)

## Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc. Oversight: Equity and Access in the Arts April 8, 2025

Thank you, Chair Rivera, Chair Joseph, and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations and the Committee on Education. My name is Shanta Thake, the Ehrenkranz Chief Artistic Officer for Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Thank you for accepting testimony today on ensuring equity and access in the arts and Lincoln Center's contributions to that effort.

Lincoln Center is home to eleven resident arts nonprofits, each a pinnacle of excellence in music, dance, theater, film, and arts education, encouraging an exploration of human creativity, imagination, and wonder. Annually we welcome thousands of students for field trips to performances, kids/family programming, and partnerships with schools.

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts has worked with students since its founding and is considered by many as the birthplace of teaching artistry. Over fifty years ago we developed a systematic approach to student-centered, discovery-based arts learning which has since grown nationally and internationally. Today the landscape is different with the pervasiveness of technology, information overload, and the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on student learning--yet the need for truly deep arts education for everyone has never been more essential to the social emotional learning of students. This requires an increase in funding for arts education in all public schools, more partnerships with arts organizations and elevating arts education within the core curriculum. We are constantly evolving how our programs can better serve students, including leveraging new technologies.

Time and again research has shown a direct connection between exposure to the arts and arts education on improved overall wellbeing and human development. Arts education in a student's learning provides a foundation for both cognitive and emotional growth, and increases their likeliness to attend college, vote, and volunteer in their community<sup>1</sup>. In the last five years our society has needed the connection that comes with participating in the arts. We look to the arts to bridge divides, celebrate differences, and encourage us to question what is and imagine what can be.

From working with students, educators, and families, we are delivering accessible arts education experiences at no cost to a growing pool of New York City students across the five boroughs.

### Developing the Artists of Tomorrow

Since 2014 Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts worked closely with the NYC Department of Education (DOE) to host **Middle School Arts Audition Boot Camp** at Lincoln Center. Middle

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<sup>1</sup> The Social Wellbeing of New York City's Neighborhoods: The Contribution of Culture and the Arts, 2017

School Arts Audition Boot Camp is a free, two-week arts program for New York City Public School students entering grade 8 in the fall across the five boroughs. The program's goal is to provide equitable access to screened arts high school programs by preparing students for the audition process.

Through the free two-week intensive summer program rising 8<sup>th</sup> graders further their artistic training in music, theater, dance, or visual art. They receive audition coaching, masterclasses, performances, and workshops from DOE arts specialists, alumni mentors, and faculty from partner cultural organizations, including Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, New York Philharmonic, Harlem School of the Arts, Studio in a School, and Weill Institute of Music at Carnegie Hall. By the program's end, students are equipped with the skills and confidence to audition for specialized artistic schools. Additionally, they develop portfolio skills that prepare them for life as an artist, and gain an artistic community of peers, mentors, and friends. When Boot Camp began in 2014, 98 students participated, and 90 percent went on to attend schools of their choosing. Last summer, ten years after it started, the 2024 class included over 400 students from 173 public schools across the five boroughs, and historically, 95% of participants go on to attend a school of their choice. We greatly appreciate this collaboration with the DOE, who fund the program and coordinate enrollment and registration, and are proud to host and support students with our dedicated team of full-time education staff.

**Young Artists Pipeline** is a free arts training program for students entering middle school developed and facilitated by Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Piloted in 2023 to address the opportunity gap due to the prohibitive cost of training in the arts the program builds on expanded approaches to training the next generation of art makers and leaders through an inquiry-based, student-centered learning method. Students meet on Saturdays, from 8:30 am–1:30 pm for 11 weeks in the fall semester and 12 weeks in the spring, with breakfast, lunch, and necessary supplies provided. Through the program students develop skills in dance, theater, vocal music, instrumental music, or visual art from expert teaching artists, learning about the professional arts world, going on field trips to cultural institutions, and preparing for a specialized education in their chosen art form. The free program is available to all New York City 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders with preference given to students attending Title 1 schools in school districts 3, 5 and 6 by free application. During the Fall 2024 session, 59 students from 31 DOE schools, primarily Title 1 schools, participated. The Spring 2025 session is currently in session with a cohort of 71 new and returning students. Funding for Pipeline and Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts education programming is made possible in part through public support.

In 2024, for their inaugural season, the Festival Orchestra of Lincoln Center piloted a partnership with the DOE's **Summer Arts Institute**. The ensemble provided sectionals and coaching to students in the Summer Arts Institute's String Orchestra and Concert Band, and presented a free, interactive performance led by Orchestra Music & Artistic Director, Jonathon Heyward, at the Frank Sinatra School of the Arts. On the Lincoln Center campus students received free coaching, observed a rehearsal of the Orchestra, attended a performance, and selected student chamber ensembles performed as a part of the Summer for the City's Family Programming series.

As an artistic cornerstone of New York City, we understand the power of the arts in inspiring civic-minded action in future generations. We continue to partner with DoSomething.org and Generation Citizen on the **Next Gen Changemakers Summit** welcoming creative teens to an all-day program of workshops and collaboration.

Year-round we offer free programs with educational components, like our Artist in Residence led **Create-athons**, inviting young audiences to learn about the arts and technology hands on, and our ever-popular kids and family programs, including **Storytimes** co-presented with the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Last October we welcomed 5,891 young people and their families in a single-day for our 3<sup>rd</sup> annual **Open House**— a day filled with creativity, community, learning, and inspiring performances.

The arts are critical throughout a person’s creative lifecycle. Arts education in early childhood provides a foundation for both cognitive and emotional growth. Exposure to the arts improves skills like language acquisition, memory, motor coordination, spatial awareness, and supports strong mental health. Lincoln Center has long been recognized as a pioneer in employing, mentoring, working with, and serving audiences of all ages with disabilities through programs like **Access Ambassadors**, a 20-week after-school work-based learning program with District 75. We recognize that access needs must be integrated in the creative process.

## Investing in Arts Educators

This fall Lincoln Center hosted the **Curriculum for Change Conference: Innovating Access in the Performing Arts**, a convening ground for educators, administrators, and artists to collectively imagine creative approaches to current issues of access in the arts. The conference invited Lincoln Center resident organizations and artistic partners to panel discussions and workshops focused on fostering inclusivity, enhancing accessibility, and how collectively we as a campus are expanding access to the arts.

This year we are excited to announce the return of **Summer Forum**, a celebration of 50 years of teaching artistry and arts learning on the campus. We invite teaching artists, educators, and practicing artists to join us at Lincoln Center to imagine the next 50 years of teaching artistry around the world. From July 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, as part of our *Summer for the City* festival, local and international arts education professions will connect through experiential workshops, performances, roundtables, and panels with leaders in the field. We hope participants leave Lincoln Center with new tools, fresh ideas, and an expanded community to propel their creative vision for arts education forward. Applications are open now and are being accepted on a rolling basis. If accepted, current New York City Public School Educators will be able to participate for free.

For a 3<sup>rd</sup> year Lincoln Center is partnering with Council Member Gale Brewer for the **“Arts & Culture in the Schools Showcase”** inviting local schools and cultural arts organizations to make connections. Over 60 nonprofit arts organizations attended the showcase to meet with superintendents, principals, and school administrators.



Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. We join our colleagues across the sector calling for a \$75 million baseline increase to the Department of Cultural Affairs budget, investing in cultural institutions, programs, and artists across New York City. Additionally, we support NYC Arts in Education Roundtable's advocacy to extend and baseline arts education funding, ensure every school has a certified arts teacher, restore and enhance the "Support for Arts Instruction" initiative, and require that DOE arts funding be spent on the arts. We believe arts education should be elevated as a core part of the required curriculum.

We look forward to continuing the dialogue with the City Council, New York City Public Schools, and City Hall to explore continued support for the arts and arts education. Working in harmony and engaging as lifelong learners is how collectively we will continue to center the arts to advance a shared sense of humanity.

## **Midori & Friends | Testimony**

*City Council Joint Oversight Hearing on Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts*  
**Tuesday, April 8 | Committees on Cultural Affairs & Education**

Good morning Chair Rivera, Chair Joseph, and members of the City Council.

Thank you for holding this hearing and for your leadership in supporting access to the arts across New York City.

My name is Jen Dayton, and I'm here today on behalf of Midori & Friends, a proud member of the *It Starts with the Arts Coalition*. For over 33 years, our organization has partnered with public schools and communities across the city to provide meaningful, high-quality music education to young people—many of whom would otherwise go without.

One of our flagship programs is the NEXTGen Musician Program—a citywide youth leadership and arts advocacy fellowship for high school students.

NEXTGen is more than a music program—it's a youth leadership and advocacy initiative that brings together high school students from across boroughs, backgrounds, and identities.

Whether it's mental health, immigration, access or equity in education, each student chooses an issue that personally affects them—and then creates an original music advocacy campaign inspired by that cause. They meet with local officials, speak with their peers, and take the bold step of using their voice to drive change, writing to City Council, speaking at rallies and advocating for arts education at their schools and in their communities.

They are here today—five students—with me. And they've chosen to be here, to ask for an excusal from school, to speak on behalf of their communities because they believe in the power of the arts.

### **Music education is not a luxury—it is a right.**

It's essential. It's a safe space. It's where students find their voice and learn to listen to others. It's where they see what's possible, even when the world outside their classroom might tell them otherwise.

And yet, too many of our young people still don't have access.

- Nearly **300 schools in our city lack a certified arts teacher**.
- Many schools have **little to no instruments** available for music instruction.

- Students travel long distances or across boroughs just to find a program that reflects their creative interests.

Despite these challenges, students show up. They create. They advocate. They connect.

Our students shouldn't have to fight for access to the arts. That is why we are asking for your continued commitment to:

- **Ensure every school has a certified arts teacher**, especially high schools where gaps are widest.
- **Invest in instruments, equipment, and facilities** that make hands-on music education possible.
- **Address transportation and access barriers** that prevent students from fully participating.
- Support a new citywide initiative for music education
  - Support Midori & Friends' request of \$100,000 for our citywide music education programs including NEXTGen to bring this transformative programming to more students
- And most critically—**listen to the students**. Let their voices guide where our investments go.

To close, I want to share the words of one of our NEXTGen musicians:

*"Music gave me my voice when I didn't know how to speak up. It helped me see I wasn't alone—and now I'm helping others see that too."*

Thank you for your time today—and for standing with us to make sure that every young person in New York City has the opportunity to express themselves, to lead, and to thrive through the power of the arts.

## **New York City Council FY2026 New Initiative Proposal**

### *The New York City Council Three Chords Initiative*

**\$3,000,000**

#### *Rationale:*

Music education has been proven to enhance academic performance while fostering students' social and emotional wellbeing. This new citywide initiative aims to ensure all NYC students and young people have access to music education and its many benefits.

#### **Introduction**

Walk down any block in New York City, and music will fill your ears. It echoes across subway platforms, powers night life venues, and flows through public schools. Music created in New York City has changed the world from Bronx-born hip-hop to iconic Broadway showtunes heard across the globe. New York's deep musical legacy creates a responsibility to ensure that future generations have access to robust music education. Every classroom in New York City can help foster the next Alicia Keys, the next Lin-Manuel Miranda, the next Louis Armstrong, or an entirely new sound and voice we haven't imagined yet.

#### **Positive Impact of Music Education**

Music education has been proven to lead to positive outcomes for students. Music improves academic performance, fosters social emotional learning, promotes cross cultural understanding, and opens students eyes to viable career pathways in the arts.

##### *Improved Academic Outcomes*

Music education has been shown to help students learn more effectively in all subjects, including math, science, reading, and writing (Guhn, Emerson, & Gouzouasis, 2019). Music education supports brain development in young children, particularly in the areas of the brain responsible for sound, language skills, speech and reading comprehension (Habibi, 2022).

In addition, access to music education can lead to increased high school graduation rates and reduced school dropout rates. The National Endowment for the Arts followed more than 22,000 students for 12 years and found that meaningful engagement with arts education leads to students being five times more likely to graduate high school (Brown, 2017).

##### *Social Emotional Learning and Community Building*

Beyond the positive brain development of those who study music, research shows that another benefit is actually boosting overall wellbeing and strengthening connections to the school and community (Ilari & Cho, 2023). Music education can lead to feelings of belonging at school and improved satisfaction with the school environment (Eerola & Eerola, 2014). One study found that low-income children at risk for school problems benefited greatly from robust music education through increased positive emotions and improved emotion regulation (Brown & Sax, 2013). Music can also give students a sense of being able to accomplish one's goals and greater feelings of achievement and opportunity in school. (Eerola & Eerola, 2014) (Catterall, 2007). The arts have also been shown to increase civic engagement among students (Catterall, 2012).

## *Cultural Competency*

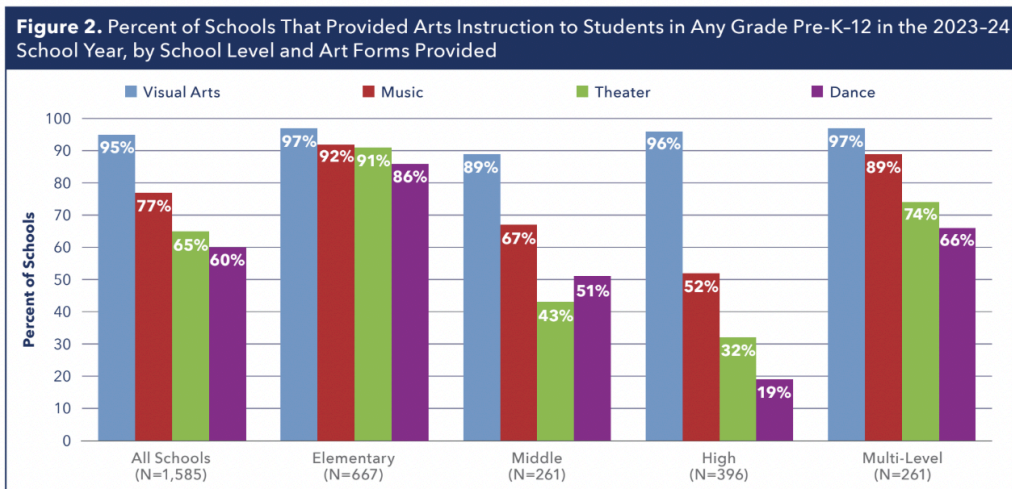
Music education helps to celebrate diverse cultural heritage and promote cross-cultural understanding. Researchers have shown that teaching music in elementary and secondary schools can help break down barriers among various ethnic, racial, cultural, and language groups (Cambell, 2018) Collaborating through music education has also been shown to increase positive interactions and relationships between children (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010)

## *Career Pathways*

Another benefit of increased music education in school is around workforce development and teaching students about potential career pathways into musical performance, composition, music production, teaching, music therapy, sound engineering, and music technology. According to a report conducted by the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment back in 2017, New York City is one of the world's most influential music ecosystems, supporting nearly 60,000 jobs, accounting for roughly \$5 billion in wages, and generating a total economic output of \$21 billion This same report noted that music-related jobs and wages are growing at an annual rate of 4 and 7 percent outpacing the overall New York City economy, where jobs and wages are growing annually at 3 and 5 percent, respectively.

## **State of Music Education In NYC Schools**

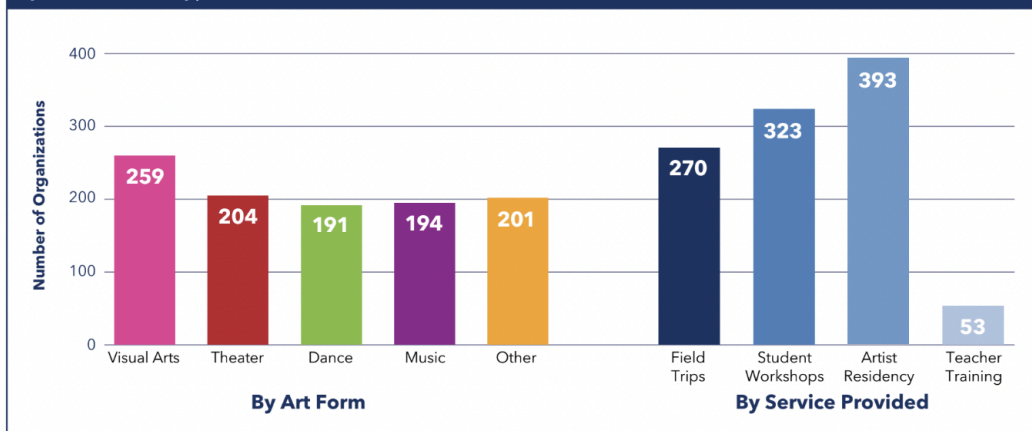
In an annual report on arts instruction on K-12 schools on arts instruction in individual schools for the 2023-2024 school year roughly 23% of schools do not offer music to any grade (358 schools out of the 1,585 included in the report). The figure below demonstrates how this number increases for both middle and high schools. In this same report, only 741 out of 1,585 schools report having a full time or part time music teacher.



Source: 2023-24 Annual Arts Education Survey and STARS Data

Our arts partners are critical to ensure that our students have access to diverse forms of music education and learn various types of music. In the 2023-2024 school year, NYC Public Schools partnered with 194 cultural arts organizations that provided music education services.

**Figure 10.** Number of Cultural Arts Organizations That Partnered with Responding Schools in 2023-24, by Art Form and Types of Services Provided\*



Source: 2023-24 Annual Arts Education Survey

\*Note that cultural arts organizations providing multiple services may be counted more than once.

- [Arts Education Report - NYC Council - Term and Condition](#)
- [2023-2024 Annual Arts in Schools Report](#)

### *Designation Proposal*

The new citywide initiative, the Three Chords Initiative, will give every child access to music education and its related benefits by supporting school arts partners and integrating music instruction into youth programs. The \$3 million initiative should be designated as follows:

#### **Arts Partners**

**\$50,000 - \$250,000**

Music education providers from the City's cultural sector will offer school day and afterschool music instruction and education to NYC students and young people.

#### **DYCD Summer and After School Music Partners**

**\$1,175,000**

New York City's afterschool and summer programs for youth recognize the importance of the arts and strive to connect participants to enriching learning experiences in the arts. With individual awards of \$25,000 for after school and summer DYCD programs, this initiative will extend arts opportunities to young people outside of school times.



New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations and New York City Education Committee

April 8, 2025, 10am

## TESTIMONY

Juliana Cope, Assistant Executive Director for Development and External Affairs, [Jcope@mind-builders.org](mailto:Jcope@mind-builders.org), 718-652-6256

Thank you all – you, dedicated public officials for your service and for this opportunity to share the work of Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center and other community-based organizations who train the next generation of New York City civic leaders and cultural contributors and on behalf of the youth, families, and neighborhoods we are honored to serve.

Founded in 1978, Mind-Builders began with a grassroots mission to inspire the growth of local youth and families in the Northeast Bronx by providing low-cost, high-quality arts education. Since then, we have grown to become a cultural anchor for our community – more than just an arts center, we bring together best practices in arts education, youth development and community engagement in the belief that a healthy community is a vital ingredient in the healthy development of a child.

For 47 years, Mind-Builders has offered hundreds of music, dance, theater, folk culture, production corps and martial arts programs serving over 750 young people every week. In 2015, we were honored to be selected to participate in the first NYC cohort of Universal Pre-K providers and have continued the program since thanks to ongoing support from the City of New York. During the school year, 18 three- to four-year-olds and their families participated in our full-day Universal Pre-K Program. This free, arts-centered program, including Suzuki violin, follows the curriculum established by the NYC Department of Education, with whom we are so very fortunate to partner. We have close partnerships with the local public schools, which send their children to us for arts instruction including through contracted performing arts residencies, and for the past 10 years our successful Pre-Kindergarten program has served as a feeder into the local school kindergartens, where we help families and students enroll. Many of our Pre-K families stay with us year after year, to participate in our after school and Saturday arts and culture programs in music, dance, theater, folk culture, theater production and martial arts.

Intrinsic to our purpose is the community we serve, which is predominantly lower-income; our children and families identify as West African, Black, Latino, and/or Caribbean. Participants come from every zip code in the Bronx, but predominantly from neighborhoods local to our facility – Olinville, Wakefield, Williamsbridge, and Norwood, which have historically had fewer safety nets than their peers, despite greater need. Mind-Builders employs dedicated staff coming from the five boroughs: professional teaching artists, pre-kindergarten instructors, support and admin staff, reflective of the communities we serve. Our work is woven into the fabric of our neighborhood and our staff continue to make transformation in the lives of our young people possible.

Organizations like Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center touch every vital aspect of daily life - from public education, health and human services, cultural enrichment to language access. We call on the City to continue your ongoing investments in the cultural sector, supporting work that effectively transforms lives, neighborhoods and cities. We look forward to the opportunity to continue to provide arts residencies for public schools and UPK services to the community.





STRENGTHENING YOUNG MINDS THROUGH THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC

# BUILDING FOR THE ARTS 2026 SUPPORT REQUEST FOR MUSIC AND THE BRAIN

FEIN: 13-2852371



Building for the Arts (BFA) expands access to the performing arts by providing creative space, learning opportunities, and hubs for artistic connection.

BFA operates Theatre Row, The American Playwriting Foundation, and Music and the Brain



**Music and the Brain** is a foundational **school-day music program** integrating **musicianship and piano learning** as a pathway to lifelong skills. NYC Partner school music teachers teach our engaging curriculum, and we provide ongoing support, 20,000+ physical and digital resources, an access for educators and students anytime, anyplace, **all free of charge**.

Columbia University's Center for Arts Education Research found **more NYC students score proficient and above on standardized ELA and Math tests at schools that use Music and the Brain** than at comparable NYCDOE schools.



**Music and the Brain Serves 58,000+ Students in 152 Schools, and 160+ Music Teachers Annually Across the Five Boroughs**

## CITY COUNCIL TESTIMONY – APRIL 8, 2025



I'm Lisala Beatty, Director of Music and the Brain, a program of the non-profit Building for the Arts. Neurological research shows that learning to read music and play an instrument like the piano is a akin to a "full body workout for the brain." The arts help motivate every kind of learner to succeed. NYC students need focus, critical and creative thinking, fine motor, social, and emotional skills to succeed. Certified music and other NYC arts educators struggle to find resources to teach. They need curriculum materials, instruments, and classroom space to give students meaningful arts instruction. Arts teachers have tremendous opportunity to impact, but need community support.

Funding for arts education is essential for NYC students to be prepared for the future. Music education in particular strengthens fine motor skills, confidence, literacy, math skills, and more. For 28 years, Music and the Brain has improved school and life skills for **more than 58,000 NYC students annually in 152 public schools across** the five boroughs. We provide schools who have music teachers a robust general music curriculum with a diverse repertoire, a 16-station piano/keyboard lab, a web platform with a virtual piano that students can access at home, and ongoing support for music teachers. Columbia University research shows a correlation between school partnership with Music and the Brain and higher scores on 3rd grade standardized ELA and Math tests, including English Language Learners.

**We've never charged NYC schools for Music and the Brain resources for nearly 30 years.** We have over 35 NYC school applications on a waiting list, and Building for the Arts NY has applied for **\$50,000 of City Council support to maintain and expand Music and the Brain through three citywide initiatives**. I'm a proud product of NYC public schools and a vocalist who's traveled the world because of music education. Music and the Brain opens doors for NYC students and profoundly impacts our under-resourced communities. Thank you for your time and consideration.

## **BUILDING FOR THE ARTS REQUESTS:**

**\$10,000** Local and Digital Inclusion and Literacy Support from City Council Districts we serve:

1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51

**\$50,000** support for Music and the Brain through the following citywide initiatives:

- **Speakers Initiative**
- **Educational Programs for Students**
- **Support for Arts Instruction**

**musicandthebrain.org**





STRENGTHENING YOUNG MINDS THROUGH THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC

## 2025 NYC COUNCIL MEMBER DISTRICTS SERVED BY MUSIC AND THE BRAIN

**District 1 – Christopher Marte**

4,237 Students and 6 Teachers

Served since 2007

P.S. 2M, P.S.20M, P.S. 140M, P.S. 343M  
P.S. 124M, P.S./I.S 276M

**District 2 – Carlina Rivera**

798 Students and 3 Teachers

Served since 2010

P.S. 63M, P.S. 34M

**District 3 – Eric Bottcher**

6,793 Students and 5 Teachers Served since 1999

P.S. 11M, P.S.111M, P.S. 212M,  
De La Salle Academy

**District 4 – Keith Powers**

882 Students and 3 Teachers

Served since 2015

P.S. 281M

**District 6 – Gale A. Brewer**

1,386 Students and 2

Teachers Served since 2017

P.S. 84M, P.S. 75M

**District 7 – Shaun Abreu**

3,521 Students and 4 Teachers

Served since 1999

P.S. 36M, P.S.145M, P.S. 862M,

**District 8 – Diana Ayala**

7,063 Students and 12 Teachers

Served since 2005

Reece School, P.S. 182M, P.S. 5X,  
P.S.30X, P.S. 49X, P.S. 65X, P.S. 102M

**District 9 – Yusef Salaam**

5,275 Students and 8 Teachers

Served since 2004

P.S. 129M, P.S. 149M, PS 185M

**District 10 – Carmen De La Rosa**

5,096 Students and 6 Teachers

Served since 2009

P.S. 18M, P.S. 132M, P.S. 152M, P.S.189M,  
P.S. 513M, KIPP Washington Heights Middle

**District 11 – Eric Donowitz**

2,388 Students and 3 Teachers

Served since 2016

P.S. 20X, P.S. 77X

**District 12 – Kevin Riley**

1,915 Students and 3 Teachers

Served since 2008

P.S. 153X, P.S. 596X

**District 14 – Pierina Ana Sanchez**

1,402 Students and 1 Teachers

Served since 2019

P.S. 363X

**District 15 – Oswald Feliz**

338 Students and 1 Teacher

Served since 2024

P.S. 391X

**District 16 – Althea Stevens**

1,691 Students and 2 Teachers

Served since 2005

P.S. 443X

**District 17 – Rafael Salamanca Jr.**

5,843 Students and 4 Teachers

Served since 2006

P.S. 1X, P.S. 157X

**District 18 – Amanda Farias**

4,370 Students and 4 Teachers

Served since 1999

P.S. 36X, P.S. 107X, M.S. 562X

**District 19 – Vickie Paladino**

2,250 Students and 2 Teachers

Served since 2008

P.S. 107Q

**District 20 – Sandra Ung**

1,246 Students and 2 Teachers

Served since 2017

P.S. 20Q

**District 21 – Francisco Moya**

9051 Students and 8 Teachers

Served since 2002

P.S. 92Q, P.S. 143Q, P.S. 14Q, PS Q329

**District 22 – Tiffany Caban**

3,622 Students and 3 Teachers

Served since 2006

P.S. 17Q, P.S. 85Q, P.S. 171Q,

**District 23 – Linda Lee**

3,562 Students and 3 Teachers

Served since 2008

P.S. 46Q, P.S. 115Q, P.S. 133Q,

**District 24 – James F. Gennaro**

2,054 Students and 5 Teachers

Served since 2014

P.S. 201Q, P.S. 219Q

**District 25 – Shekar Krishnan**

7,628 Students and 6 Teachers

Served since 1998

P.S. 7Q, P.S. 149Q, P.S. 212Q, P.S. 398Q

**District 26 – Julie Won**

2,995 Students and 3 Teachers

Served since 2004

P.S. 78Q, P.S. 111Q

**District 27 – Dr. Nantasha Williams**

3,994 Students and 6 Teachers

Served since 2010

P.S. 176Q, P.S. 360Q, Riverton St. School,  
P.S. 182Q

**District 29 – Lynn Shulman**

2,623 Students and 7 Teachers

Served since 2015

P.S. 196Q, Tiegerman High School,  
P.S. Q056, Q273





STRENGTHENING YOUNG MINDS THROUGH THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC

## 2025 NYC COUNCIL MEMBER DISTRICTS SERVED BY MUSIC AND THE BRAIN

### District 30 – Robert Holden

8,938 Students and 6 Teachers

Served since 2002

P.S. 58Q, P.S. 71Q, P.S. 128Q, P.S. 68Q

### District 31– Selvena N. Brooks-Powers

1,693 Students and 4 Teachers

Served since 2014

P.S. 181Q, M.S. 356Q

### District 32 – Joann Ariola

9,622 Students and 8 Teachers

Served since 2007

P.S. 207Q, P.S. 63Q, P.S. 114Q, P.S. 91Q,  
P.S.119Q, P.S. 97Q

### District 33 – Lincoln Restler

5,260 Students and 9 Teachers

Served since 2006

P.S. 38K, P.S.110K, P.S. 307K,  
Brooklyn Rise Charter

### District 34 – Jennifer Gutierrez

6,379 Students and 5 Teachers

Served since 2005

P.S. 17K, P.S. 123K, P.S. 132K,  
P.S. 257K

### District 35 – Crystal Hudson

2,069 Students and 5 Teachers

Served since 2012

P.S. 316K, P.S.705K

### District 36 – Chi Osse

651 Students and 1 Teachers

Served since 2015

P.S. 628K

### District 37 – Sandy Nurse

3,877 Students and 5 Teachers

Served since 2005

P.S. 45K, P.S. 151K,  
P.S. 383K, P.S. 214K

### District 38 – Alexa Aviles

2,215 Students and 3 teachers

Served since 2017

P.S. 971K, Sunset Yards Elem, P.S.  
200K

### District 39 – Shashana Hanif

4,135 Students and 3 Teachers

Served since 2008

P.S. 130K

### District 40 – Rita Joseph

2,310 Students and 3 Teachers

Served since 2004

P.S. 139K

### District 41 – Darlene Mealy

828 Students and 5 Teachers Served

since 2019

P.S. 770K, P.S. 446K

### District 42 – Chris Banks

6,653 Students and 7 Teachers

Served since 2004

P.S. 66K, P.S. 233K, P.S. 346K, P.S. 557K,  
Brooklyn Scholars Charter

### District 43 – Susan Zhuang

6,638 Students and 8 Teachers

Served since 2010

P.S. 101K, P.S. 247K, P.S. 682K,  
P.S. 105K, P.S. 227K

### District 44 – Kalman Yeger

1,571 Students and 1 Teacher

Served since 2007

P.S. 199K

### District 45 – Farah Louis

3,557 Students and 4 Teachers

Served since 2009

P.S. 193K, P.S. 361K,  
Brooklyn Dreams Charter

### District 46 – Mercedes Narcisse

2,103 Students and 2 Teachers

Served since 2009

P.S. 114K, M.S. 366K, P.S. 207K

### District 47 – Justin Brannan

2,718 Students and 2 Teachers

Served since 2021

P.S. 188K, P.S. 170K

### District 48 – Vernikov

1,270 Students and 2 Teachers

Served since 2024

P.S. 254K, P.S. 100K

### District 49 – Hanks

797 Students and 1 Teacher

Served since 2024

P.S. 045R

### District 50 – David Carr

1,357 Students and 2 Teachers

Served since 2023

P.S. 30R and P.S. 39R

### District 51 – Joseph Borelli

2,628 Students and 3 Teachers

Served since 2016

P.S. 36R, P.S. 42R, P.S. 55R



229 W 42nd Street, 10th Floor  
New York, NY 10036  
646.223.3000

April 8, 2025

***Testimony from the New 42nd Street and the New Victory Theater:  
Activating Arts Access and Equity for NYC Students***

Thank you all for this opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of New 42 and The New Victory Theater. My name is Courtney J. Boddie, VP of Education and School Engagement at New 42, where we take deep pride in fulfilling our mission: *to make extraordinary performing arts a vital part of everyone's life from the earliest years onward*. I am also the co-chair for the Arts Committee for the Mayor's Panel for Educational Policy.

Research has proven that quality early arts exposure can have a positive impact on the socioemotional development of young people and yet barriers to arts access still exist. Through the **New Victory Education Program**, New 42 engages with its school partners in neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs and beyond to create accessible, more authentic pathways for Pre-K-12th grade students to experience the transformative power of the arts amongst their peers.

**The New Victory Education Program**, is one of the largest and most expansive providers of live performing arts in New York City bringing free, dynamic arts education programming to **130-150 school partners each year**. **76% of our school partners represent NYC public schools**, 70% of which are classified as Title 1, serving students living in low income neighborhoods, and a number of which are District 75 schools specifically serving students with disabilities. In FY25, each of our **138** school partners has access to deeply subsidized \$2 tickets (underwritten by \$2M) to **school day matinee performances at our historic New Victory Theater; in-person classroom workshops** led by trained New Victory Teaching Artists to deepen the experience of our live presentations and provide a space for creative, innovative play and meaning making; free summer dance programming; and arts-based teaching resources for educators to implement within their classrooms. Through our **Bring Your Family Program**, we also provide **over 1,000 FREE performance tickets annually** for families living in NYCHA housing to ensure the broadest possible reach to the kids of our city.

**Access for ALL** remains a core tenet of our organization and, for many students in the schools we serve, our New Victory Education Program is **the only arts education they receive during the year**. A 3rd grade teacher from PS 169 The Sunset Park School shared, "**None of my students have ever been to a theater before! Some of them had never even taken the train until today! This is so exciting for us.**" Another teacher from PS/IS 178 Queens said, "**Thanks for making our students feel welcome! It really was an excellent show.**" By providing this unique opportunity to engage in collaborative and creative educational play, we positively impact **up to 19,000 NYC students each year**. As certified Theater teacher Meredith Akins from the Stephen



229 W 42nd Street, 10th Floor  
New York, NY 10036  
646.223.3000

Gaynor School stated, **"....students are empowered by theater and hearing different stories. They communicate with more confidence when theater is in their lives."** In fact, beyond improvements in writing achievement, school engagement and higher education aspirations, New 42's own quantitative research proved that exposure to live performing arts strengthens collaborative skills and nurtures self-confidence and optimism. As Agustin Romero, a member of our New 42 Youth Corps and Queens College student said, **"New 42's work is important because it reaches a lot of different people...It gives young people the opportunity to develop a love for the arts, and adults a chance to connect with their inner child."** That's the kind of city I want to be a part of and we thank you for striving to activate equitable arts access for all New Yorkers. New 42 is proud to be the city's partner in this effort.

In Fiscal Year 2026 we are seeking City Council members to advocate for the restoration of Speaker funding (a request of \$125,000), which provided crucial support until 2024, for our education work citywide, as well as discretionary funds to support our arts education programming within each district. Additionally, we are requesting \$25,000 from the Autism Awareness Initiative in support of our autism-friendly programming that provides an inviting experience for kids and families of diverse abilities. We know the City Council is aware of how important arts education can be for our school system and we hope that the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations will advocate for New 42 and other arts institutions citywide as you approach the upcoming budget season.

Best,

Courtney J. Boddie  
VP, Education & School Engagement  
[cboddie@new42.org](mailto:cboddie@new42.org)  
646.223.3094



Written Testimony for the  
New York City Council  
Committee on Education and  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries,  
and International Intergroup Relations

April 5, 2025

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Tia Powell Harris, and I serve as Vice President of Education & Community Engagement at New York City Center. I joined City Center's senior leadership team in 2022, following my tenure as Chief Executive Officer of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts Project and the Ellington Fund in Washington, D.C., and as Executive Director and President of the Weeksville Heritage Center here in Brooklyn.

It is an honor to testify today about the work we do to bring high-quality, accessible arts education to New York City public school students.

City Center was founded in 1943 by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia as the "People's Theater," and our commitment to that founding vision continues today. Alongside our onstage dance and musical theater productions, our education and community engagement initiatives—collectively known as EDUCE—serve as a third pillar of our institutional programming. These offerings are designed to meet students where they are: in classrooms, in our theater, and in community centers throughout the five boroughs.

In the 2023–2024 school year, our arts education work engaged nearly 7,000 students and educators across 50 schools and are on track to serve nearly 10,000 this year. These programs included a wide range of in-school workshops and semester-long residencies in both dance and musical theater. Whether introducing young students to storytelling through movement or guiding older students through the process of creating an original musical, our teaching artists provide an inspiring and supportive environment that meets the City's curricular standards while nurturing creative expression.

Importantly, our work does not end in the classroom. Each participating student is invited to attend a live performance on our mainstage through our Lynne & Richard Pasculano Student Matinee series. These matinees—paired with custom study guides and professional development opportunities for educators—are a cornerstone of our approach, helping students connect what they learn in school to the world-class artistry they see onstage. In recent years we have been proud to expand this program to include our first-ever Encores! Student Matinees, exposing students to musical theater history through productions like *Once Upon a Mattress*, *Jelly's Last Jam* and *Ragtime*.

*Ragtime* had a particularly profound impact on our students and teachers. The feedback we received was deeply moving and underscored the unique value of experiences like this. As one teacher shared, opportunities like these "show students what is possible in theatre" and reinforce that "shows are for them too." A sixth-grade teacher noted, "I don't think they were aware that humans could sound like that." The production's historical themes also sparked meaningful dialogue. After Act I ended with the death of an unarmed Black woman, one student asked her teacher, "Why did they kill Sarah when she wasn't going to hurt anyone?"—opening the door to critical conversations that extended well beyond the stage.



Accessibility is a core value at City Center. We offer deeply subsidized tickets to ensure our performances are within reach for all schools, with additional discounts for those in our residency programs. We believe arts education is essential to a young person's development—supporting academic growth, empathy, collaboration, and self-expression—and we witness these benefits daily across our programs. This season, we expanded physical accessibility by offering six ASL-interpreted performances, serving over 250 audience members—including 93 NYC students—and held dedicated seating near interpreters at a discounted rate. We also introduced sensory guides for our Encores! Student Matinees in partnership with CO/LAB. We remain committed to growing and improving these initiatives in the seasons ahead.

I want to thank the City Council for your leadership and for your investment in arts and culture across all five boroughs. As you continue to examine the equitable accessibility of arts education, I urge you to consider the impact of programs like ours—and the opportunity that lies in expanding them to reach even more New York City students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Best,

Tia Powell Harris  
Vice President, Education & Community Engagement  
New York City Center





## **Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations**

**Tuesday, April 8th, 2025**

### **NEW YORK SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL dba THE PUBLIC THEATER Testimony**

#### **Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts**

Chair Rivera and committee members and staff, thank you for calling this important hearing. The Public Theater is pleased to share testimony on our work on this topic. There are many critical issues currently facing the entire culture and arts community. One of these issues is ensuring access to the arts in our schools and providing transparency for parents, leaders and community organizations throughout New York City.

The Public Theater's mission is to operate on the principles that theater is an essential cultural force, and that art and culture belong to everyone. The Public continues the life work of our visionary founder Joe Papp as a civic institution engaging, both on-stage and off, with some of the most important ideas and social issues of today. Our institution recognizes the systemic barriers that prevent fresh and diverse talent from pursuing careers within the Arts and Culture field. Therefore, we are committed to cultivating young people's talents in a safe and nurturing space while providing financial support, and working directly to produce free education materials in partnership with WNET, a primary PBS television station

The Public Theater's three artists in residence include: Ife Olujobi, Ryan J. Haddad, and Julian Goldhagen. The Public Theater's leadership team and Creatives Rebuild New York afford these resident artists the time, resources and space to create. Playwrights Ife and Ryan focus on writing as their primary paid occupation. During their residencies, both artists premiered new plays at The Public – Ryan's "Dark Disabled Stories" (2/28/23 – 4/9/23) and Ife's "Jordans" (4/11/24 – 5/19/24). Furthermore, as a part of his residency, Ryan supported The Public in its exploration of more expansive accessibility offerings for audiences and artists with disabilities and held a workshop of his new, yet-to-be produced play, "Good Time Charlie." As a part of their residency, Ife organized and moderated two panels on just labor practices for arts workers and successfully advocated for an increase in playwright compensation at The Public. Julian is embedded with Public Works, our major community engagement initiative, and uses their expertise as a licensed social worker to help participants build community across interpersonal differences. They also developed a series

of storytelling classes and created a sweeping oral history project documenting the first ten years of Public Works. After this residency period all artists will move on to other endeavors with strong experience and The Public Theater will as a home base.

In 2023, The Public Theater launched a partnership with the City University of New York's (CUNY) network of undergraduate theater training programs to help us teach, train, and employ a new generation of professional theater staff. Over the past two years, The Public Theater developed our relationship with CUNY, focusing specifically on Brooklyn College and Hunter College as inaugural partners, to build a robust workforce development program with a three-pronged approach that includes fellowships, artist residencies and masterclasses. We onboarded our 2024/25 cohort of six CUNY fellows in October 2024. Each of these fellowships will offer practical experience in each student's chosen discipline, provide robust professional development and network building opportunities to help launch their careers, and offer resources to fellows to build a portfolio of work. These fellowships included positions in: Marketing, Community Programs, Development, Producing, New Work Development, and Production Management. The purpose will be to meaningfully advance each Fellow's career, and at the end of their time with The Public the goal for each participant will be permanent employment at an arts organization. These programs are funded through donations from private funders and foundations including the Miranda Family Foundation.

Now in its fifteenth year, the Hunts Point Children's Shakespeare Ensemble represents an extraordinary collaborative effort between The Public Theater's Shakespeare Initiative and the Hunts Point Alliance for Children. Fourth, fifth, and sixth graders from schools in the Hunts Point community of the South Bronx spend a full academic year discovering, rehearsing, and ultimately performing a Shakespeare play. The Ensemble meets 3 times per week for 8 months, working with a team of teaching artists from The Public Theater and Hunt's Point Alliance to make Shakespeare's original text their own. In May each year, the Ensemble's teamwork, creativity, and commitment come together in a celebratory production, complete with sets, lights, costumes, props, and live musicians. In partnership with the Hunts Point Alliance for Children, this long-standing program supports young people in developing intellectual, social, and emotional confidence, while strengthening practical skills such as public speaking, listening, creativity, and teamwork.

One of The Public Theater's most famous programs is Free Shakespeare in the Park. Since 1962, the Public Theater has performed over 150 productions at The Delacorte Theater in Central Park



and hosted over 6 million audience members. Free Shakespeare in Central Park is part of the Public Theater's annual summer tradition and offers several key benefits to New York City including cultural enrichment, tourism impact, economic impact, public space utilization and education. Over the last several years, Free Shakespeare in the Park has been proud to partner with WNET to capture our productions of MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, MERRY WIVES, and RICHARD III for broadcast through PBS's Great Performances series.

Alongside filming these productions, The Public has developed educational materials to accompany the broadcast and live streams and assist public school teachers' already existing curriculums for Shakespeare lessons. In 2022, Public Theater teaching artists developed a curriculum for MERRY WIVES. The materials include guided critical discussions around Shakespeare, historical and modern applications of his works, and its interactions with race. These discussions are intended to create a pathway for students to see themselves reflected in Shakespeare's language and themes, and it is our hope to inspire the next generation of our artists to make his works their own. These forays in digital programming and our educational resources have enabled Free Shakespeare in the Park productions to reach millions of audience members around the world.

Students are often introduced to the arts and the possibility of a career in the arts while in grammar school. Many of our CIGs work with school-age students in our Public Education System. Furthermore, there are after-school programs that are designed to expose our students to careers within the arts. We are also aware that within our Public Schools there are systemic barriers and other factors that limit the time our students spend within libraries. The Public Theater aims to ensure transparency within our own organization but within our Department of Education. Therefore, The Public Theater Supports Introduction 1125 that would require the Department of Education to report annually information on school librarians and library access in DOE schools. To properly educate our students, we need to ensure ongoing learning in our libraries lead by licensed librarians.

It has never been more important to the long-term health of our field to invest in a new generation of talent, and to develop a workforce that is as diverse and dynamic as the city in which we live. Part of this work is ensuring transparency at all levels. Again, the Public Theater Supports

Introduction 1125 and the calls for the council to increase funding for the arts in New York City.

Baselining \$75 million in the city budget would help stabilize the entire arts and culture community.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to Kate Madigan, Government Affairs Coordinator, at [kmadigan@publictheater.org](mailto:kmadigan@publictheater.org) with any questions or further information about our programs and work. Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on  
*Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations*

Hon. Carlina Rivera and Hon. Rita Joseph, Chairs

**April 8, 2025**

Thank you to Chairs Carlina Rivera and Rita Joseph and the City Council for your bold and continued support of arts education across New York City. I write to you as a passionate educator, proud New Yorker, and Director of Advocacy for the New York State Dance Education Association (NYSDEA). My name is Maxwell Louis Green-Waterman, and today, I offer this testimony, in support of the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition, not only as a policy advocate, but as a mirror for the voices of young people, teaching artists, and community leaders whose lives have been transformed through dance.

The mission of NYSDEA is to advance dance education centered in the arts throughout New York State. With more than 500 members representing PreK–12 schools, higher education institutions, private studios, and community organizations, NYSDEA serves as a driving force for excellence, equity, and advocacy in dance education. Our reach is wide, but our focus is precise: to ensure that every New Yorker has access to the joy, rigor, and transformative power of dance.

Our Advocacy Committee is rooted in the belief that dance is more than movement—it is liberation. We are committed to amplifying historically silenced voices, eliminating systemic barriers, and expanding sustainable access to dance education across race, ability, gender identity, income, and geography. At a time when the arts face erosion through budget cuts and bureaucracy, we stand unwavering in our demand that dance be treated not as an extracurricular, but as a civic right.

The NYC Arts in Education Roundtable’s announcement of a Joint Oversight Hearing on April 8th is a call to action. This moment—anchored by transparency, accountability, and community—demands testimony from those closest to the work. Delayed payments, shortened residencies, opaque MTAC processes, and fingerprinting hurdles all create

impossible choices for teaching artists, students, and school partners. We must name this truth and transform it.

Our students deserve more than 'what's left.' They deserve intentional investments. We've seen firsthand the results when arts are prioritized: students finding their voice after trauma, classrooms transformed into stages of cultural pride, youth developing self-worth, discipline, and empathy through choreography. This is the power of dance. This is the impact of equitable arts education.

Yet the data is clear: 379 schools lack a certified arts teacher. Only 31% of eighth graders meet state arts standards. With the Class Size Mandate, Foundation Aid shifts, and federal sunset funds looming, this gap will only widen unless the City takes immediate and visionary action.

We urge the Council to:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M)**
- **Ensure every school has a certified arts teacher (\$39.8M)**
- **Enhance "Support for Arts Instruction" funding (\$6M)**
- **Require DOE arts funding be spent on the arts (\$12.5M)**
- **Center arts in Summer Rising 2025 and DYCD programs (\$5M)**
- **Increase baseline funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M)**
- **Demand school-by-school transparency on arts access**
- **Expedite contract processing, especially for MTAC services**

We are not asking for favors—we are calling for justice. Dance is education. Dance is equity. Dance is essential. Let us rise together and ensure that NYC leads the nation in arts access and imagination. Our future depends on it.

In Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "MGreen-Waterman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Maxwell Louis Green-Waterman

Director of Advocacy

New York State Dance Education Association (NYSDEA)

**NORTHERN MANHATTAN  
IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION  
(NMIC)**

**TESTIMONY**

Regarding

General Funding Support

**SUBMITTED TO:**

**THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL**

Committee on Education

April 8, 2025

NMIC is a community-based settlement house founded in 1979 which has grown into a leading multi-service agency with a staff of over 120 employees, serving all of New York City. Our mission is to serve as a catalyst for positive change in the lives of the people in our community on their paths to secure and prosperous futures. We serve about 14,000 clients each year with a variety of programs to address Housing, Immigration, Education/Career, Finance/Benefits, Health, and Holistic needs. Our education and career services provide over 500 members of the community with the basic building blocks - access to preparation for the High School Equivalency exam, English language skills, and the associated wrap around services - necessary to establish secure and prosperous futures.

NMIC does not charge any fees for services to our primarily low-income communities and immigrant persons and families. NMIC is ideally situated in Washington Heights and University Heights where the large immigrant and mostly Spanish speaking populations in these communities can easily access the broad range of services available.

Our core catchment area is Upper Manhattan (Community Districts 9-12) and adjacent Bronx neighborhoods (Community Districts 1-7). Our communities specifically represent some of the highest socioeconomic need in New York City and include 9 of the top 10 (out of 59 total) community districts with the highest percentage of residents living below the federal poverty level. These community districts report dropout rates far above the City average; with the Bronx districts we serve reporting over 12% of young people have left school, more than double the Citywide average of 5.9%.

The clients we serve are nearly 100% low income, 70% are foreign born, and 58% speak Spanish as their primary language. As low-income immigrants, many are faced with multiple barriers to success that can interact and compound upon one another, making single focus programs ineffective. That's why the provision of wraparound services and quality case management is a focus of all NMIC programs. Our goal is to step in and address both short- and long-term needs that will enable our community to thrive.

NMIC is one of only a handful of settlement houses to provide a wide array of services onsite. As such we are uniquely positioned to provide clients with both literacy and educational programming, as well as the advocacy and case management support required for their success.

We have made great strides in 2024 and your support will allow us to continue to provide these existing services to our community members:

- NMIC provided adult education and career services to nearly 700 individuals
- 259 adults received English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instruction
- 83 adults received Adult Basic Education and High School Equivalency instruction
- 29 clients participated in our YouthBuild Program, provided in partnership with the NYC Department of Education Pathways to Graduation Program.
- All NMIC program participants receive case management support and referrals for additional services, including mental health, benefits access, housing, or employment.

These numbers represent only a portion of the work that we are doing throughout the City. With critical support from the City Council through the YouthBuild Initiative, Adult Literacy Pilot and Adult Literacy Initiative, NMIC is able to provide clients with a robust set of services and supports to meet the range of needs within our community.

Funds awarded under the Adult Literacy Pilot and Adult Literacy Initiative fund seven sections of English for Speakers of Other languages classes that provide 110 students with over 600 hours of English Language instruction. These funds also allowed NMIC to hire a full time intake specialist to support clients through the application and enrollment process. With their support, NMIC classes have been fully enrolled throughout FY 25.

Support from the City Council is essential to the operation of NMIC's YouthBuild Program, which provides education and career services to young adults (ages 17 to 24) working to complete their high school diploma and begin their career journey. YouthBuild clients present multiple barrier – young parents, unstable housing, a history of involvement in the justice system, and unmet mental and emotional health needs. NMIC's program provides these young people with access to case management, regular mental health supports, individualized instruction, and exposure to career pathways. NMIC has helped seven students complete their GED in FY 25 to date and connected those students to advanced training programs and post-secondary education programs.

While we are proud of our accomplishments, the need in our community remains high. Our ability to meet the educational and basic needs of our clients can only be guaranteed through sources of stable and adequate city funding.

The recent actions of the Trump administration to eliminate the federal Department of Education's Division of Adult Education and Literacy and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Title II that currently provides over \$24.6 million a year in funding for ABE, GED, and ESOL classes throughout New York City. These cuts represent an existential threat to NMIC's Adult Education programs for both long-time New York residents and more recent immigrants, as well as our career services programs that help low-income New Yorkers on a path to self-sufficiency.

NMIC, like many other organizations, is already planning for the pending devastation of our programs. The loss of federal funding that is the cornerstone of our DYCD Adult Literacy contracts would result in the shuttering of our GED program and a dramatic reduction in the services available to English Language learners. Funding from the New York State Department of Labor may also be in jeopardy, hindering our YouthBuild Program. Jobs will be lost, including educators, social workers, attorneys, and other vital, dedicated staff who are passionate about serving our community.

While for the time being we are forced to accept the reality of the current federal government and its malicious disdain for our work, the City must help stem the bleeding. Nonprofits are already working beyond capacity, but we are now on the precipice. Community members hoping

to improve their career prospects, achieve key educational milestones, and better navigate their life in New York City will have nowhere to turn.

To support our ongoing work NMIC requests a renewal in FY26 of our FY25 \$350,000 YouthBuild Initiative, \$140,000 Adult Literacy Pilot and \$100,000 Adult Literacy Initiative allocations. We also ask that the City Council maintain its discretionary funding for the Adult Literacy Pilot and Adult Literacy Initiative at its current total level of \$16.5 million.

Your support for our work will send a strong message to communities across the City, showing that their rights are valued, and can make a huge difference in the lives of our community members. To meet current and future challenges facing New Yorkers, NMIC and other agencies require a reliable baseline of funding to develop a secure infrastructure of support. This can only happen with the council's commitment to make financial investments in our communities and the legal/social services sector.

Thank you again for your time and support. We look forward to continuing partnering with the City Council to ensure that our communities are welcomed and supported!



**Arts Education Testimony**  
**Written Testimony Submitted by:**

**Kimaada Le Gendre, Director of Education & Community Engagement, Queens Museum**  
***April 8, 2025***

Thank you to the Chair and entire City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony today. I am Kimaada Le Gendre and I am Director of Education & Community Engagement for Queens Museum. I am here to support the *It Starts with the Arts* coalition and call on the city to prioritize funding for arts in New York City schools.

Queens Museum is dedicated to presenting the highest quality visual arts and educational programming for people in the New York metropolitan area, and particularly for the residents of Queens, a uniquely diverse, ethnic, cultural and international community. The Museum fulfills its mission by designing and providing art exhibitions and educational experiences that promote the appreciation and enjoyment of art, support the creative efforts of artists, and enhance the quality of life through interpreting, collecting, and exhibiting art, architecture, and design.

Arts education is core to the work we do at the Museum. educational initiatives serve a wide range of participants from young children to older adults, with a focus on accessibility, creativity, and social impact. School programs provide hands-on learning experiences for PreK-12 students across New York City, while the Queens Teens Institute for Art and Social Justice empowers high school students to explore art and activism. ArtAccess ensures individuals with disabilities have meaningful opportunities for creative expression, Creative Aging fosters artistic engagement among older adults, and New New Yorkers offers free multilingual classes to support the needs of the growing communities of adult immigrants in Queens. Family Programs invite multilingual participation, while Summer and Winter Camps offer immersive art-making experiences for children.

My charge as the Director of Education & Community Engagement is to manage these programs. We are excited to share that we will break ground on the final phase of our capital project later this winter with an estimated completion in 2027. In addition to many necessary upgrades, we are transforming 15,000 sq ft of unrenovated space into an intergenerational, multilingual family space for learning and creativity, also referred to as the Children's Museum. This Museum will be the first dedicated arts and culture museum for children in Queens.

The Children's Museum will be designed around four dynamic zones:

**Make:** A cutting-edge maker space equipped with 3D printers and design tools dedicated to art making and creativity, featuring a 'Build Lab' that connects design, fashion, and architecture, and highlights The Panorama of the City of New York.

**Play:** A multifaceted area encompassing performing and visual arts, where children can engage in imaginative play, storytelling, and performance.

**Interact:** A technology-based space encouraging exploration and innovation. Here, children can engage in hands-on projects that blend traditional crafts with modern technology, nurturing critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

Queens Museum  
New York City Building  
Flushing Meadows Corona Park  
Queens, NY 11368

**Grow:** A hybrid indoor/outdoor area dedicated to sustainability and environmental education, featuring a learning garden in Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Programming will focus on climate change, food justice, and the interconnectedness of art and nature, emphasizing culturally relevant practices rooted in community values and knowledge.

Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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 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 to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Thank you for your opportunity to testify today.



Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committees on Education and on Cultural Affairs,  
Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair of Education; Hon. Carlina Rivera, Chair of Cultural Affairs

Hearing: Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts, April 8, 2025

Thank you, Chair Rivera and esteemed members of this Committee, for the opportunity to testify. With deep gratitude for City Council's ongoing partnership during this time of precarity, Roundabout Theatre Company joins our colleagues in support of the "It Starts with the Arts" coalition. We urge City Council to prioritize funding for the arts in New York City schools.

Roundabout celebrates the power of theatre by spotlighting classics from the past, cultivating new works of the present, and educating minds for the future. We produce new works, classics, and musicals on and off-Broadway. Our education programs reach over 24,000 public school students, teachers, and New Yorkers each year within and beyond the classroom. Our classroom residencies use the tools of theatre to promote engagement, academic achievement, and social emotional learning in all subjects—not just the arts and humanities, but also math, science, and English as a New Language. We also provide artistic and technical support for student theatre around the city, an after-school and summer program for teens, a popular Student Matinee series, and a range of workforce development programs that connect young people to careers in the arts.

Education at Roundabout began in collaboration with the New York City Department of Education in the 1990s. Almost 30 years later, in the 2024-25 school year, Education at Roundabout will serve approximately 4,000 students and teachers in class and afterschool at 24 partner schools across all five boroughs. We are committed to reaching students who have limited access to arts programming. Many of our partner schools have Title I designations. At 17 of our partner schools this year, over 75% of students live below the poverty line.

For over 10 years, DCLA and the City Council's support through initiatives like Cultural After School Adventures (CASA) and Cultural Immigrant Initiative have been essential to the success of these programs. Of our 24 NYC public school partners this year, seven are generously funded in part by the City. These residencies alone reach over 400 students in all five boroughs; our roster of 50 professional Teaching Artists delivers more than 300 direct contact hours of mentorship in theatrical craft areas like playwrighting and costume design, as well as key career skills like leadership, staff scheduling, budget management, and strategic problem-solving. Our Student Matinees, supported by our City Council representative Erik Bottcher, have brought over 2,000 public school students – and counting – to our theatres in Midtown this season. For many young New Yorkers, a Student Matinee at Roundabout offers their first experience of professional theatre—and a meaningful connection to the vast cultural opportunities our city offers young New Yorkers.

In the past year, demand for our work has nearly doubled. Partner schools continue to report persistent, severe learning losses and gaps in social emotional competencies like self-efficacy, collaboration, and

problem solving. Recent research suggests their experience is part of a larger trend: in a 2024 Gallup survey<sup>1</sup> of K-12 students, less than a third strongly agreed that they were having engaging experiences at school. Six out of ten students say that they are most excited about learning when their teacher made the material exciting for them, and when they could engage with material in a hands-on way. Our work directly addresses this downturn in engagement by turning students into active participants in their own learning.

By centering their voices and experiences, Roundabout creates classroom environments that promote creativity, participation, academic achievement, and positive school cultures. As we seek to reach even more students in the coming year, and as partner schools continue to face unprecedented challenges, we need the City's support to grow our partner school network and especially increase our presence in Queens and Brooklyn. We join our colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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 Teacher (\$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.
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- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

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<sup>1</sup> K-12 Schools Struggle to Engage Gen Z Students; <https://news.gallup.com/poll/648896/schools-struggle-engage-gen-students.aspx>

Thank you for your years of ongoing partnership, and your consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Mercanti', with a stylized, cursive script.

Sarah Mercanti  
Director of Government Relations  
Roundabout Theatre Company

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Trenton Price

**Testimony to Committees on Education and Cultural Affairs re: Arts Education**

*From Trenton Price – Executive Director, Salvadori Center*

*Tuesday, April 8, 2025*

Thank you, Chair Joseph, Chair Rivera, and members of the Committees on Education and Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations. My name is Trenton Price, and I am the Executive Director of the Salvadori Center. I am a former middle school teacher, school leader, and district leader for arts education in the New York City Public Schools before joining Salvadori two years ago.

At Salvadori, we provide STEAM education services – that is STEM plus the A for Arts, and in our case, Architecture – to schools, after-school sites, and NYCHA community centers across the five boroughs focusing on the built environment. For context, last year, Salvadori taught over 12,000 students in 145 schools and NYCHA community centers. Our goal is to make STEAM come alive for students through the built environment, and to foster the soft skills of collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving – just like real-life architects, designers, and engineers.

We are grateful to have the support of the Council through multiple CASA and Digital Inclusion & Literacy grants as well as After School Enrichment and the Speaker's Initiative at numerous NYCHA sites across the City.

I want to thank you all for hosting this joint hearing to put the magnifying glass up to arts education and bring a megaphone to the work of so many who support arts education throughout our City. I and Salvadori underscore the importance of arts and creative education for ALL students. As we say, it starts with the arts!

At Salvadori, we have seen first-hand the impact on investment in arts education. For example, our residencies explore and have kids create community models that reflect their values or monuments that are to important them and their peers. Amplifying student voice is one of the most powerful things creative education can do.

Having worked in arts education for many years, I know it is often one of the first things to get cut when funding gets tight. But to the contrary – schools and cities that KNOW the true value of arts education know that tight times are when we need to double-down on the arts. A recent study with NYU showed that Salvadori elementary students showed increased self-efficacy up to a year after our residency. What could be more important than an individual's belief in their ability to succeed, which impacts motivation, effort, and persistence? This reveals the true importance of arts education, beyond the specifics of the content.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding that was previously funded by federal stimulus dollars
- Ensure every school has a certified arts teachers
- Restore and enhance “Support for Arts Instruction” initiative funding
- Increase and restrict DOE arts funding be spent on the arts
- Center arts education in DYCD programs
- Restore and increase baseline funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs

- Improve data transparency and accountability from NYCDOE about arts education access at each school
- Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions
- Expand CASA and Digital Inclusion & Literacy funding that has remained flat for years

I thank you for facilitating this hearing and for your commitment to supporting the young people in our City. We are grateful to be able to serve New York City's children, and we stand ready to do more. Thank you.



WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF MARTHA NEIGHBORS  
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT  
SNUG HARBOR CULTURAL CENTER & BOTANICAL GARDEN

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL**  
**Committee on Education, Jointly with Committee on**  
**Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup Relations**  
***Oversight Hearing: Ensuring Equity & Access in the Arts***  
**April 8, 2025**

Good morning, Chair Joseph, Chair Rivera, and members of the Committees. My name is Martha Neighbors, and I am Executive Vice President of Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden in Staten Island. I am providing this testimony in support of a proposed new Speaker Initiative, Rooted in Accessibility, in the FY26 City budget, which will enhance the ability of the City's public botanical gardens to provide access to disabled populations and support positive public health outcomes.

Founded in 1977, Snug Harbor is an expansive culture park on Staten Island where arts, nature, education, and history unite to bring dynamic programming, events, and festivals to our diverse community. We welcome 500,000 annual visitors to explore our gardens and grounds, discover a new passion, and engage with culture. Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden is the private non-profit tasked with managing and operating the site on behalf of the City of New York. We are the only free botanical garden in New York City, open 365 days a year from dawn to dusk. City Council funding underwrites our efforts to create a more culturally connected, thriving community in an underserved area of New York City.

There is currently no single city-wide initiative in the budget that addresses New York's commitment to accessible botanical gardens. Snug Harbor has joined with our peer organizations that operate on City-owned property – Brooklyn Botanic Garden, New York Botanical Garden, and Queens Botanical Garden -- to propose a new Speaker Initiative for the FY26 budget. Rooted in Accessibility will support each garden with \$250,000 annually. We will use this funding to increase the number of dedicated staff leading accessibility initiatives, increase dedicated programming, host events for families and seniors, enhance professional development for garden staff, and redesign and improve signage and wayfinding for ADA compliance.

Snug Harbor, BBG, NYBG, and QBG each provide opportunities for people of all abilities to engage with nature through cultural programming. Each of our organizations has a history of serving people with disabilities. We have long-standing partnerships with District 75 to serve public school students with physical, cognitive and/or sensory challenges, and with Title I

schools throughout the five boroughs, serving thousands of New York City public school students each year. In addition, Snug Harbor partners with organizations as varied as City Access New York, GRACE Foundation, Lifestyles for the Disabled, and On Your Mark to host events and provide workforce development opportunities for their clients, serving hundreds of individuals annually. I invite each of you to join us for our seventh annual Beeping Egg Hunt on Wednesday, April 16, starting at 11 am. Offered with City Access New York, the Beeping Egg Hunt is a free fun family day for people of all abilities, the visually impaired, and the blind, serving ages 2-6, 6-14, young adults, and seniors.

We do all of this largely without dedicated support for our accessibility programming. Snug Harbor, BBG, NYBG, and QBG are all members of the Cultural Institutions Group, as such, we each receive an annual allocation through the Department of Cultural Affairs to support operations. Baseline support for culture has not substantially increased in decades. Over the past 15 years, while the City's budget has grown by 89%, support for the Department of Cultural Affairs has increased only 10%. The Agency is stretched thin and understaffed. As a result, support to cultural organizations is delayed and payments are backed up, depriving culture of the funding it needs to do its best work.

The impact of this uncertainty on Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden is instability. We too are understaffed and overstretched, constantly trying to catch up to demands and our own high standards of service. Dedicated support through Rooted in Accessibility will offset expenses related to providing accessibility services and events to our community, provide professional development for existing staff to improve service, and enable one new full-time and one new part-time position in an economically challenged neighborhood.

In her 2024 State of the City address, Speaker Adams referred to culture as one of the "institutional pillars" of New York City. Culture is an economic driver for our City and a lifeline for the families, students, emerging adults, and seniors of all abilities whom Snug Harbor and our peers serve every day. Our sector is vital for attracting tourist dollars and to building sustainable, desirable communities. Arts and culture are essential to quality of life and positive public health outcomes for New York City. Equity in access to arts and culture for people of all abilities is crucial to supporting the mental and physical health of disabled and low-income New Yorkers.

We are grateful to City Council for including our \$75 million baseline request in the FY26 budget. With deep uncertainty surrounding federal funding for culture, education, and the environment, New York City should invest more, not less, in our institutional pillars: culture,

libraries, and parks. The four botanical gardens that operate on City-owned property are each a hybrid of culture and parks, and each of us operate in under-served areas of our City.

We ask you to support our unique role in providing safe, accessible spaces for people of all abilities with a \$1 million annual investment in Rooted in Accessibility.

Thank you for your time.



MARTHA NEIGHBORS  
Executive Vice President  
Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden  
[REDACTED] / [mneighbors@snug-harbor.org](mailto:mneighbors@snug-harbor.org)



## Studio in a School

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Relations

Hon. Rita Joseph and Hon. Carlina Rivera

April 8, 2025

Thank you to Chair Joseph and Chair Rivera and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools. My name is Dave Weiner, and I work Studio in a School in a city-wide visual arts organization.

The mission of is to foster the creative and intellectual development of New York City youth through quality visual arts programs, directed by arts professionals. The organization also collaborates with and develops the ability of those who provide or support arts programming and creative development for youth both in and outside of schools. Each year, we work with over 26,000 students across New York City.

Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Unfortunately, only 31% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. The [term and condition passed by the Council last year](#) revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools) — leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. Furthermore, the combined implications of the Class Size Mandate rollout, the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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 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 to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Thank you for your attention and consideration,

Dave Weiner  
Interim President, Studio NYC



520 Eighth Avenue, Suite 801 | New York, NY 10018  
(212) 912-9770 | [www.tdf.org](http://www.tdf.org)

## Testimony by Ginger Meagher Vice President of Programs for TDF

### Joint Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on Education and Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations

April 10, 2025

### The Arts Belong to All of Us

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to this Joint Oversight Hearing, and for chairing this, Council Members Joseph and Rivera. My name is Ginger Meagher, and I am the VP of Programs for TDF, the nation's largest non-profit service organization dedicated to building and sustaining audiences for live performance. I'm here today to speak in support of setting a baseline budget of 75 million dollars for arts and culture in FY26, and to urge the City Council to support the individuals and organizations that connect New Yorkers to the arts.

TDF is driven by the conviction that the arts belong to all of us, and they make all of us better. Access to the arts is correlated with benefits for individuals and communities, associated with lower rates of depression and loneliness, lower crime rates, and increased civic engagement.

At TDF, we realize those benefits by lowering the barriers to access for all—especially for young people. Each year, TDF School Programs bring over 10,000 public school students from 49 Council Districts to the theatre free of charge, and we supplement tickets to shows with in-class workshops with trained teaching artists or post-show discussions with theatre luminaries. For students with hearing and vision loss, we offer accessible performances, featuring open captioning, ASL interpretation, audio description and touch tours. In 85% of the schools we serve, we are the only providers of performing arts education. We do this to ensure that young people feel welcome to their birthright of NYC theatre and are represented in all their glorious diversity. And we see results – last year, 94% of teachers we worked with observed in their students higher self-esteem and confidence, and a greater ability to empathize with their peers.

Enclosed with this written testimony is a letter we received after a recent student matinee of *The Lion King* in March, part of our Introduction to Theatre and Dance program and TDF Accessibility Program for Students. The performance featured audio description services and a touch tour for young people with vision loss, and the response from this parent who attended with her family demonstrates the profound good that comes when we open the doors of the theatre to everyone.

I want to thank you all for your time, and for the many years of support the City has provided to TDF through the Cultural Development Fund, City Council Initiative funding, and Member-directed funds. This year, we have applied for new funding of \$100,000 for TDF School Programs through **the Speaker's List, Education Programs for Students, and Support for Arts Instruction**. TDF is not eligible for CASA, so City Council initiative funding is critical to our

ability to reach more students, teachers and schools throughout the city. In a time when fear and uncertainty are daily feelings for the students of this city—we can give them tools and ways to express themselves with joy and humanity. We can help them to resist oppression and speak in their authentic voices because art and theatre give us those tools—and make us all better for it.

---

***Letter from the Parent of Participant in TDF Accessibility Program for Students –  
Received March 14, 2025:***

“My 10 year old daughter, 5 year old son and I had the pleasure of attending the matinee of The Lion King on Wednesday the 5th, along with a group of visually impaired students from around the city. We came early for the Touch Tour, where we had the magical experience of seeing some of Julie Taymor's beautiful puppets and costumes up close and touching them, to see them in a different way. The whole day was an experience we will never forget! Saying thank you doesn't even come close to expressing the depth of our appreciation.

My daughter has albinism, which affects eye development in the womb. Every person with albinism has some degree of near-sightedness, even with corrective lenses. My daughter's vision is close to the legally blind threshold--she will never see well enough to be able to obtain a driver's license, for example. Because of her vision, we haven't taken her to the theater as often as I thought we would. I'm an actor and I like to say only half-jokingly that theater is my religion. Most of the time, we can't afford to buy the up close orchestra seats she needs in order to see the show.

My daughter is the only person in her school with a visual disability. She's a confident, fierce kid, but she usually tries to hide the fact that she has a visual impairment. She's in 5th grade and this is the first year that kids have started to notice the difference and make fun of her for it. So, what an incredible experience for her, to be in a room with a bunch of kids who have this in common. You created a much needed sense of community for my daughter through this experience, and I know she will carry it with her throughout her life. I could see already how it boosted her sense of self-confidence that day.

[Her] brother and I also appreciated sharing in this community with her. The Touch Tour helped *us* to see better, too. I definitely appreciated the striking visual elements of the show in a much more specific way during the performance, after seeing them up close and holding them in my hands. What a beautiful sensory experience!

The theater that afternoon was one of the most diverse audiences I've ever seen. And the excitement was electric! It was so beautiful to hear that room full of kids cheering like they were at a rock concert. We all experienced the true magic of theater that day.

Thank you for doing the vital work of diversity, equity and inclusion. I hope more people are able to appreciate what that work actually looks like--children in a room together, experiencing art in a way they never have before. From the bottom of our hearts, our family thanks you and TDF for a most memorable afternoon.”

# THE ARTS BELONG TO ALL OF US.

Since 1967, TDF has been breaking down physical, financial, and invisible barriers to attending the performing arts. With over five decades of experience in audience building, we work in deep collaboration with historically underserved communities, building pathways to transformational arts experiences that build empathy, empower, and lead to healthier and more fulfilling lives.

**11,000**

**High school students** attend FREE theatre education programs in 49 out of 51 City Council Districts. TDF is the sole arts provider in 68% of the schools we serve.



**2,200**

**NYC public school seniors** signed up for a FREE TDF membership through TDF's inaugural Graduation Gift. That's 4% of the Class of 2024!



**2,030**

**Homebound older adults** shared communal experiences watching and discussing recordings of live performances in 4 languages!



**3,000**

**Veterans and active-duty service members** attended the theatre for FREE during Fleet Week and through the year.



**10,000**

**Audience members impacted by autism** attend TDF's "no apology, no judgment" Autism Friendly Performances annually.



**30,000**

**TAP Members** access deeply discounted tickets for accessible seating, audio described, open captioned and ASL interpreted performances.



**"For 15 years TDF has enriched both the emotional and intellectual lives of my students.** When they attend the theatre, they see possibilities and their worlds open up. Not only do they become theatre goers, they learn to think in new ways while still remaining true to themselves. **TDF transforms lives."** – LILY VERO, THEATRE TEACHER, FLUSHING INTERNATIONAL HS

For more information, visit us at [www.tdf.org](http://www.tdf.org) or email Jaime Totti, Deputy Director of Development at [jaimet@tdf.org](mailto:jaimet@tdf.org)

**tdf**





GET CLOSER TO DANCE

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council  
Committee on Cultural Affairs and Committee on Education  
Hon. Carlina Rivera and Hon. Rita Joseph, Co-Chairs  
April 8, 2025

Thank you to Co-Chairs Carlina Rivera and Rita Joseph, and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I am writing to support the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition – calling on our city to prioritize funding for the arts in NYC schools. My name is Heather McCartney, and I am the director of dance education and family programs for The Joyce Theater Foundation, Inc. (The Joyce) located in Chelsea.

Since its opening in 1982, The Joyce has invited students and educators into the theater and has made supporting and promoting the art of dance and choreography, along with the allied arts of music, design and theater, its core mission. In addition to the 155,000+ attendees, each year The Joyce welcomes over 2,500 students to school-time matinees and sends teaching artists to classrooms across the boroughs.

In the last eight years we have been especially proud of the sensory-friendly performances offered to students in D75 schools. Offering neurodivergent students the opportunity to see live dance and have classes with professional dancers and teaching artists has uplifted our city's most underserved and overlooked. This work would not be possible without the consistent support from DCLA and NYC Public Schools. The funding enables subsidizing production costs, artist fees and so much more. With City funding, our newest venue on East 10<sup>th</sup> Street will provide arts experiences for a community that has the lowest rate of certified dance specialists.

Earlier this month, the Martha Graham Dance Company – America's oldest modern dance group – returned for a second year to offer a special D75 performance. Teachers commented on how “engaged” and “responsive” their students were to the concert, and how much it meant for them to see children participate and innovate in ways quite different than classroom instruction. Most of the schools involved do not have a certified arts specialist to work with – The Joyce helps to close that disconnect. We believe arts education should be available to ALL students. Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Require DOE arts funding be spent on the arts**
- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars**
- **Ensure Every School Has a Certified Arts Teachers**
- **Restore and Enhance “Support for Arts Instruction” initiative funding**

Thank you for your attention and consideration,

Heather McCartney  
Director of Dance Education & Family Programs

# The Little Orchestra Society®

DAVID ALAN MILLER, ARTISTIC ADVISOR

## **The Little Orchestra Society Testimony on NYC Council Hearing on Equity and Access to Arts Education Committee on Education Jointly with the Committee on Cultural Affairs**

**Tuesday, April 8, 2025**

**Anthony Ball, Executive Director, Little Orchestra Society**

Thank you Chairs Rivera and Joseph, and Members of the Committees on Cultural Affairs and Libraries, and Education for the opportunity to testify. My name is Anthony Ball and I am the Executive Director of the Little Orchestra Society.

The Little Orchestra Society (L.O.S.) is proud to celebrate its 78<sup>th</sup> year as a part of the New York City cultural landscape, and it is our privilege to reflect on a three-quarter-century-history engaging our residents with the highest quality in music and arts education. The Orchestra made a name for itself launching the careers of great performers and premiering music by composers who have become household names, but in recent decades, we have become especially well-known for our programs focusing on children and families.

Our public-facing L.O.S. KIDS concert series brings together professional musicians performing cherished music of the past—alongside young/living/emerging composers from diverse backgrounds who have their work heard for the very first time; we craft our concerts to be engaging for little ones, including actors, dancers, visual artists, and accomplished young soloists.

Most people we encounter have at least heard of our performances, but in fact, the lesser-known part of our work is actually the *majority* of our work—music education residencies in NYC public elementary schools that focus on the breadth and depth of what arts education can do for young people. Our Musical Connections program (M.C.) is embarking on our 19<sup>th</sup> year of partnerships, where students as young as four years old work with their peers to compose their own new music. Students take inspiration from our live performances in the concert hall and bring that learning back to their classrooms; they work with our professional composers/teaching artists to explore the elements of music and use this newfound language to begin expressing their feelings and ideas. At the heart of our program is creativity, communication, and collaboration, and young people—along with their parents, classroom teachers, administrators, and elected officials—become a community of learners with a common goal and a common voice.

The whole process is transformative, and I struggle to express in words how moving it is to see a student lean forward with anticipation and sit up a little taller right before their music is performed at Celebration Events. Parents and classmates are in attendance, and each student can see and hear how seriously everyone in the room is regarding their work, including the professional musicians who have studied their pieces; they hear their own contributions being shared with the group, and they recognize and respect the work of their peers with whom they have shared this journey. Students come away with a sense of dignity and confidence that their community has recognized their hard work. This is our process, but arts education takes many similar forms, and experiences like this help to make it possible for young children to take their place in the world and become successful and assertive young adults.

That is the power of creativity. We are a community of professional artists, and because the study of art has changed our lives as individuals, we have a distinct awareness of its importance. We at L.O.S. see the impact of arts education nearly every day, and this is why we've built our philosophy and mission around young people—*all young people*—having the ability to participate in high quality programming that is local, relevant, and engaging. We are saddened to hear the latest metrics about the

lack of certified teachers and access to diversified arts programming in schools, especially in under-resourced neighborhoods. This type of environment was true for NYC decades ago, and is the original reason why cultural organizations like L.O.S. created supplemental programs to push-in to public education—to ensure our students had the education they deserve. *And the work continues.*

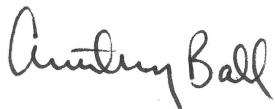
A guiding light has been the New York City Council who have made it a priority for our government to focus on arts education as a non-negotiable right, an integral part of a public education that our families deserve. We applaud Speaker Adams, along with Council Members Rivera and Joseph, who have made sure that that equal access to arts education is always a part of the conversation, front-and-center, as we make our community decisions and allocate our city budgets.

As you may know, demand for high-quality arts education programs far exceeds the resources of school budgets. Small non-profits like L.O.S. partner with the Department of Education to help fill this gap, and as you will hear from us and our sibling organizations at this hearing, we are at capacity.

**The Little Orchestra Society and other organizations have proposed that the City Council consider a special city-wide initiative focused on music education, so that we can more readily offer programming directly to deserving and under-served school partners.** This initiative would sustain and enrich existing programs in an ever-changing post-COVID world, but would also allow us to expand to meet the needs of those still without. As non-profit arts institutions, we are in a unique position to step up and be a part of this solution; we cherish our partnerships, we understand the landscape in public education, we are ready to mobilize, and perhaps most importantly, we are deeply driven to connect with young people so that *they* can have their voices heard, in and through the arts. **Little Orchestra respectfully requests \$50,000 in citywide initiative funding to support our Musical Connections program.**

We thank you for giving us your attention, and we look forward to working with you to bring equal access to a full school curriculum, for all young residents of our great City.

Respectfully Submitted,



Anthony Ball  
Executive Director  
[aball@littleorchestra.org](mailto:aball@littleorchestra.org)



## **New York City Council FY2026 New Initiative Proposal**

### *The New York City Council Three Chords Initiative*

**\$3,000,000**

#### *Rationale:*

Music education has been proven to enhance academic performance while fostering students' social and emotional wellbeing. This new citywide initiative aims to ensure all NYC students and young people have access to music education and its many benefits.

#### **Introduction**

Walk down any block in New York City, and music will fill your ears. It echoes across subway platforms, powers night life venues, and flows through public schools. Music created in New York City has changed the world from Bronx-born hip-hop to iconic Broadway showtunes heard across the globe. New York's deep musical legacy creates a responsibility to ensure that future generations have access to robust music education. Every classroom in New York City can help foster the next Alicia Keys, the next Lin-Manuel Miranda, the next Louis Armstrong, or an entirely new sound and voice we haven't imagined yet.

#### **Positive Impact of Music Education**

Music education has been proven to lead to positive outcomes for students. Music improves academic performance, fosters social emotional learning, promotes cross cultural understanding, and opens students eyes to viable career pathways in the arts.

##### *Improved Academic Outcomes*

Music education has been shown to help students learn more effectively in all subjects, including math, science, reading, and writing (Guhn, Emerson, & Gouzouasis, 2019). Music education supports brain development in young children, particularly in the areas of the brain responsible for sound, language skills, speech and reading comprehension (Habibi, 2022).

In addition, access to music education can lead to increased high school graduation rates and reduced school dropout rates. The National Endowment for the Arts followed more than 22,000 students for 12 years and found that meaningful engagement with arts education leads to students being five times more likely to graduate high school (Brown, 2017).

##### *Social Emotional Learning and Community Building*

Beyond the positive brain development of those who study music, research shows that another benefit is actually boosting overall wellbeing and strengthening connections to the school and community (Ilari & Cho, 2023). Music education can lead to feelings of belonging at school and improved satisfaction with the school environment (Eerola & Eerola, 2014). One study found that low-income children at risk for school problems benefited greatly from robust music education through increased positive emotions and improved emotion regulation (Brown & Sax, 2013). Music can also give students a sense of being able to accomplish one's goals and greater feelings of achievement and opportunity in school. (Eerola & Eerola, 2014) (Catterall, 2007). The arts have also been shown to increase civic engagement among students (Catterall, 2012).

## Cultural Competency

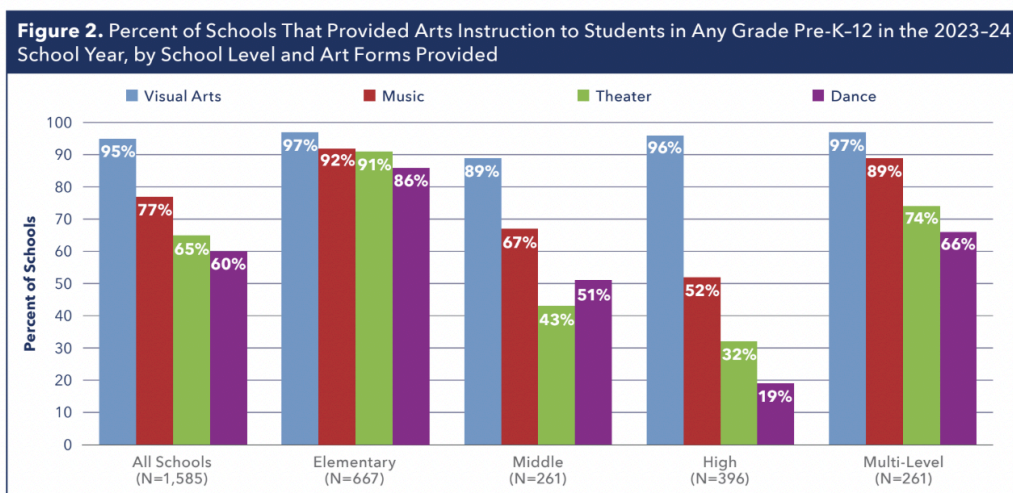
Music education helps to celebrate diverse cultural heritage and promote cross-cultural understanding. Researchers have shown that teaching music in elementary and secondary schools can help break down barriers among various ethnic, racial, cultural, and language groups (Cambell, 2018) Collaborating through music education has also been shown to increase positive interactions and relationships between children (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010)

## Career Pathways

Another benefit of increased music education in school is around workforce development and teaching students about potential career pathways into musical performance, composition, music production, teaching, music therapy, sound engineering, and music technology. According to a report conducted by the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment back in 2017, New York City is one of the world's most influential music ecosystems, supporting nearly 60,000 jobs, accounting for roughly \$5 billion in wages, and generating a total economic output of \$21 billion This same report noted that music-related jobs and wages are growing at an annual rate of 4 and 7 percent outpacing the overall New York City economy, where jobs and wages are growing annually at 3 and 5 percent, respectively.

## State of Music Education In NYC Schools

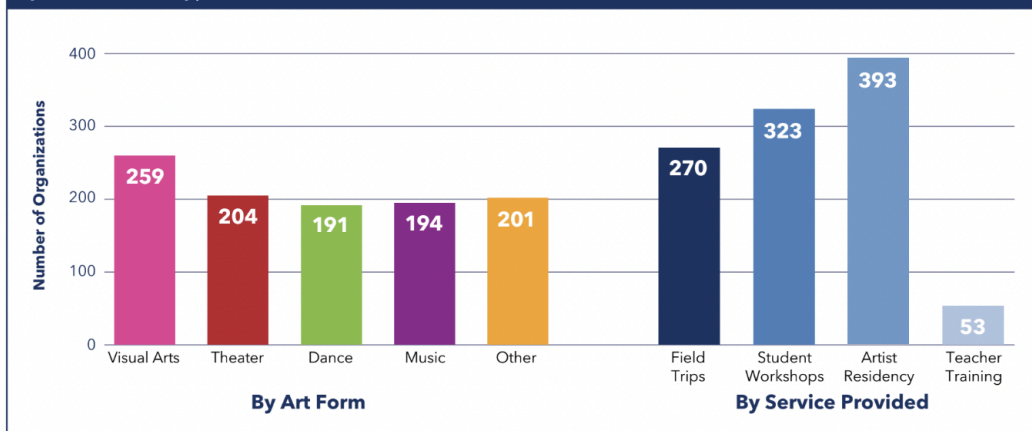
In an annual report on arts instruction on K-12 schools on arts instruction in individual schools for the 2023-2024 school year roughly 23% of schools do not offer music to any grade (358 schools out of the 1,585 included in the report). The figure below demonstrates how this number increases for both middle and high schools. In this same report, only 741 out of 1,585 schools report having a full time or part time music teacher.



Source: 2023-24 Annual Arts Education Survey and STARS Data

Our arts partners are critical to ensure that our students have access to diverse forms of music education and learn various types of music. In the 2023-2024 school year, NYC Public Schools partnered with 194 cultural arts organizations that provided music education services.

**Figure 10.** Number of Cultural Arts Organizations That Partnered with Responding Schools in 2023-24, by Art Form and Types of Services Provided\*



Source: 2023-24 Annual Arts Education Survey

\*Note that cultural arts organizations providing multiple services may be counted more than once.

- [Arts Education Report - NYC Council - Term and Condition](#)
- [2023-2024 Annual Arts in Schools Report](#)

## Designation Proposal

The new citywide initiative, the Three Chords Initiative, will give every child access to music education and its related benefits by supporting school arts partners and integrating music instruction into youth programs. The \$3 million initiative should be designated as follows:

### Arts Partners

**\$50,000 - \$250,000**

Music education providers from the City's cultural sector will offer school day and afterschool music instruction and education to NYC students and young people.

### DYCD Summer and After School Music Partners

**\$1,175,000**

New York City's afterschool and summer programs for youth recognize the importance of the arts and strive to connect participants to enriching learning experiences in the arts. With individual awards of \$25,000 for after school and summer DYCD programs, this initiative will extend arts opportunities to young people outside of school times.

*Testimony to the*  
**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations**

**Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts**  
Tuesday, April 8, 2025

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Dear Members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup Relations:

Founded in 1804, The New York Historical conveys the stories of the city and nation's diverse populations, expanding our understanding of who we are as Americans and how we came to be. Ever-rising to the challenge of bringing little or unknown histories to light, The New York Historical's mission is to collect, preserve, and interpret, for the broadest possible public, material relevant to U.S. history, and serve as an accessible community resource for audiences underrepresented in cultural institutions.

**K-12 Education Programs**

Education is the cornerstone of our mission, and each year, The New York Historical delivers direct services to 200,000 K-12 students and teachers through quality education programming that enhances critical thinking, literacy, and creative problem-solving, while encouraging knowledge of U.S. history, appreciation for cultural diversity, and responsible civic engagement. Leveraging our expansive American history collections and our object-based learning pedagogy, our programming is designed to supplement content learned in classrooms, filling gaps in traditional history curricula by providing diverse, untold American history narratives, enabling students to see themselves in our nation's shared past.

Field trip programs and social studies enrichment are offered during school time. Field trips bring school groups to the Museum to explore our galleries while being led by experienced Museum Educators. Field trip offerings cover both our temporary exhibitions and our permanent installations, and cover topics such as "Life in New Amsterdam," "Slavery in New York," and "New York and the Civil War." Social studies enrichment programs dispatch our Museum Educators to classrooms around the five boroughs for once-a-week sessions on a certain topic. Equipped with replica historical objects, paintings, and documents, these Museum Educators illuminate the stories of our collective past while developing students' critical and historical thinking skills and expanding their understanding of the complicated story of this nation.

Outside of school hours, high school students can participate in our Student Historian internship program and our Digital Humanities courses. Student Historian interns conduct research in our galleries to create public-facing digital projects to complement our exhibitions. Over the course of the academic year or the summer, interns meet with professional staff to learn about the Museum, Library, digital humanities, and history fields, working collaboratively with fellow students to develop their historical thinking, communication, and digital media skills. This year, the internship projects focus on our exhibition *Our Composite Nation: Frederick Douglass'*



*America*. All interns receive a \$700 stipend upon successful completion of the internship, and participation in this program can be used to fulfill the extracurricular requirement for the NYSED Seal of Civic Readiness. High school students who aren't yet ready to commit to a long-term internship can participate in our Digital Humanities courses, which center the student-led creation of digital projects, including podcasts, websites, and digital games.

For educators, The New York Historical offers teacher professional development opportunities that empower teachers to use our collections to spark curiosity and creativity, promote cultural understanding, and foster a civic-minded citizenry. Our programs for teachers not only provide Continuing Teacher and Leader Education (CTLE) credits required for educators in New York State, but also surround teachers with a broad network of colleagues and collaborators. Our freely accessible digital resources provide further support for teachers in the form of digital curricula and digital reproductions of objects in our collections. Our flagship digital curriculum [Women & the American Story](#), for example, spans the full survey of American history from 1492 to 2001 while centering the perspectives and stories of women.

### **Resolution to Recognize May 10 as Chinese American Railroad Workers Memorial Day**

The New York Historical is pleased to support the Council's resolution to recognize May 10 annually as Chinese American Railroad Workers Memorial Day in New York City. The New York Historical aims to tell the American story in ways that are reflective of the vibrant cultural fabric of this City, and our groundbreaking 2014 exhibition *Chinese American: Exclusion/Inclusion* explores the centuries-long history of trade and immigration between China and the United States—a history that involved New York from its very beginnings—raising the question “What does it mean to be an American?” The exhibit narrative extends from the late eighteenth century to the present and includes all regions of the country, thus interpreting the Chinese American saga as a key part of American history. Included in this history are the Chinese American railroad workers whose civil disobedience and legal campaigns to oppose exclusion and unequal treatment were integral to the American story. More recently, scholarship from this exhibition has been used in programming around our Jerni Collection of Toys and Trains, the largest and most significant collection of model trains and set pieces ever assembled. Dating from 1850 to 1940, the Collection serves as a vivid microcosm of the 19th and 20th centuries, documenting the role of Chinese Americans who built the railroads while promoting the rights of future Americans. The Collection will soon be displayed in a permanent exhibition in our DiMenna Children's History Museum, serving as a critical resource for the teaching of westward expansion, immigration, and industrialization, while charting the railroad's transformation of American history and culture, uniting the nation geographically and bringing into our collective consciousness people of different racial backgrounds and national and ethnic origins.

### **Conclusion**

Ensuring that New Yorkers of all ages find equity and access to the arts is fundamentally aligned with our institutional mission, and The New York Historical remains grateful for the City's investment in our work. Funding from the City Council and the Department of Cultural Affairs ensure that our programs have a sustainable future, and we thank you and your fellow City Council Members for your exceptional service.



Written Testimony regarding  
Resolution recognizing May 10 annually as Chinese American Railroad Workers Memorial Day  
in New York City

RESOLUTION NUMBER T2025-3318

April 8, 2025

Prepared by Vivian Louie, Ph.D  
Professor of Urban Policy and Planning  
Past Director of Asian American Studies (2018-2024)  
Hunter College (City University of New York)

I write in enthusiastic and grateful support of a resolution that would recognize May 10 “annually as Chinese American Railroad Workers Memorial Day in New York City.” Thank you to the NYC City Council Members, who sponsor this resolution: Susan Zhuang, Robert F. Holden, Kamillah Hanks, Shekar Krishnan, Sandra Ung, Julie Won, Farah N. Louis, Alexa Avilés, Eric Dinowitz, Shahana K. Hanif. And to the entire City Council for its consideration. I write to provide context for why this resolution is so needed. In addition to my professional roles, I write as a New Yorker.

Resolution Number T2025-3318: Recognizing a Crucial Part of U.S. History

Thousands of Chinese immigrant male workers were pivotal to a key accomplishment of our nation’s industrialization – the transcontinental railroad. As stated in the resolution, Chinese Americans comprised 80 percent of the workforce of the Central Pacific Railroad Company; they were assigned “the most difficult, dangerous jobs and were paid lower wages than other railroad workers,” and provided worse housing; their jobs included blasting tunnels through granite. Building the infrastructure that would connect the Eastern and Western parts of our nation by rail was perilous work, and Chinese railroad workers played a crucial and unsung role.

In Gordon H. Chang’s<sup>1</sup> foundational book, the author writes about the figures named in the resolution, who had such important roles in the events and stories that unfolded. This includes entrepreneur Asa Whitney, Pres. Abraham Lincoln, engineer Theodore Judah and the corps of Chinese workers for the Central Pacific Railroad Company, who actually built the

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Ghosts of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Harper Collins, 2019).

railroad, starting in Northern California, toiling eastward to Utah. The workers pushed back against their ill treatment, striking in June 1867, then the “largest organized labor strike in the United States.”<sup>2</sup> But so many of these stories have been untold, and the Chinese American contributions long unrecognized.

The erasure from the historical record started even as the historic feat was celebrated. As I wrote in a chapter, co authored with Christopher M. Kwok<sup>3</sup>:

These Chinese American railway workers were by and large excluded from the official 1869 “Golden Spike” photo at Promontory Summit, Utah, commemorating the connection of the railroad’s eastern and western lines, their historic contributions literally made invisible.

The late Corky Lee decided to redress this wrong. Starting in 2014, Lee, the acclaimed unofficial Asian American photographer laureate, gathered Chinese Americans to Promontory Summit, Utah for their *own* iconic photo.<sup>4</sup> Invisible, they would no longer be. Just this year, Russell N. Low,<sup>5</sup> a physician, delved into his family’s past in his illustrated book, which tells the story of his

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<sup>2</sup> National Park Service. Chinese Labor and the Iron Road.

<sup>3</sup> Vivian Louie and Chris M. Kwok, “An Overview of Asian American and Pacific Islander History,” pages 12-21 in *Hidden Voices: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in United States History* (New York: New York City Department of Education, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Gordon H. Chang, “The Railroad in the Chinese American Imagination,” pp 262-263 in Chee Wang Ng and Mae Ngai (eds.), *Corky Lee’s Asian America: Fifty Years of Photographic Justice* (New York: Penguin Random House).

<sup>5</sup> Russell N. Low, *The Iron Road and the Steam-Breathing Dragon (Three Coins)* (Gum Saan Journeys Publishing, 2025).

great grandfather and the ancestor's brother, both Chinese railroad workers. In the process, the book, "celebrates all of the Chinese men whose hard work forever changed America."

## **The Key Role of NYC**

From 1869 onward, the Chinese workers who had built the nation's first transcontinental railroad, their descendants and compatriots faced harsh exclusion and violence that propelled them eastward in the U.S., in search of safety. NYC's Chinatown in Manhattan (and many others) were born of this literal movement of people seeking places, where they could take stock and safely build lives.<sup>6</sup> The Chinese workers found that their labor was welcomed in the United States by business owners, but their cultures and their families were not, and soon enough, other workers wanted them out, including a number of American labor unions. The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882),<sup>7</sup> focusing on laborers from China, was the first federal law to restrict immigration, but not the last. Over time, exclusion extended to other Asians. Asians in the United States were also excluded from key rights here, such as the right to join unions, become professionally licensed, testify in court, own land, marry local women or bring over wives from the homeland. It was not until 1952 that all foreign-born Asians were finally eligible for naturalized citizenship. The pandemic of hate that targeted Americans of East Asian descent, particularly Chinese Americans, during COVID-19, has a long history and was another grim commonality that Americans descended from South, Southeast and East Asia share.

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<sup>6</sup> See Ava Chin, *Mott Street: A Chinese American Family's Story of Exclusion and Homecoming* (New York: Penguin Press, 2023); Peter Kwong and Dušanka Mišćević, *Chinese America: The Untold Story of America's Oldest New Community* (New York: The New Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

As the resolution points out, New York City continues to have a vibrant and growing Chinese American population across its five boroughs.<sup>8</sup> They are part of Asian American New Yorkers, who taken together, make up nearly 1 in 5 New York City residents. They have different backgrounds and histories here, but they, along with all New Yorkers, should know this history. We should know of the varied individuals and groups who built America as a nation and the struggles and successes that America has had with honoring these contributions. A key endeavor along these lines is the NYC's *Hidden Voices*<sup>9</sup> project of instructional/resource guides, the brainchild of the NYC Department of Education, led by the Department of Social Studies & Civics. The Hidden Voices project examines the contributions of underrepresented individuals and groups throughout history. Its 2023 volume<sup>10</sup> documents the contributions of the Chinese railroad workers, along with many Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

As I read through the City Council notes in writing this testimony, I found even more reason to be proud of our city, as I read about Res. No. 741 that would honor the life and legacy of the legendary Judith Jamison, dancer, choreographer, and artistic director of the amazing Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Thank you to Council Members Carlina Rivera, Nantasha Williams, Gale Brewer, Farah Louis and Chris Banks for sponsoring Res. No. 741. There is something truly special about our city and our city government that these two resolutions are paired and presented to the Committee on Education and the Committee on

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<sup>8</sup> Vivian Louie, *Compelled To Excel: Immigration, Education and Opportunity Among Chinese Americans* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004); Tarry Hum, *Making a Global Immigrant Neighborhood: Brooklyn's Sunset Park* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> As the website states: "The *Hidden Voices* project is a product of collaboration between the NYC DOE, scholars, institutions, and educators." See <https://sites.google.com/schools.nyc.gov/social-studies-and-civics/resources/hidden-voices>

<sup>10</sup> *Hidden Voices: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in United States History* (New York City: NYC Department of Education, 2023 June). I was a lead scholar on this volume, along with Linh An and Chris M. Kwok, both of Hunter College, and Khyati Joshi, of Fairleigh Dickinson.

Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations. One on the tens of thousands of Chinese American railroad workers, whose prowess literally powered our nation's growth at a critical stage of industrial development, in the face of many challenges, and one on the prowess of an African American artistic visionary and dance phenomenon, who transformed dance in America. As a New Yorker, I am grateful and hope that more such commemorations are forthcoming.

Good morning Chair Rivera, Chair Joseph, and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and Intergroup Relations and Committee on Education. My name is Loyi Malu, and I am the Director of Student Services, Inclusion and Engagement at Third Street Music School Settlement. Third Street is a nonprofit community music school that is headquartered in the East Village and which provides onsite and offsite music and dance education programs to over 6,000 students annually. I'm testifying today to call on our city to prioritize FY26 funding for arts education in NYC schools and communities.

The arts are a core component of a well-rounded 21st century education. Arts education programs provide students with opportunities for growth and learning that complement their academic studies, and there is overwhelming evidence that participation in arts instruction can positively impact the trajectory of a student's life. Despite the numerous benefits, access to arts education for New York City youth remains inequitable, with repeated funding cuts threatening the vitality and sustainability of arts education programs across the five boroughs.

Public schools serving lower income communities are historically the most likely to face funding shortages. They tend to have fewer partnerships with cultural organizations, and their students earn on average 25-30 percent fewer arts credits. Meanwhile, it is lower income students who stand to benefit the most from consistent access to arts instruction. Studies continuously show that students of lower socioeconomic status with high arts participation have lower dropout rates; score higher in math and English language arts; and are three times more likely to graduate college than their peers who are not enrolled in arts programs.

Third Street is one of hundreds of cultural organizations bringing arts education programs into NYC public schools and communities. As only 3% of the NYC Public Schools budget is allocated to arts education, nearly 30% of NYC public schools must rely on cultural organizations like ours to fund and deliver their arts programs. Third Street's Partners program is at the heart of our work to remove barriers to arts education. As one of Third Street's core program areas, Partners sends professional teaching artists into public schools and public housing community centers in all five boroughs to provide exceptional in-school and afterschool music and dance education programs for 3K-12th grade students. Third Street maintains a vast network of 35 schools and community partnerships--some of which we have partnered with for going on 30 years--and through these programs we reach over 4,000 students each year with arts education programs designed to facilitate social-emotional learning, encourage peer collaboration, and boost community engagement.

I oversee Third Street's partnerships with five public housing and community centers in Manhattan and Brooklyn, where our arts education programs have a deep impact on students in these communities. Third Street partners with University Settlement to deliver African Percussion, Chorus, Dance, DJing, General Music, Music Production, and Rock Band programs at these sites, reaching nearly 200 students with afterschool arts programs in a safe and supportive environment. Over 95% of students that Third Street serves through these five partnerships live below the poverty line, making Third Street's programs all the more critical.

Arts education is essential to a young person's development, equipping them with the skillset they need to succeed in high school, college, and beyond. Third Street has requested \$250,000 from City Council this year to support and grow its essential education programs, and I implore the Council to invest in New York City's youth and ensure that students of all backgrounds can access invaluable arts learning opportunities and their innumerable benefits. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Loyi Malu, Director of Student Services, Inclusion and Engagement  
Third Street Music School Settlement

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Leslie Platt Zolov   Laurie Basloe   Karen Curlee  
Bharat Didwania   Gabriel Gomez   Laura Patinkin Urken

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Education, Jointly with the  
Committee on Cultural Affairs,

Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair and Hon. Carlina Rivera, Chair

Hearing: Joint Oversight Hearing on Arts Education

April 8, 2025

Thank you to Hon. Rita Joseph, Hon. Carlina Rivera and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition — calling on our city to prioritize transparency and funding for arts in NYC schools. My name is Katie Palmer and I am the Executive Director of Together in Dance, based in Queens.

Together in Dance's mission is to use Dance and Musical Theater to empower individuals to use their creativity and work collaboratively to connect to the world around them. We prioritize using a Trauma-Aware approach in our arts work. Through centering relationships, creativity, and collaboration Together in Dance aims to disrupt cycles that perpetuate trauma and facilitate in our participants more adaptive responses to problem-solving, encouraging them to rely on trust, curiosity, and compassion. I am grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony on how the red tape and bureaucracy of New York City is denying thousands of students the arts education that can help them develop resiliency, belonging, and confidence.

Together in Dance, like many of my peer organizations, was caught in a contract extension spiral of doom. Our programming was completely halted for 5 months due to a small technical process that is completely opaque with no timeline communicated. While that massive delay was happening, Together in Dance Teaching Artists were denied thousands of dollars of expected income and most devastatingly, 2,000 students were not able to have life-affirming access to the arts.

Together in Dance has even lost partnerships due to the lack of transparency around funding. PS 242 in Flushing, Queens has been a partner of Together in Dance for 8 years. Every year we served all 285 students grades Pre-K through 3rd as their only dance education during their elementary school careers. This year, PS 242 did not receive the grant they rely on every year for funding. There was no explanation why this funding was denied.

Transparency in how New York City allocates resources is critical to Together in Dance's success. The students of New York City deserve transparency in the Department of Education's budget and



how arts education money is spent. I am thankful the City Council is conducting this hearing today and am hopeful we will start to get some answers. Our students' futures, and the future of New York City, depends on it.

Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Unfortunately, only 31% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. The [\*term and condition passed by the Council last year\*](#) revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools) — leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. Furthermore, the combined implications of the Class Size Mandate rollout, the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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 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 to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.

- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Thank you for your attention and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie B. Palmer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Katie" and last name "Palmer" clearly legible.

Katie Palmer

Executive Director, Together in Dance

*I would also like to uplift the message of Coalition for Equitable Education Funding, as it is exactly in line with this call.*

**Coalition for Equitable Education Funding:** Last June, the Mayor and City Council baselined many of the important education programs that were at risk due to expiring federal or city funds, providing long-term funding. However, the City continued other initiatives for one year only—meaning the funding will expire at the end of June unless City leaders act to extend funding in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

The programs at risk of being rolled back or eliminated as soon as July 2025 are currently benefiting tens of thousands of NYC students and their families; they include 3-K, preschool special education classes, community schools, restorative justice, the Mental Health Continuum, and more. We urge Mayor Adams to baseline these programs in the FY26 Executive Budget and to make additional investments that are needed to support students, with a focus on those who have the greatest needs.

Resources: [FY 2026 – CEEF Budget Agenda](#) // [Response to Release of Preliminary Budget](#)



## **Testimony Before the NYC Council Committees on Education and Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations Re: Intro 1125**

April 8, 2025

Thank you so much to Speaker Adams, Chairs Joseph and Rivera, and all the committee members for the opportunity to speak on Intro 1125. My name is Lauren Comito. I'm a librarian here in NYC and the Executive Director of Urban Librarians Unite, a 501(c)(3) professional organization based in Brooklyn that supports urban library workers across the United States.

If you've ever tried to find a book on a specific topic at a public library while an entire third-grade class is researching the same thing, you know how impossible it can be. What you really need at that moment is a school librarian.

As a public librarian, I am fully and completely unqualified to do the work of a school librarian. I'm a very good public librarian—but school librarians are something special. I don't think I've ever seen one sit still. They serve the entire school community, supporting the research and reading needs of every teacher and student in line with an ever-changing curriculum.

The lack of school librarians creates a resource gap that the public library cannot fill.

School librarians are vital to a functioning education system—one that teaches children to think independently and learn how to grow on their own. Without them, we graduate students who don't know how to cite sources or use an index, who can't find reliable information to support their lives, or evaluate the information they do find.

We end up with adults who, when they need to make a résumé, can't judge whether the website they're using is trustworthy—and who, after creating their résumé, are asked to pay \$12 to download it and must start over. I've seen all of these situations in the public library, and they don't need to happen.

The first step in addressing the school librarian shortage is determining the true extent of the issue. I urge you to support Intro 1125 and require the Department of Education to provide the public with the information they deserve about the state and effectiveness of our education system.



## **Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)**

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Education

Hon. Rita Joseph, Chair

April 8, 2025

Thank you to Chair Rita Joseph and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the *It Starts with the Arts* coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools.

My name is Tara Geer and I am the Director of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), a nonprofit arts education organization that works with schools, museums and Universities around the world. I am also an artist, have taught in the Art & Art Education program at Teachers College, Columbia University for 12 years, and have spent my life teaching art in NYC classrooms and to NYC art teachers.

Backed by cognitive research, at VTS we train teachers to facilitate open discussions about art. For nearly four decades, we offer educators the skills to lead student-driven conversations starting with three simple questions: *What's going on here? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can you find?* The practice was originally designed in the 1990s to help museums widen their audience, but classroom teachers quickly shared their excitement about what they saw students learning. Over 40 years of research, and approximately 100 studies, make clear that students who do VTS regularly for 1-2 years improve thinking, reasoning, observation, communication, collaboration and visual literacy. Over 30 medical schools, including Harvard, now have med students doing VTS to improve their medical competency and ability to understand visual information. VTS is now in use in thousands of schools and museums worldwide. From pre-K to medical school, discussing art with a trained VTS facilitator, strengthens both academic and social-emotional skills across diverse populations.

Cave paintings show us that humans have been communicating visually for over 50,000 years. In contrast we have been reading and writing for 4,000. Yet we rarely teach students how to interpret visual information. This means we are not preparing them for the world in which we now live.

City funding is essential to ensuring equitable access to high-quality arts learning experiences like VTS in New York City's public schools. Most nonprofit arts organizations, and teaching artists do this work out of love and mission, and do so on a razor thin financial margin. The loss or delay of funding directly impacts our ability to train teachers, collaborate with partner schools, and support students—especially those in under-resourced communities. When budgets are uncertain, programs are delayed, training cohorts shrink, and schools most in need are left without the tools and support they need to deliver engaging and transformative education to their then silenced students.

We know that consistent VTS programming supports student growth. In a recent study of more than 700 Boston Public School students, those who participated in VTS demonstrated measurable gains in social-emotional leaning, reasoning, and curiosity. Other research has shown improvements in language and math test scores, respectful debate, tolerance for ambiguity, citing evidence,



observational accuracy, vocabulary (especially for multilingual learners), and writing -among other skills. The skills practiced and mastered in VTS art discussions transfer to other subject areas - which is why medical schools have their first-years discussing art. These impacts are particularly pronounced for students who are often underserved: those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, Multi-language learners, and students who typically struggle to engage.

VTS is just one piece of the puzzle, though. Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Yet only 31% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. The term and condition passed by the Council last year revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools)—leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. Furthermore, the combined implications of the Class Size Mandate rollout, the Governor’s proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M):** Shift from temporary restorations to sustainable, annual allocations for arts education alongside early childhood, community schools, teacher recruitment, and other critical programs.
- **Ensure Every School Has a Certified Arts Teacher (\$39.8M):** Close the equity gap for at least 379 schools by investing in certified arts educators and supporting a strong pipeline through supplemental certification programs.
- **Restore and Enhance “Support for Arts Instruction” initiative funding (\$6M):** Increase funding from \$4M to \$6M to meet demand across the city.
- **Require DOE arts funding be spent on the arts (\$12.5M):** Boost per-student allocation to \$100 and ensure it is used for arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Expand support for arts education in Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding and a one-time \$45M to sustain and grow cultural access.
- **Improve data transparency:** Compel NYC Public Schools to provide school-by-school breakdowns of the state of arts education.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Prevent service gaps by ensuring accountability and efficiency in agency operations.

Thank you for your attention and continued investment in the future of our students and our city.

Sincerely,

Tara Geer, Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)

tgeer@vtshome.org



# WHITNEY

Whitney Museum  
of American Art

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## **Testimony to the NYC Committees on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations and Committee on Education oversight hearing on ensuring equity and access in the arts.**

April 8, 2025

Thank you, Chair Rivera, Chair Joseph and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to speak about the Whitney Museum of American Art's work providing arts education in New York City schools.

I am Araya Henry, Manager of K-12 Initiatives and Youth Learning at the Whitney. I lead a team that runs the Museum's education work serving the youth. These programs include our longstanding teen program 'Youth Insights,' our guided school visits, which are free for NYC public schools, online lessons, school partnership programs, and a year-long teacher training program, Teacher Exchange.

Building on the idea of the Museum as an extension of the classroom, our K-12 initiatives use works of art in the Whitney's collection and our special exhibitions as the core for teaching, learning, enhancing curriculum, encouraging innovative classroom practices and forming creative partnerships with schools. These programs are designed to facilitate in-depth exploration of works to create a space for dialogue, enhancing visual literacy and critical thinking in schools. All programs address New York State Learning Standards and focus on school curriculum areas including art, English language arts, social studies and technology. Today I am here to speak about a school partnership program and spotlight our collaboration with Gotham Professional Arts Academy located in Bed-Stuy Brooklyn.

The Whitney is committed to creating in-depth, long-term partnerships with a small group of New York City schools in order to foster a love for art and familiarity with the institution among the students and teachers. The partnership schools also serve as sites for research, where the impact of arts education on student learning can be evaluated.

Museum educators from the Whitney work closely with teachers from partnership schools to design and implement multi-session programs that meet the specific needs of their curriculum. Programs include curriculum-planning sessions with the classroom teachers, multi-part programs led by a Whitney Educator, special artist-led programs, Guided Visits at the Whitney, parent tours or friends and family events, and professional development workshops for school staff and classroom teachers. Additionally, each school sends a teacher to participate in a yearlong professional development program, Teacher Exchange.

Gotham Professional Arts Academy is a public Title 1 high school serving 203 students located in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, focused on the arts and arts-related professions. Students collaborate on creative projects like performances, art exhibits, poetry slams and publications, and each semester begins with a two-week intensive project. Gotham Academy has been a Whitney partnership school since 2008.

During our last full fiscal year, which runs July 1 – June 30, we served the Gotham school community over 460 touchpoints including:

- 8 in-class visits, producing 144 student touchpoints
- Special artist events, with 26 student touchpoints
- 6 teacher touchpoints
- We served 48 family members
- One Gotham participant in the Whitney's Youth Insights program
- 11 In-person guided visits, with 235 student touchpoints

# WHITNEY



In the fall, Gotham's lead educator, Jeannette Rodriguez-Pineda, led a series of in-class and in-person visits with Gotham's ninth, tenth and eleventh grade visual arts and photography students. Focusing on the Whitney exhibitions *Henry Taylor: B Side* and *Inheritance*, students followed themes of inheritance and culture in both exhibitions. For example, after reading the poem "Affirmations" by Assata Shakur, students created collage works, remixing symbols and semiotics to create visual poems.

In the spring, Jeannette worked with eleventh grade art criticism students for their Performance-Based Assessment Tasks in connection with the 2024 Biennial. This process included working with students at the Museum over six sessions and culminated in student presentations during Gotham's Friends and Family Night at the Whitney. Students selected works of art from the Whitney Biennial, our signature exhibition series that explores the latest ideas in contemporary American art, to engage in further research, developing questions, and compiling contextual information in the model of inquiry-based teaching.

The Whitney recognizes the critical needs that many schools face, including a shortage of arts educators, limited access to high-quality resources, and a lack of tailored arts programming that meets the unique needs of diverse student populations. The Museum believes that every student deserves access to the transformative power of the arts, regardless of their school's location or available resources. This spring, we are proud to pilot a new model of partnership with ELLIS Prep Academy, a transfer school in the Bronx serving newly arrived immigrant students. In response to the school's specific needs, we have designed a flexible, in-depth program that brings teaching artists directly into classrooms, creating opportunities for students to engage with contemporary art in ways that support their language development and academic success. Programs like this are only possible with continued investment and resource support. Through partnerships like this, the Whitney demonstrates how cultural institutions can play a critical role in bridging gaps in arts education and supporting New York City's broader educational goals.

Investment in arts education is an investment in the future health and wellbeing of our City. The Whitney's school partnership programs have a profound impact on participating students. Art education raises academic performance, attendance and graduation rates. Engaging with the arts increases student's socioemotional learning, enhancing compassion for others, the ability to make decisions, experiment and possess self-confidence.

Thank you to members of the Committee for holding a hearing on this topic and for exploring ways to supporting arts education in schools.

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For more information contact:

Jane Carey, Director of Government + Community Affairs

[Jane\\_carey@whitney.org](mailto:Jane_carey@whitney.org)

301-775-9956 (mobile)

April 8, 2025

Dear City Council Members,

Thank you for inviting me and my fellow educators to testify today.

My name is Dr. Tom Zlabinger. I am a tenured Associate Professor at York College / CUNY, where I teach popular music performance. I also currently serve as the President of the Music Educators Association of New York City. But I come to you today first and foremost as an ethnomusicologist.

You may not be familiar with the word, but an ethnomusicologist is an anthropologist that studies musicians and music making. We are interested in where, when, how, and why music is made. In addition, we are very interested in who makes music, since it is the music makers who are at the heart of music. We must never forget that without musicians, there would be no music. And without music educators, there would be no musicians.

So, as a good ethnomusicologist, I must remind everyone here today that music is NOT a universal language, because music does not mean the same thing to all people. Rather, music is a universal PRACTICE. People all over the planet make music. Therefore, music is more than a thing. Music is a verb. Music is something we do.

When we music, we cooperate.

When we music, we celebrate.

When we music, we innovate.

When we music, we educate.

When we music, we facilitate.

When we music, we illuminate.

When we music, we appreciate.

When we music, we activate.

When we music, we cultivate.

When we music, we stimulate.

When we music, we participate.

When we music, we rejuvenate.



When we music, we elevate.  
When we music, we motivate.  
When we music, we accelerate.  
When we music, we radiate.

Please continue to invest and support the music makers and their educators. Help ensure that every K-12 student has access to quality music education, so every child in New York City can reap the joys and rewards of making music.

Thank you for your time and attention,  
Dr. Tom Zlabinger  
Associate Professor of Music  
York College / CUNY  
94-20 Guy R. Brewer Blvd.  
Jamaica, NY 11451  
tzlabinger@york.cuny.edu



April 8, 2025

Dear City Council,

My name is Kenneth Keng, Program Manager at **iOye! Group**, a Bushwick-based creative incubator for artists, students, and community members of all ages, both local and immigrant to New York City. We present festivals, productions, and education programs that reflect the concerns and experiences of our community. Since 2012, we have been providing free workshops for youth and adults in Bushwick. Even as our community has faced rampant gentrification over the past 13 years, we remain steadfast in our commitment to support Bushwick's Black and Latine communities by using art to engage, educate, and inspire.

I oversee a program called Shake on the Block (SOTB), which serves middle school students in Bushwick, Brooklyn and Ridgewood, Queens. SOTB is a free youth Shakespeare program that centers creativity and builds theater-making skills. Students adapt Shakespeare's plays using modern English and slang while developing skills in scene analysis, playwriting, acting, production, tech, and costume design. Over 8 weeks, they produce a public performance to share with their community and families. Workshops are offered in the Spring and Summer, serving low-income middle school and high school students in Brooklyn. Since 2015, the program has served hundreds of students in our community.

**Some of the biggest challenges in implementing this program have been:**

**First**, difficulty in finding good venues to hold the workshops. I have experienced both benign neglect and outright disdain from those who own spaces we have attempted to hold classes in, and this is reflected in either poor conditions of the rooms or overly strict restrictions in the usage thereof.

**Second**, getting the word out. Often, parents and prospective students are in communities where it is most difficult for us to get the information about the program out to. Once they are made aware of the program, they are usually eager to participate.

**Third**, committed institutional support. When we do work with larger government run institutions and have larger, regular class sizes, the students are often called to do other activities during our assigned class time, often without prior notice, deprioritizing our program. Yet, our program's content directly supports Language Arts learning outcomes, so this is a great disservice to students' progress.

**We ask that the City Council help address these issues by allocating more funding for the following:**

1. **Space** – Safe and clean spaces in each neighborhood for arts organizations to offer free arts education programs after school. These should be spaces that can be used by multiple organizations and can serve that particular school district.
2. **Outreach Support** – Dedicated marketing and outreach funding and resources so we can reach parents and families. This can also take the form of capacity building workshops, shared resources, databases, or other ways to help us reach parents.
3. **Demanding that the Department of Education prioritize arts education programs** – Arts programs help are proven to help students succeed in school and support learning outcomes in language arts, social emotional learning, and more. Yet, we have to constantly advocate for our program's value. The DOE and the City have the data and can support us more.

With the support of the City, we can surpass these challenges and improve learning outcomes for New York City's youth.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Keng  
Program Manager  
¡Oye! Group

**Testimony to the New York City Council  
Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations  
Committee on Education  
Oversight - Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts  
Tuesday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
The 92nd Street Y, New York**

Thank you to the New York City Council, Chairs Carlina Rivera and Rita Joseph and members of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations and the Committee on Education for the opportunity to share testimony on ensuring equity and access in the arts. My name is Ariel Savransky and I am the Director of Government and Community Relations at The 92nd Street Y, New York (92NY), a nonprofit cultural and community center in Manhattan.

Since 92NY's founding more than 150 years ago, we have offered services for children, families and individuals. Over 700,000 people of diverse racial, religious, ethnic, and economic backgrounds come each year to enjoy and create the arts and literature, to engage their minds through lectures and classes, and to exercise their bodies. Through a wide array of educational programs, community outreach initiatives, and affordable performances, 92NY strives to make the arts accessible to individuals of all ages, socio-economic statuses, and cultural identities. By offering scholarships, subsidies, and opportunities for NYC public school students to attend events at 92NY, we ensure that all people can have these experiences. Whether through collaborations with local schools, partnerships with underrepresented artists, or its dedication to diversity in programming, 92NY continues to advocate for a more equitable and accessible arts landscape.

**NYC Council initiative partnerships:**

We are grateful for our partnership with the NYC Council allowing us to provide eight free Cultural After-School Adventures (CASA) programs in schools throughout the city, which have included a hip hop dance residency, instrumental arts instruction, visual arts, a residency focused on percussion, and more. Without 92NY's programming, many of the students we serve would lack access to creative arts experiences, as extracurricular activities are financially prohibitive.

We are also grateful for our SU-CASA funding. 92NY has provided successful, productive and joyous choral arts instruction at Roosevelt Island Senior Center since FY19 through programming led by a 92NY Teaching Artist. Our partnership with the Roosevelt Island Senior Center allows older adults to experience the joy of making art. We have heard from our Teaching Artists that past participants have been enthusiastic not just about singing but also in discussing the music, reminiscing and sharing stories and experiences. Staff also commented that they saw the participants experiencing joy in making music.

We would also like to thank the NYC Council for introducing Resolution 741, designating May 10 annually as Judith Jamison Day in the City of New York to honor her life and legacy as a dancer, choreographer, and longtime artistic director of the groundbreaking Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. 92NY was delighted to honor her at our 2022 Gala and fully supports designating May 10<sup>th</sup> as Judith Jamison Day.

**Programs for public school students:**

For 35+ years, 92NY's School Engagement in the Arts (SEA, formerly 92NY Center for Arts Learning and Leadership) has played an increasingly outsized role in bringing the arts to public school students serving 7000+ students and teachers across all five boroughs. Programming provides opportunities for in-depth classroom visits from top teaching artists and innovative curriculum design, interaction with 92NY mainstage talent and thought leaders from around the world, and unparalleled access to professional internships and other early career opportunities that provide a crucial foothold into a life in the arts.

92NY has built strong collaborations with many schools through proactively engaging with principals, teachers and arts liaisons, and understands the unique needs of each school population and what cultural resources are/are not available in its community and neighborhood. Partial or full subsidies are provided to most participating schools, ensuring that cost is not a barrier to participation. Approximately 80% of the FY25 Partner Schools have Title 1 status, and in a typical year, over 70% of students at SEA partner schools come from families living in poverty.

92NY offers programs that increase access for public school students in grades K-12 to further their skills in the arts. These include the Discovery Series and a "Build Your Own" School-Based Residency program for elementary school students.

Programs for high school students include the Concert Schools Project, Christopher Lightfoot Walker Literature Project, two workforce development programs for teens, and Teen Arts Week.

Through the **Discovery Series**, approximately 3000 students from 30 elementary schools explore a variety of dance and music genres through lively, curriculum-based classroom sessions with their dedicated Teaching Artists throughout the school year, along with attendance at exhilarating dance, music, and musical theater performances at 92NY. Schools can also bring in a **“Build Your Own” School-Based Residency** led by professional practicing artists. Residencies have focused on Afro-Latin Percussion, House and Hip-Hop and Visual Arts, among others.

92NY’s programming for high school students is provided free of charge. **The Concerts Schools Project** offers free music education for over 100 students from 5+ public high schools citywide, and **The Christopher Lightfoot Walker Literature Project** connects 600+ students in 20 public high schools across the city with contemporary and classic literature. Through these programs, students attend live concerts or readings at 92NY and participate in pre- or post-performance Q&As with the featured performing artists or authors.

High school students can also take part in the **Arts Fellows Program**, which is a transformative opportunity designed for students who demonstrate talent in and passion for music, dance, and visual arts. Fellows benefit from fully subsidized classes in their chosen artistic discipline as well as invaluable one-on-one mentorship opportunities.

92NY also offers two workforce development-focused programs for NYC public high school students: 1) **Teen Gems** is a 12-week jewelry-making course offered free of cost to teens, providing access to jewelry studio equipment, training, and mentorship to students with an interest in art and design. 2) **Teen Producers** is 92NY’s two-year paid internship for 10-20 teens that builds technical skills in arts administration, programming, production, and nonprofit management and offers hands-on experience producing live events at 92NY.

**Teen Arts Week** is a citywide annual celebration of the arts created for teens, by teens. 92NY’s Teen Producers help create this week of free programming for all NYC teens. During the 2025 Teen Arts Week, 45 cultural organizations across all five boroughs offered classes, workshops and performances for over a thousand teens throughout the city. These events enable teens to gain hands-on experience in different areas of the arts, engage with professionals in creative industries, and explore career pathways.

### **Programs for children, families and individuals**

In addition to programs for public school students, 92NY offers a variety of arts and cultural education programs for children, families and individuals. We offer need-based financial assistance for all programs for children and adults and we encourage those who need them to apply. We are committed to ensuring equity and access in the arts and making our programming accessible to a diverse 92NY community.

Programs include extensive music education programs for people of all ages and skill levels; dance programs ranging from ballet and modern dance to hip-hop and swing dance; visual arts classes, including drawing, painting, sculpture, photography and digital arts; and theater and performing arts education, including acting classes, improvisation, and other performance-based workshops. In addition, we offer adult learning classes covering subjects such as literature, history, philosophy and languages. We also have programming geared toward the 60+ community through our Himan Brown Program, providing opportunity for community engagement and enrichment. Members can access numerous in-person, online and hybrid programs every week, including lectures, writing workshops and studio art classes.

Ensuring equity and access is integral to our mission. We look forward to continuing to work with the NYC Council to ensure that all New Yorkers can access high quality arts and culture programming.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**Ariel Savransky**

Director, Government and Community Relations

P: [REDACTED] | [ASavransky@92NY.org](mailto:ASavransky@92NY.org)

Dear Members of the New York City Council Education Committee,

My name is Abigail Rennert, and I am a Certified Teacher (ELA, Social Studies, Generalist, and Students with Disabilities) at KAPPA MS215 in the Bronx. I am writing to express my strong support for Bill NYC Int. 1125-2024, which would require the Department of Education (DOE) to report annually on critical information regarding school librarians and library access in DOE schools.

As a teacher who has recently completed a school librarian/media specialist degree and earned my NY state certification, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact that a well-resourced library and certified librarian can have on students' academic success, personal growth, and future opportunities and I have also seen the loss and gaps not having one can allow.

Although this is my twentieth year as a public middle school teacher in the Bronx, the only functioning and fully staffed library I have had access to in the past decade was during my field work for my library masters. I was able to visit and work in the libraries at the NYC Lab School for Collaborative Studies and the McKinley Library at STAR Academy (PS 63) & The Neighborhood School (PS 363). During my time at these libraries I saw firsthand how a librarian can build the love of reading, support research, and provide safe spaces from the elementary to the high school level. Lessons that support all content areas - about selecting resources, evaluating sources, taking notes, and other critical thinking skills - were provided by librarians. I saw how librarians supported teachers with their planning and resource collection and how high school students learned to navigate journals and online databases.

The building in which I work supports two middle schools and one high school. The media/library center has been updated, but it is not staffed. Instead of being a functional space with a supportive and knowledgeable librarian; it remains a room used for occasional meetings. Our Bronx students deserve the support of a librarian who can help teach critical thinking and research skills. They deserve access to a space with thoughtfully curated collections of books, media, and technology to support their diverse learning needs. Additionally, the staff on site deserve a partner that can help gather relevant resources to facilitate planning. Many of my students do not visit public libraries and are missing out on the opportunity to build a love of reading and encounter new ideas through the library experience.

Unfortunately, the decline in certified school librarians across New York City has created inequities that disproportionately affect students in underfunded schools. Without accurate reporting on the number of librarians and library access in schools, it is impossible to address these disparities effectively. Bill NYC Int. 1125-2024 is a crucial step toward ensuring transparency and accountability so that every student can benefit from the resources and expertise that school libraries provide.

I urge you to support this bill and advocate for equitable access to school libraries for all NYC students. Our libraries are essential to preparing young people for success in school and beyond—and we cannot afford to let them disappear.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for your commitment to improving education in New York City.

Sincerely,

Abigail Rennert

Teacher

KAPPA MS215



Send to: [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov)

Testimony of Good Shepherd Services  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Education

Submitted by  
Alani Maxine Naissant

April 8th, 2025

My name is Alani Maxine Naissant, and I'm a senior in high school. Art education has played a huge role in my life not just in the classroom, but in my healing and growth as a person.

For a long time, I struggled with dissociation and anxiety. I often felt disconnected from myself and the world around me, like I was just going through the motions. But when I started taking art seriously, everything changed. Art gave me a way to express what I couldn't put into words. It helped me feel present, connected, and more confident in who I am.

Through painting, drawing, and learning about different art forms, I was finally able to find peace and purpose. Art education helped me process my emotions, feel grounded, and break out of that dark place. And because of how much it helped me, I kept pushing forward and that led to me getting accepted into Temple University Tyler School of Art where I will be studying art therapy. There I will continue to grow as a person and an artist and contribute to supporting children through art therapy to do the same.

Art saved me, and I truly believe every student in every school deserves access to that kind of creative outlet and support.

Thank you for the opportunity



## TESTIMONY - ARJAN SINGH

Thank you to the Committee and Chair Rivera for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is [Arjan Sing](#). I am originally from the Bay Area but have chosen to make my professional home here in New York City. There is a strong sense of musical culture here. New music and classical music organizations - like American Composers Orchestra - are vitally important to keep me in NYC.

My income comes from many sources. I am the band manager for the jazz big band at Mannes School of Music and a composition teaching artist with the American Composers Orchestra. I gig as a trombonist, arrange and prepare scores, and write original music.

I began playing violin at age 4, and then started trombone at age 9. I simultaneously studied jazz, Western classical, and Hindustani music. I went to a public school. I was heavily involved in middle and high school band playing trombone. We played music by composers who are living. I also studied Hindustani classical music independently from my school classes. The arts education I had in California led to my current career in music.

After High School, I continued my studies at the Berklee College of Music in Boston. This was my first opportunity to take trombone solo lessons. I entered Berklee thinking I wanted to be a film composer and eventually went to Mannes for my Masters in composition, where I decided to pursue concert composition. The medium is a beautiful way to express creative thoughts without using words. It's an expressive language that can also be abstract. And yet, without my early music education, I would never have seen this as a possibility for myself. By playing music by living composers, I was able to see this future.

Now, as a gigging musician, and teaching artist with the American Composers Orchestra, I have the chance to show others a professional future in music. Teaching gives me a chance to give back. I got a great music education. Now, I can return it to people who deserve it.

In my work as the band manager for the jazz big band at Mannes, I see students are studying in undergrad because they were introduced in middle and high school. Like me, their learning began at a young age and continues to this day.

With ACO, I teach the arts integrated program called Sonic Spark Lab. In the Fall I taught 8-14 year olds at Wharton Arts in NJ. Using online software, the students created their own original works. Seeing their final presentations was inspiring. Not only did they get to share their music, but they heard feedback from me and my teaching artist colleague JL Marlor, and they got feedback from fellow classmates. That kind of interaction is invaluable.

Last month, I began teaching at Lenox Academy in Canarsie Brooklyn. We are grateful to have this work funded by the Brooklyn Borough President's Office. Without this funding, the program would not be moving forward. And yet, the American Composers Orchestra received notification in the last week of January. This timing led to scheduling challenges causing an additional delay in getting classes started. We finally began in mid-March and will be teaching 60 students per day across 3 classes. I'm proud to be serving some of the neediest students at this school that serves 6-8 graders. The school population includes 79% who receive free lunches, and 95% are Black, Latino, Native American, or Asian. 13% are students with disabilities, and 1-2% are English Language Learners.

This teaching role is in stark contrast to my undergrad private lessons in supplemental music theory, composition, conducting, clarinet, trombone. For that work, there is a high income bar. Students are paying for this instruction from their own pocket. At Lenox Academy, we are providing free weekly music instruction to students who would otherwise not get this exposure. With the American Composers Orchestra, I am providing education to students who wouldn't otherwise get the experience. ACO is removing barriers.

ACO also supports me in my composition career. From June 5-6, I will be a featured artist in their EarShot Readings held in partnership with the Manhattan School of Music. Composers relish the opportunity to have music performed by orchestra. Because of the expense, this is one of the hardest milestones to achieve. I have so many friends who want this opportunity. It's too expensive to self-produce.

My original work *Live Salmon* will be rehearsed and recorded by ACO. A publicly available recording of an orchestral work is a rare asset for an emerging composer to have. I will receive individualized feedback from the conductor, mentor composers, and musician liaisons.

I'm particularly fortunate to have this work performed more than once. Mannes performed my piece last year; I was one of two artists, selected from 40 composition students, whose work was selected by the orchestra ensemble for performance. A

single piece can be interpreted differently by different conductors. A single performance can become the piece, rather than one representation of it, which isn't how an artist wants to see their work exist in the world. Second performances are almost more important than the premiere.

I'm grateful for places like the American Composers Orchestra to be providing me multiple avenues of support. As a teaching artist, I have regular weekly income to help support my day-to-day living expenses. Through the EarShot program, I am receiving a rare professional development opportunity to advance my career as a composer of concert music. over 50% of EarShot composers report receiving subsequent performances or commissions as a direct result of their participation. EarShot alumni have won prestigious awards, including Pulitzer and Grawemeyer Prizes and GRAMMY awards.

As this Committee considers how to better support arts education access, I encourage you to look at not only increasing funding but examining the timing and bureaucracy around that funding. Students, schools and artists would benefit from stable, consistent and early funding. This is true for organizations like ACO who receive funding from the Department of Cultural Affairs, for public schools like Lenox Academy that rely on funding from the Department of Education, and for me, an artist who is paid by these organizations. Learning about vital city funding to support this work in January and February means that arts organizations are working with schools on scheduling and program implementation when the school year is already halfway over.

In addition, the majority of my work is on a rolling contract basis. This means from year to year, even semester to semester, I'm unsure of what my income will look like. This instability leaves a constant question of whether I can continue my creative career in NYC. When this school year ends, I won't know what teaching jobs I will be offered for the next school year until September, October, or, as with Lenox Academy, March of the following year. This is not the way to ensure consistent outcomes for students year over year.

Thank you for your work to change the way we provide music education in NYC. It should be a human right for all students regardless of borough, age, or income.

## Testimony by Arlene Laverde

Good morning members of the NYC Education Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of the New York City Public Schools to report annually on school librarians and library access.

My name is Arlene Laverde, and I am a recently retired NYC educator with over 30 years of experience. I spent 16 years as an elementary school teacher and 19 years as a high school librarian. I have served as President of both the New York City School Library Association and the New York Library Association. I am currently the advisor to the School Media Program at Queens College Graduate School of Library and Information Studies, where I have the privilege of preparing future school librarians to serve our city's students.

Throughout my career, I have seen firsthand the essential role that school libraries and certified librarians play in shaping student success. **New York State Education Law mandates** that every school have a library and every secondary school be staffed with a certified librarian. Yet, many schools across the city are not meeting this requirement, leaving students without access to these critical resources.

Certified school librarians are far more than keepers of books. They are specialists in **information, media, and digital literacy** — skills that are crucial in our information-driven world. Equally important, they are champions of **independent reading**.

Research consistently shows that students who engage in independent reading perform better — not only on standardized tests but across all subject areas. Independent readers develop stronger vocabularies, critical thinking skills, and writing abilities. A certified librarian creates the environment and programs that nurture a love of reading and connects students to books that spark curiosity and joy. Libraries are where lifelong readers are made.

I will never forget a young Black student who wandered into the library one day and found a book with a young Black girl on the cover. She looked at me and said, *“If there were more books like this, I would read all the time.”* In that moment, we walked around the library together, and she discovered multiple books with characters who looked like her and reflected her experiences. Suddenly, reading became personal, relevant, and inviting. That day changed her relationship with books, and it never would have happened without a librarian there to guide her.

**Representation matters**, and libraries — when fully staffed and supported — ensure that students see themselves reflected in the stories they read.

In another example, I worked with a senior government class, teaching them about their **constitutional rights**, particularly the **freedom to read**. Together, we explored how the First Amendment protects access to information and the right to read freely. Students researched book bans, new legislation around the country, and evaluated books that had been challenged across the country. Students were engaged, thoughtful, and passionate. We took the lesson further by teaching them how to participate in government by writing letters to their state representatives, lending their voice to the Freedom to Read Bill. Whether students were in support or opposition of the Bill they wrote letters that contained evidence based in fact. For many, this was their first experience in civic engagement, and they felt

empowered knowing their voices could influence policy. This kind of project does not happen without a certified librarian.

Beyond academics, school libraries are **inclusive and safe spaces**. For many students, the library is a refuge — a place where they can read, study, collaborate, or simply be themselves. Without certified librarians, these spaces lose their power, becoming nothing more than rooms filled with books instead of vibrant hubs of learning and community.

This bill is essential because it brings much-needed **transparency and accountability**. It will help us see where we are meeting students' needs and where we are falling short. Every student in New York City deserves equitable access to a library led by a certified librarian who can help them develop the skills they need to thrive — academically, personally, and as engaged members of society.

Thank you for your time and for recognizing the vital role school libraries and librarians play in the lives of our students.

Hello council,

My name's Ashley Aviles and I'm a lifelong resident of District 34. Today, I'm writing in support of INT 1125 because I can't imagine my city (nor the world) without libraries. I was lucky to grow up with one on Leonard Street and to have access to libraries in nearly every school I attended.

In third grade, our school library doubled as the meeting room for the Green Team, my favorite club. We learned about composting, recycling, and why we should care about the planet. Although we didn't have a librarian, my teacher, Mrs. C, used the resources provided (e.g. books, computers, digital & audio media) to share information with us. I loved that space because there were murals of classic children's books on the walls. The best was the Frog and Toad one. Some days, I wished I could chill there on non-club days because I enjoyed the vibe.

In middle school, our building was shared with lower grades and the library was only available to them. I must've walked by it only a handful of times (and by mistake) because I was either lost or just drawn to the books inside. Disappointed, I enjoyed the clubs that we did have in the rooms open to my grades.

By high school, I was involved in more extracurricular activities than ever. Nothing brought me more joy than when a few friends and I founded our Tabletop Gaming Club. It started out in the cafeteria, then made its way to the computer room. Our first club advisor, Mr. F, saw our passion for gaming, taught us a few of his personal faves and allowed us to use the space. When the Girls Who Code Club asked us to relocate and Mr. F stepped down as advisor, I personally searched for a new room.

That's when I remembered the school had a library.

Going there was the best decision because not only did it have dimmable lights (which created the perfect ambiance for D&D campaigns) but it was also full of cool books and resources I didn't know we'd need, much less love. At the helm of that room was Mr. W, the librarian. He introduced us to awesome titles, authors, neighborhood projects, and so much more. Soon after, the library was our go-to hangout spot during lunch breaks and after school when we didn't want to go home yet.

It was actually Mr. W who told me about this law. I wouldn't have known about INT 1125 otherwise.

This made me realize how meaningful my experience with libraries was. I don't know if everyone has access to a school library, let alone a librarian who makes an effort to connect with students. That's why INT 1125 is important. If we don't know how many libraries and librarians exist in the public school system, we can't even begin to address the gaps.

Every student deserves to have access to a great library. They also deserve to meet someone like Mr. W, who'll enrich their learning. This law will help ensure that opportunities aren't limited to just a lucky few.

I hope you'll consider passing it.

Thanks,  
Ashley Aviles  
Former NYC Public School Student

My name is Ashley Hawkins. I am a school librarian and a Queens College Professor at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, where I teach Reading Motivation and Information Literacy to potential school librarians. I also was raised in a school library, following my mother as she worked as a library paraprofessional. It was actually quite shocking to move to New York City from Florida, and to find that here, in a city that is home to some of the most famous libraries in the world, not every student has access to a certified school librarian. In fact, none of us seem to really know what has happened to those positions or to the libraries they once facilitated. Having rehabilitated two libraries in my time at NYCPS, I have some ideas.

I've dug out trash and dated, dusty books from those spaces, and dedicated my life to creating spaces where students can find community, learning, and fresh and relevant books. A library, when staffed with a school librarian, is the heart of the school community. It is a thriving hub which enables astonishing literacy growth and critical thinking. But first, a librarian has to be there. And that means we have to know what's actually happening in our schools, especially in our secondary schools which are not staffing libraries according to the Chancellor's Regulations. This bill helps us get there, for our kids, who need literacy at this moment more than ever.

Thank You.

Ashley R. Hawkins

My name is Ashley Marquez and I am 17 years old. I live in Borough park in District 44 and my council member is Simcha Felder. I am currently a senior at UASLE in Borough Park. I am testifying today to support the bill to require the department of education to report on school librarians and library access in New York city public schools.

I think school libraries and librarians are important because it keeps students involved and helps them learn. I used to go to the High School of Telecommunications. There I had access to resources like a library. When I went to the library, I felt safe and comfortable and it was a space where I could study independently. The library was large with many bookshelves, books, computers, printers, comfortable chairs, and librarians. The librarian was very nice and helpful and would answer any questions I had about a book I was reading. When I was taking US History, I remember reading a book about the American Revolution and I asked the librarian about what was life like back then. She had a lot of knowledge, and was able to do research and answer my questions. Also, I liked that the library was a calm quiet place to do work.

Now, I go to a smaller school that does not have a library. When I have questions about books I am reading, I can ask my teachers but they are often busy teaching. I liked having a librarian at my old school who was always available. When I want a quiet place to study I don't have anywhere to go. I get distracted when I try to study at home and wish I had a school library.

My classmates and I researched this issue about school libraries for our Government class. When we met with our school principal she said that she wants us to have a library and a librarian but because of our budget we can't have one. I support this law because hopefully it will help show the city council that we need more libraries and we need a bigger city budget for schools so every school can have a librarian.



## Ava Emhoff - Written Testimony

Hello, my name is Ava Emhoff, and I am a student at LaGuardia High School. To talk about the importance of libraries and librarians, I have to first talk about lunch. I'm not a very social person; if I'm in a room with people I don't know, chances are I'm not saying a single word. Going into sophomore year, I found myself in an odd social situation of not knowing where to eat lunch. My friends hated going outside, but I hated having to scavenge the school for ten minutes trying to find an empty and quiet place for us to settle into. So, one day when I wandered into the school library and found everyone with headphones in, and many people sitting alone, I figured it was a good escape for the 40 minute period. Through those 40 minutes of me connecting with the library, I was also given the opportunity to bond with Ms. Healy, our amazing librarian. From the small waves when I began entering, to my finally asking if I can volunteer (something she quickly accepted and started with teaching me the combination of library systems we utilize), I knew Ms. Healy is someone who truly loves the LaGuardia community and our library. I have never seen someone light up the way she did when teaching me Dewey Decimal, and it made me so much more passionate about respecting the library and its contents. This has only strengthened as time passed. From the 'FREE BOOKS' section that has saved my family hundreds from Barnes and Noble trips, to opportunities that get me places such as City Hall, a librarian who cares is someone that can make the biggest change in schools. Though overtime my friends eventually began joining me, and now in my junior year I spend time connecting with friends in the cafeteria, I will never forget what the library has done for me.

04/07/2025

Good Day,

I'm writing to you as a Special Education Teacher working in New York City Public School's District 75, where I have taught children with Autism, Intellectual Disability, Down Syndrome, and/or Emotional/Behavioral Disorders for 19 years. My District 75 school organization consists of 7 different sites across geographic Districts 20 and 21. These sites are co-located in public school buildings with community schools in grades K-8.

As I visit the 7 sites of my D75 school organization, as well as school sites across NYCPS, I consistently come into contact with public school libraries that have not been used as libraries for years. These school libraries, still filled with books, are instead used as meeting spaces, extra classroom space, the staff break room, storage for the school building, etc. – anything except the intended purpose of being a school library for public school students. None of these library spaces are staffed by a school librarian. As an unfunded mandate, these libraries are frozen in time. This is a grave disservice to all New York City Public School students, and as citizens of NYC we need to work together to make a change.

The first step to making this change is for New York City Public Schools (aka the DOE), to report on which schools have and do not have designated library space; as well as reporting on how many librarians are working within NYCPS and where those librarians work. This information can be used to take concrete steps toward addressing the unfunded mandate for a school library in every NYC public school. Having this information would make it possible for parents, students, educators and other members of the community to advocate for school libraries in their community schools; and to come together to share resources and strategies for opening or re-opening school libraries in their school buildings.

I ask City Council to please do their part to help, by compelling NYCPS to share the requested information. Only then can we begin to address this severe need within our NYC school system, and to provide our NYC public school students with the enrichment, joy and opportunity that only comes with immersion in all that a public school library has to offer. There is so much!

Thank you,

Chad Hamilton  
Special Education Teacher  
P231K, District 75

**CHE BUFORD TESTIMONY**  
**2025-04-08**

Thank you for this opportunity to speak today, Chair Rivera.

My name is [Che Buford](#). I'm a violinist and composer. Currently, I am pursuing my Doctorate of Musical Arts in composition at Columbia. I also hold a violin performance degree from Berklee College of Music in Boston. I compose acoustic and electro-acoustic works exploring the possibilities of timbre and acoustical phenomena and connect them to elements of place, memory, poetry, and the quotidian.

Recent highlights of my career include a [commission for string orchestra](#) for the Next Festival of Emerging Artists, a [fixed media piece for violin and electronics](#) for MOMA, and a new work for world-renowned violinist Midori to premiere at the end of this year.

I was introduced to music at a young age. My school day included music class, which captured my imagination and attention. I started playing the violin at 10 years old - a practice I have continued to today as a **XX**-year-old professional musician living, studying, and working in New York City.

I believe music and art should be an integral part of the NYC school curriculum, and access to classes guaranteed to all New York City children. I'm living proof that early exposure to music can lead to a lifelong passion and professional pursuit.

The American Composers Orchestra introduced me to the idea of being a composer. I opted into an elective they offered called "Compose Yourself." Through weekly classes, the program exposed us to different kinds of music, aesthetics, and sounds beyond Western Classical music. Even at Talent Unlimited, my specialized arts high school, there was no composition class. The American Composers Orchestra was my entryway to sharing my voice through music.

ACO has played a huge part in my composition journey. Over the course of a semester, I created an original composition, got to hear that work performed by professional musicians, and keep a recording for future study and promotion. This experience also gave me my first connection to the freelance performance scene in NYC. Today, I freelance regularly across the city.

Before the American Composers Orchestra, I didn't realize that there were composers that write music for a living. ACO introduced that possibility and dream to me.

I'm thrilled to know that Council Member Julie Menin supports American Composer Orchestra's partnership with Talent Unlimited via a local discretionary grant. I can easily imagine many other students - like myself - discovering composition in the Compose Yourself classroom.

To further support artists working in NYC, I encourage this committee to invest in artist residencies and studio spaces.

Artist Residencies that pay a living wage to artists as they make their work and engage with communities including students provide sustaining income for artists. Studio spaces give us the space we need to do the work.

Thank you.

My name is Christina Gavin. I am a librarian at Midwood High School in Brooklyn in Councilmember Louis's district, and I live in Chair Joseph's district.

My students enjoy accessing a library that is full of diverse contemporary books in different languages and formats; lots of graphic novels; tons of manga; board games, arts & crafts materials, and computers. The library is home to multiple clubs, and we have also hosted author visits where students come together to meet an author, ask questions about becoming writers themselves, and have books signed. Students do their homework, collaborate with their peers, and study for tests.

The library is a wonderful space where students can choose their own adventure, learn, explore, and create without worrying about grades or "wrong answers." School librarians also collaborate with classroom teachers to provide instruction about doing research and identifying misinformation.

Unfortunately, this is my 13th year in the DOE; I worked for 5 years as a special ed teacher at 3 different school buildings in the Bronx and until I became a librarian myself, I had not worked in a school that had a functional library.

Many of my students report this is the first time they have had access to a library in their school or they had one in elementary school but not in middle school or vice versa. This is a common refrain across the city.

That is unacceptable. NYC Public Schools are the largest school district in the country, in the city that's a hub of industry, the center of the financial world. In many regards, New York City is the most important city in our country but we are not leading in school library access. There are about 1,600 public schools, but only about 300 certified school librarians, which works out to 1 librarian for every 3,000 students, but we know that not every student actually has access to a librarian at all.

I say "about 300" because we actually do not know how many there are. In June 2022, a reporter filed a FOIL request and found 443 certified school librarians; in May 2023, a different reporter filed a FOIL request and reported there were about 260 librarians. It is unreasonable to think there was a 40% loss in one school year. The issue is that there is not precise data so we cannot disaggregate by borough or district, unlike the more robust **Art Counts** reporting that has been mentioned at length.

The New York State Commissioner of Education's Regulations mandate that every school in New York State have a school library staffed by a pedagogue and that every secondary school have a certified school librarian; however, for example, the Harlem Council of Elders frequently cites that about 90% of Harlem secondary schools DO NOT have librarians. It is well beyond time to right this wrong.

Every NYC public school student deserves a librarian in every school. Intro 1125, the Librarians Count bill, brings us one step closer to that reality and to giving our students the library access they deserve by letting us see the scale and magnitude of the problem so that it can be addressed: borough by borough, district by district, school by school.

**Clarification:** I would like to offer a clarification on a point made during preliminary testimony. The Teacher2Librarian program is in its 4th cohort. Across all 4 cohorts, there will be 100 librarians certified in total over the course of several years. There are not 100 people in Cohort 4 alone.

Good morning Councilmembers,

My name is Claire Cho, and I am a proud NEXTGen musician at Midori & Friends, highschool senior, and resident of Long Island City.

Long Island City is one of the most rapidly growing neighborhoods in New York, full of new developments, new families, and people arriving from all over the world. With so many different cultures and backgrounds coming together in one place, it can be hard to build a sense of community. But I believe we can do so through music.

Music creates a common ground, bringing together people who speak different languages, who come from different backgrounds, but find shared emotions when they hear a song or attend a concert. In a neighborhood like Long Island City, where change is constant and many are still finding their place, music can become more than entertainment—I believe it can become a way to belong.

From performing at retirement homes and playing at local orchestra concerts to busking in the streets of New York, as a student and violinist, I've seen how music connects, in both formal and casual settings. Music creates a space where people can gather, feel seen, and where young voices like mine can lead. But none of this is possible without strong arts education in our schools.

When we invest in the arts, we're investing in more than creativity—we're investing in communication, in leadership, and in unity. And in a place like Long Island City, I believe that kind of investment is what transforms a neighborhood into a home.

Thank you for listening and for supporting the power of music and the arts in building stronger, more connected communities.

Dear Members of the Council:

As a librarian serving a diverse NYC public high school for the past 4 years, I've had the opportunity to witness firsthand the many benefits that students find when they have access to a school library staffed by dedicated library professionals.

Our library is a crucial third space where students of all backgrounds and identities can be themselves as they socialize, study, and read. A library thoughtfully curated by a certified librarian is a fertile place that sparks new possibilities for its community's readers, from the future medical student delving deeper into biology, to the young activist studying political movements, to the aspiring poet learning about meter and rhyme. New paths and opportunities open up as a result of connections formed in our space.

Each school in New York deserves a library and librarians, not just because it's required by law but because school library programs have the power to shape lives for the better.

Sincerely,

Elias Hetko

Dear Members of the New York City Council Education Committee,

My name is Elisabeth Silverberg, and I am a Teacher Assigned to the Library currently pursuing my Master's Degree of Library Science at Queens College. I am in my 20<sup>th</sup> year as a New York City Public School Educator at P.S.106 Edward Everett Hale in Bushwick, Brooklyn. I am also the parent of two public school students. I am writing to express my strong support for Bill NYC Int. 1125-2024, which would require the Department of Education (DOE) to report annually on critical information regarding school librarians and library access in DOE schools.

As a school librarian, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact that a well-resourced library and certified librarian can have on students' academic success, personal growth, and future opportunities. In my current role I have seen students demonstrate excitement when they find "the book" – the title that inspires them to read for enjoyment, that connects them to their culture, that deepens their understanding of their content area learning. Students from diverse backgrounds, academic strengths, and attitudes towards school look forward to their weekly library visits.

School libraries are more than just spaces filled with books—they are hubs of learning, creativity, and equity. In my role as a librarian, I have:

- *Hosted family literacy events, where parents and students have obtained library cards for the Brooklyn Public Library – connecting them with vital community resources*
- *Utilized my specialized training to update the library's collection, reflecting our student population, schoolwide curriculum and high interest texts*
- *Connected educators with resources, such as NovelNY, that support inquiry and deep understanding of concepts taught during classroom instruction*
- *Encouraged and increased student usage of Sora, the Citywide digital library, supporting independent student reading at home*

Unfortunately, the decline in certified school librarians across New York City has created inequities that disproportionately affect students in underfunded schools. As a parent, I am disheartened that my daughters did not have the opportunity to experience a school library in either their elementary or middle school years. I have witnessed firsthand the impact that access to a school library with a certified librarian has. Students build connections with one another and teaching staff in a non-evaluative educational space, uncovering their interests and initiating further exploration into these topics. Libraries grow not only a love of reading, but a love of learning. Without accurate reporting on the number of librarians and library access in schools, it is impossible to address these disparities effectively. Bill NYC Int. 1125-2024 is a



crucial step toward ensuring transparency and accountability so that every student can benefit from the resources and expertise that school libraries provide.

I urge you to support this bill and advocate for equitable access to school libraries for all NYC students. Our libraries are essential to preparing young people for success in school and beyond—and we cannot afford to let them disappear.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for your commitment to improving education in New York City.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth Silverberg  
Teacher Librarian  
P.S. 106 Edward Everett Hale  
[esilverberg@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:esilverberg@schools.nyc.gov)

To the esteemed Committee Members,

I am writing to testify in support of the NYC City Council “Librarians Count” Bill (Intro 1125) that will require the DOE to report on and acknowledge the devastating loss of school librarians and libraries in NYC schools.

City Council Members Lincoln Restler and Rita Joseph, you recently introduced Bill #1125 the “Librarians Count” Bill to require the DOE to report up-to-date data on librarians and libraries in NYC schools: how many librarians/libraries are in our schools, who has access to them and who doesn’t.

Every student in New York City deserves access to libraries – not only because of books and a safe, devoted space to learn but because of the invaluable work librarians do. Moreover, each of these librarians deserve to be seen for their work and to see each other. Without communities of librarians and sufficient personnel at school libraries, their work and these learning communities dissolve.

I support this bill and urge you and the Speaker to bring the legislation to a vote and pass it without delay. It’s time to demand that the DOE share the scope of the problem and begin to fix it.

Thank you for your time and consideration,  
Elliot Galvis

## Testimony for the Librarians Count Bill

I am a New York Times bestselling author of over 55 books for children. I travel nationwide to schools to do presentations for schoolchildren. Always, my host is the school librarian and I see firsthand how school librarians function: giving lessons that intersect with literacy efforts by teaching, explaining library systems, empowering students to accurately use search engines, inspiring a love of nonfiction, building collections of current books so nonfiction is up to date and the shelves have the books the kids are most excited to read. I've seen school librarians who run after-school programs where students read award-winning books, and also school librarians who run craft programs and other fun activities in a book-rich environment, taking the pressure off reading by making stories fun. At many school libraries, the librarians have created strategies for getting books into the hands of students who don't have other access to them — book drives and exchanges, sponsoring coupons for book fairs so everyone can get a book regardless of their economic situations, partnering with charities to bring authors in, taking students on field trips to kids' book festivals and arranging so that every kid gets a book.

I also live in Brooklyn and am a public school parent. When my eldest child was in elementary school, I was part of a committee that created a library in PS58, where previously there was none. The library was beautiful, and decently stocked — but within year, funding was gone and so we had no librarian. Students didn't visit during class times, and the library was only open when there was a parent volunteer available. As time went by, the library was missing beloved books that were never returned, and no librarian was there to restock those, or to buy the new series the kids were excited about, or to purchase the current nonfiction the kids needed for their studies. It was a room full of books, disorganized and without community, failing to serve the families who had so lovingly worked to raise money and get it built.

Our schools need not only libraries, but librarians.

Thank you.

Emily Jenkins



Brooklyn, NY 11215

I am writing in support of Bill 1125-2024, Libraries Count. My name is Esther Keller, and I have been a NYC resident for most of my life. As an avid reader and a librarian for the past 27 years, I have had the privilege of impacting thousands of students in NYC Middle and High Schools.

In my role as a librarian, I have taught critical thinking and inquiry skills, motivated students to read, and championed graphic novels that enhance visual thinking skills. I have supported my teacher colleagues by developing lesson plans, finding resources, and introducing innovative ways to use technology in the classroom.

When I was hired at Grady High School at the beginning of the 2023-24 school year, I reopened a library that had been without a librarian for 10 years. The response was immediate and positive as the space was refreshed and updated. While there is still much work to be done, we have already made significant strides. Books are being read, research is conducted, and students have a safe place to go.

A school librarian wears many hats. We help students find books that support their social and emotional needs, create a warm and welcoming environment, teach critical thinking, inquiry and research skills, while we also manage our collections by keeping data up to date. And don't forget our role as book and reading champion!

Every child deserves to be in a school with not only a library space but also a librarian who keeps the library functioning.

With a long career behind me, I have countless stories and mementos of the individual impacts I have made, as well as those made by my colleagues. However, there are not enough librarians in the NYC public school system. If the NYC Department of Education is serious about boosting literacy rates, it is essential that every school has a librarian. The first step is to hold schools accountable to follow the state mandate.

You can submit your testimony at <https://council.nyc.gov/testify/> or by emailing [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) — additional information about submitting your testimony can be found on our website. **Due 4/11/2025**

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council and the Committee on Cultural Affairs and Libraries and  
Committee on Education at City Hall  
Hon. Carlina Rivera and Rita Joseph  
04/08/2025 10a.m.

Thank you to Chair Carlina Rivera and Rita Joseph and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools. My name is Frankie Dascola, and today I speak to you as a representative from NYSSAE - New York State Alliance for the Arts, Government Relations Chair for Music Educators Association NYC, Head of Ops for a community music org Big Apple Leadership for the Arts in Brooklyn and a music educator who teaches in Queens.

As Gov Relations Chair, and proud colleague of those who spoke before from MEANYC, the students of our schools deserve access to music, materials, and connections with cultural organizations that elevate the arts. Across our city a well rounded music education is dependent on zipcode and energy or willingness of administration. Today we are asking our city council to build more access and write in accountability so ALL students can have and engage in the arts.

Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Unfortunately, only 31% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. The [term and condition passed by the Council last year](#) revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools) — leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. Combined Class Size Mandate rollout, the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Future like the students I proudly represent from IS 93 in Ridgewood Queens. In the 7yrs I've been there we have been able to cultivate a community of musicians that love making music, performing every chance they can in a program that continues to facilitate over 250 musicians annually. Whether it be in advanced rock bands, drum line, to NYSSMA Competition band, our students want to make music when we give them the space so because of this I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education.

This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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 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 to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Also, On behalf of the New York State Alliance for Arts Education, the statewide network representing thousands of educators in the fields of Art, Music, Theatre, Dance, and Media Arts across New York’s 731 school districts, 37 BOCES, and 64 SUNY Colleges, as well as arts educators and teaching artists in public and independent schools and colleges, and community based organizations, we wish to lend our voice to the chorus of advocates urging you to maintain full funding of public education, and to avoid unprecedented cuts which will inevitably result in further decreases in arts education in our elementary, middle, and high schools.

Thank you for your attention and consideration,

Frankie Dascola

*I am also including testimony from students at I.S. 93 Ridgewood.*

## Testimony for the Funding of the Arts Department

Hello! My name is Giovanni Stahl. I am in eighth grade as of now. I attend Intermediate School 093, in Ridgewood. I will be testifying in favor of the funding of the Arts Department. The Arts Department has brought not only me but so many other people so much joy. The Arts Department offers a wide array of activities such as music, visual arts, dance, theater, and film. The vast array of arts ensures that everyone has a place to truly express themselves. The arts help people express themselves through their activities. They can perform, film, and draw with heart. However, some students do not have access to the arts for numerous reasons. A study from "Brookings.edu" proves that the number of students receiving arts education has "shrunk drastically." However, participation in the arts helps enhance discipline, academic achievements, cognitive skills, creativity, and focus- and should be funded.

To begin, the same study proves that people "deny that the arts confer intrinsic benefits..." The term intrinsic benefits implies that the arts are not an addition, an extra period, or a pastime, but an essential part of a student's day. It emphasizes that participation in the arts fits perfectly with human nature... and should be funded. However, people deny that, and still fail to see the children becoming more social because of the connection opportunities the arts bring. The arts offer people to connect beyond words, but their spirits connect with the hard work and determination they put into the arts.

Pursuing this further, "students who received more arts education experiences are more interested in how other people feel and more likely to want to help people who are treated badly." This emphasizes the increase of empathy the students feel because of the arts. They can connect on a deeper level. The students bring a more positive attitude towards other students directly because of their participation in the arts. The direct correlation of the arts and bringing a positive attitude daily is visible in almost every aspect.

The arts bring people joy, but also change lives. It is a wonderful department that everyone should have access to. Over time, children begin to actively excel in being more empathetic, focused, disciplined, respectful, and thrive academically. The arts should be funded and recognized for their positive accomplishments, helping shape the younger generations. The future is within our school system now. Why should they be stripped of their access to something that brings them joy? We want the younger generations to thrive positively, not take a depressing downward spiral. Help them see the world in a different light. Help scintillate the path of success through the arts- which is not possible without funding. Take the benefits of the arts, and help shape the people who will run the world in the future.

Sincerely,

Stahl, Giovanni

I. S. 93 Honors Student

Jeremy Guaman , Grade 7

The reason I support the arts is because it supports the things I love like art, music, theater, and film and my personal favorite is music because that's where I met new people that I became friends with and thanks to this band in my school, 4 seconds to New York, it gave me the inspiration to create my own band which is now named Rapidlines and thanks to all of that was the arts supporting what I like to do everyday.

### Julian Cantor Grade 7

My name is Julian Cantor and I attend I.S. 93 middle school in Ridgewood Queens. Today I am here to tell you about why funding music and the arts is so important to me . First, it gives me and others the opportunity to connect with people who share similar interests and a love for music as music helps us build connections. This year I joined an advanced rock group called rapid lines where we learn new songs and write our own . Rapid Lines wouldn't be here if I didn't have the opportunity to join music .in fact as the web states students who participate in playing an instrument are more likely to get into college as it helps with applications .So with that being said please consider funding music and the arts as I believe all students should have the chance to show educational growth and connect with music and the arts.

### Sofia Guevera Grade 7

Education needs art! It's to express their creativity personality their character. As a student in middle school when I do music and arts in my school I feel myself, I feel joy and I get to express myself! I want all my fellow students to be able to express themselves freely with out any restrictions! The arts provide that, no matter if it's acting, drawing, or music, it lets students express themselves, communicate, and feel joy in their own way. Arts have no boundaries and it lets students bound with others and connect. New York is filled with art, murals, statues, and paintings and to think that most school don't have art in their academics is baffling so my ask it to fund the schools art, music, dance , and drama so all students can have a chance to express themselves.





**Jacqueline Cruz**

**Retired Bilingual NYC Art Teacher of 30 years at P.S.1K**

**Now Interim Acting President of NYCATA/UFT New York City Art Teachers Assoc.**

**New York City is considered the arts capital of the world. We have The Met, MoMA, The Whitney, and many more museums, along with Broadway, Juilliard, Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, Dance Theatre of Harlem, NYC Ballet, Ballet Hispanico, to name a few. All of the arts have created a very lucrative tourism industry for our city. NYC students should be fully exposed to the plethora of arts around them. So it's very ironic that we are here today begging for our students to receive an adequate arts education.**

**It is when students have the opportunity to be immersed in the arts and to learn to create and forge their own masterpieces, that they will truly thrive and understand the human need for the arts. With every society that our students study from the past, it is through the arts that students learn most. It is how people attain knowledge of culture and history. How can we only teach them to take tests to show their understanding? We must ensure that every school has the funds and certified arts teachers to give our children the ability to flourish and grow as artists. Back in 2011, my students witnessed the falling of the towers from the school windows. So I gave my fifth graders black and white paint and taught them about Picasso's Guernica. 150 fifth graders created their own paintings to express their fears and horrors of their experience. All 150 paintings were displayed on a giant wall outside of our auditorium. One of those pieces is now on permanent exhibit at the 911 Museum.**

**It is with the arts that kids are nurtured to promote social-emotional wellness. Studies have shown that art improves academic outcomes, prepares students to enter the workforce, and increases parental involvement and attendance rates. For some kids, it may be an art class that keeps them coming to school. We at NYCATA/UFT, New York City Art Teachers Association, a committee of the UFT, are calling on the city to adequately fund Arts Education for all of our students.**

To Whom It May Concern,

I am a teacher at Midwood High School in Brooklyn. Our school library is one of the few places where students can go when they don't have class. The librarians who work there ensure that the time students spend there is productive and engaging. They ensure that there are up-to-date, interesting and relevant books available to students. And they teach them hugely important research skills that teachers rarely have time to cover during class time.

Midwood is lucky. Many DOE schools have no librarian. We need the DOE to report on which schools have / don't have librarians so we can work to fix this problem.

Thank you for your time,

James Bruffee  
Media Arts CTE / Video Production Teacher  
Midwood High School

## Intro 1125

Jessica Schilling Parent of two NYC students.

If we truly care about educating the next generation of New Yorkers—and I mean educating them so they don't grow up thinking TikTok is a research tool—then you need to support Intro 1125.

This bill isn't just about numbers. It's about whether kids in this city have access to one of the most basic building blocks of learning: a school library, with a real, live librarian inside. This is not a nice-to-have—it's a necessity. Let's not turn libraries back into a luxury item. We've come a long way since books were reserved only for royalty and chained to shelves.

Right now, we have no clear idea which schools have libraries, which have librarians, or which kids are actually getting time in those spaces. If that sounds bad, it's because it is. Intro 1125 would require the Department of Education to give us that information—every year. Because if we don't even know what's missing, how can we fix it?

This is step one. If we want curious, literate, thoughtful humans running this city one day, we've got to start with books, librarians, and covering the basics. Please vote yes on Intro 1125. The future of New York kind of depends on it.

## JL MARLOR TESTIMONY

Chairs Rivera and Joseph, thank you to you and the Committees for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is [JL Marlor](#). I am a composer, teaching artist, and the education coordinator for American Composers Orchestra.

ACO has partnered with NYU to examine the impacts of music education on mental and behavioral health. Early results show consistent improvements in engagement, mood, anxiety, depression, fatigue, and self-esteem.

This research is proof of what I experience every week in the classroom. The work of a teaching artist is powerful, and often feels like social work.

I encourage this Committee and the City Council to create and expand programs that link and embed arts programming within academic classrooms. At Lenox academy, ACO provides free weekly music instruction to students who otherwise would not get this hands on instruction. ACO is removing barriers. Students who would not self-select music are often the students who benefit the most from the program. Let me tell you the story of one such student, whom I taught at IS229 in the Bronx.

This student had a great personality. She was inquisitive, loud, expressive. But she was also disruptive. I felt that she was desperate for attention and care.

Through the ACO curriculum, we were creating identity-based original songs. As I asked questions like: What sounds did you hear growing up? What songs play in your home? What kind of music does your family like? She almost always declined participation. I supported her.

Over the course of the year, I checked in with her regularly without judgment. It was powerful for her to be in a playful environment where she could completely be herself without barriers. She began participating more. She ended up writing a song about never giving up, being strong and the importance of resilience. We performed it together, me playing guitar, and her singing in front of the class.

During our check ins, she shared with me that she was in an unsafe environment and was being physically abused by a parent in her home. As she built up self confidence and esteem, she finally felt comfortable and empowered enough to get help from a school counselor, and over the next few weeks she was moved into a different home situation One that she chose. Music education gave her the agency to change her reality. I watched her turn her disruptive habits into action. She literally found her voice.

I must emphasize that this change happened because I was in her classroom 3 times per week starting at the beginning of the school year. We don't see these kinds of results when our classes happen only once per week, or when we start in the middle of the school year.

I echo Lyndsay's call to the Council to address the delays in the funding process and make it easier for organizations to partner with schools. With school budgets and grant notifications confirmed in July, our work would be transformed, and by extension so too would the lives of thousands of NYC students. Thank you.

Good Afternoon,

I am a social worker and program coordinator running a school-based program at a title I public High school in Queens NY. I would like to express my support for city council bill Int 1125-2024 Requiring the department of education to report on school librarians and library access in New York city public schools. Data is power. Libraries are power. Together we can shed light on systemic inequities facing our children in NYC. In my school, the library and our Licensed Librarian, are vital to school culture, developing a “third space” so desperately needed by youth, housing SEL programming, and creating unique ways to engage students who are hard to reach. It is my hope that all NYC youth will have this access, and this bill is one step further to making this a reality.

Thank you,

Joanna McIntyre, LMSW

Program Coordinator

[jmcintyre@dayoneny.org](mailto:jmcintyre@dayoneny.org)

My name is John Scandone and I have been a public school music teacher for the past thirty-four years. I am currently the Director of Music at the Brooklyn High School of the Arts in downtown Brooklyn. I helped to found this school, which this year is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary.

During this time I have seen how a strong arts program can change communities and change lives and how it can give young people hope for the future and a place to belong.

I am still in contact with many of my former students, and I asked them to send me their reflections on the impact arts education has had on their lives. Here is one:

Arts education kept me from going down some darker paths as a teenager. I grew up with a lot of trauma and living in a toxic home environment. I started playing clarinet in seventh grade; it gave me something to focus my energy on and I found it fun. Going to Brooklyn High School of the Arts and getting to really put in the work on my clarinet skills was a godsend. No matter what was going on in my life at home or in school, I could always hang out in the band room with Mr. Scandone to talk, practice, and even tutor future classes of musicians as I got older. I don't play very much anymore, but I still have my clarinet as a reminder of the teacher and the subject that got me through difficult times.

As moving as this testimony is, it is not unique. Over the years I have had many parents tell me how my program saved their child's life. It gave him (or her) a place to



belong, where he could build self-esteem through his accomplishments, a place where he could make the right kind of friends, and stay off the streets and make music.

Let me now speak of how an arts program can change a community. When I came to work at 345 Dean Street in 1995, the school was known as Sarah J. Hale High School. This was a dangerous place, where gang involvement was high and academic achievement was low. People in the neighborhood were afraid to walk the block during school hours. But even in this environment, there were many students who wanted to succeed. I was able to find these students and create the first music program in over fifty years at the school.

When the State Education Department recommended closing Sarah J. Hale, it was the music program that survived, becoming the heart of the new Brooklyn High School of the Arts. Dean Street is no longer an unsafe block to walk. Police cars do not line the block at dismissal. We have regular evening concerts, musical theater performances, and presentations by guest lecturers.

**In short, the creation of Brooklyn High School of the Arts has substantially improved the lives of thousands of students and helped to transform our neighborhood.**

**Council Members, I urge you to continue to fund arts programs such as ours. I will end with a quote from Kurt Mazur, at the time Music Director of the New York Philharmonic: “If you hire two music teachers, you will have to hire two fewer policemen.”**

**Thank you.**

Jorjina Amefia-Koffi

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Oversight & Investigations  
April 8th, 2025

Thank you to the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the It Starts with the Arts coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools. My name is Jorjina Amefia-Koffi and I am a freelance Teaching Artist living in Brooklyn.

As a freelance Teaching Artist, I work with multiple arts organizations and schools in order to deliver English Language Arts (ELA) specific programming utilizing Dramatic Arts skills. City funding impacts my students through field trips, supplies, and learning various life skills like public speaking and editing.

As a Teaching Artist, I have seen many of my former students move onto successful careers and enter prestigious universities. I have even had the opportunity to work with former students as colleagues.

Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Unfortunately, only 31% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. The [term and condition passed by the Council last year](#) revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools) — leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school. Furthermore, the combined implications of the Class Size Mandate rollout, the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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 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 to \$100 from \$86.67 and require that money be spent on arts education.
- **Center Arts and Culture in Youth Development Programs (\$5M):** Allocate funds to better support arts and cultural education opportunities during Summer Rising 2025 and other DYCD programs to support public safety and continued community-building opportunities via the arts.
- **Restore and Increase Baseline Funding for the Department of Cultural Affairs (\$75M):** Add \$30M to baseline funding plus a one-time add of \$45M.
- **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.
- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Warm regards,  
Jorjina Amefia-Koffi

Dear Members of the New York City Council Education Committee,

My name is Kristen Falco, and I am a Certified School Librarian at the South Shore Campus Library in Brooklyn. I am writing to express my strong support for Bill NYC Int. 1125-2024, which would require the Department of Education (DOE) to report annually on critical information regarding school librarians and library access in DOE schools. As a school librarian, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact that a well-resourced library and certified librarian can have on students' academic success, personal growth, and future opportunities. After being closed for close to 15 years, despite state mandates requiring a library with a certified school librarian, I was hired to revitalize the library program here at South Shore and create a brand new library space. While some school staff did not understand why a room used for meetings and social gatherings was being turned into a library, I've now had several staff members tell me that now that I've been here over a year, they see why our campus needed a school library and a certified librarian running it. I work with 6 unique schools and have already brought my students 4 author visits, 30 new laptops, over 2,000 new books, and nearly \$20,000 in grants and private donations. Our library has hundreds of student visits each month and our book circulation has skyrocketed this year, proving that kids do read books and school libraries are a vital part of the equation.

School libraries are more than just spaces filled with books—they are hubs of learning, creativity, and equity. In my role as a librarian, I have:

- Created a safe space for students to express their ideas, learn about what interests them, and connect with other students with similar interests.
- Built a space where students can access a variety of texts for both academic and pleasure reading.
- Gotten books into the hands of students. A colleague pointed out that just 2 years ago, before the school had a library and school librarian, you wouldn't have seen a student in the cafeteria reading a book. Now, this is something that he notices regularly, because students are finding books they love in the school library.

Unfortunately, the decline in certified school librarians across New York City has created inequities that disproportionately affect students in underfunded schools. Without accurate reporting on the number of librarians and library access in schools, it is

impossible to address these disparities effectively. Bill NYC Int. 1125-2024 is a crucial step toward ensuring transparency and accountability so that every student can benefit from the resources and expertise that school libraries provide.

I urge you to support this bill and advocate for equitable access to school libraries for all NYC students. Our libraries are essential to preparing young people for success in school and beyond—and we cannot afford to let them disappear.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for your commitment to improving education in New York City.

Sincerely,

Kristen Falco

Certified School Library Media Specialist

South Shore Educational Complex - Serving Academy for Conservation and the Environment, Brooklyn Theatre Arts HS, Brooklyn Community HS for Excellence & Equity, Victory Collegiate HS, Brooklyn Bridge Academy, and Uncommon Prep Charter HS  
KFalco2@schools.nyc.gov

**April/8/2025**

**Lesly's testimony**

**UA maker**

Hi, I'm Lesly Arenas, a tenth grader from urban assembly maker academy. I'd like to thank the council for giving me the space to testify for my fellow students across New york.

In a world where everyone is focused on the advancement of technology, it's important to have a space to physically put down our feelings, dreams, and hopes. whether that be through drawing, painting or any other possible art form; to be able to express ourselves through even music and actually visualize what we the youth want for our own world and future? Art is fundamental, it's the building ground and jumping point for so many students across the world. Students across the world should be able to see a future for themselves.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

## Art Effects the Essential

My name is Liz Chidester. I grew up in the mountains of the rural south, the bible belt, very close to Jerry Fallwell's institution Liberty University. The arts were a haven for me. It's where I found my family, my weirdos, my free thinkers, and showed me that there was a universe outside of the conservative energy that surrounded me. That there was a whole world waiting to be understood and celebrated and lived in. That the United States is not the world. The arts directly gave me opportunities to pull me out of that place and made me into the world traveling performer and educator I am today. I now live in NYC as a music teacher and performer.

We are seeing right now the effects of over 30 years of conscious divestment in the arts and humanities in public institutions and schools. There is an overall lack of interest in being a human, in compassion, in social interaction in a natural way. We are becoming the robots we feared would take over. We are quickly giving all the reins to people who do not want us to think for ourselves, to express who we are, to tell true stories, to connect with each other in larger ways. And with that, there is a lack of care for the fellow human, for our world, for mother earth. Art therefore affects all aspects. The arts give us compassion, expression, connection, deep, thoughtful, strategic thinking, collaborative work. The arts are what it is to be human. And what is human is essential. Investment in the arts is a direct investment against the current administration, and their mission to strip away anything they see contributes to being human.

My statements don't come from me fighting for my job. As we are all coming to see in any field in this country, jobs are not promised. My purpose is far greater than any "job." And nobody can take my purpose away from me. My purpose is to inspire, connect, stir life and love to those around me through music, theatre, and poetry, and I will do this with my artistic talents until I am no longer here. I want to continue to leave that same spirit behind to the next generation. Do you? The future of our country depends on it.



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**Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Cultural Affairs and Committee on Education,  
Hon. Carlina Rivera and Hon. Rita Joseph, Chairs  
April 8, 2025**

Thank you to Chairs Carlina Rivera and Rita Joseph and the City Council for your support of arts education across New York City. I'm writing to support the **It Starts with the Arts** coalition — calling on our city to prioritize funding for arts in NYC schools. My name is Rae De Vine and I am the Director of Learning and Community Engagement at Manhattan Theatre Club.

The mission of Manhattan Theatre Club is, in short, to develop and present new work, collaborate with emerging and established artists, and produce a diverse range of innovative and thought-provoking plays and musicals by American and international playwrights. **As the first New York City theatre company with a dedicated Education department**, founded in 1989, and more recently renamed to Learning and Community Engagement, the mission of our department is to create experiences that **empower learners** to engage joyfully and authentically with live theatre as **authors, audience, and administrators**. This work centers equity, diversity, and inclusion, and is driven further by our core values of **community and connection, inquiry and reflection, authenticity in storytelling, and joy**. Each year, we achieve our mission by working with approximately **3,000 learners** in three major spaces: **classroom, community, and careers**.

We offer a range of programming in these three areas that includes **playwriting focused residencies** and workshops in schools and with community partners, **intergenerational opportunities** for theatre going, special **student matinee** performances, **long distance learning** across multiple states and continents (TheatreLink, est. 1997), a digital library, and a **robust workforce development** program for recent college graduates.

MTC Learning and Community Engagement is dedicated to equity, diversity, and inclusion in everything we do. Based on the data provided by New York City schools this summer, approximately **85% of the students we served in 2023-24 were BIPOC**, and approximately **71% were experiencing economic hardship**. We continue to **focus on reaching young people who might not otherwise have access to theatre and arts education**. In our New York-area programs, about **29% of our students attend alternative schools**, including high school equivalency programs, night schools, and transfer high schools for students who are behind in credits, and **72% of our total school partners were Title I schools**.

Many **New York City public schools rely on partnerships with cultural arts organizations** like MTC to **provide arts instruction that students would otherwise never have; only about 38% of NYC public high schools provide any theatre instruction**. As described in the NYC Department of Education's most recent Arts in Schools report, "**New York City's cultural arts organizations are a tremendous asset to the public schools**, providing students and teachers with access to quality arts instruction and world-class performances and exhibitions...These experiences directly support the goals for students to become college- and career-ready in speaking, writing, listening, and language." MTC Learning and Community Engagement programs are uniquely poised to develop these skills through the study and practice of theatre. In 2023-24, **97% of participating classroom teachers agreed that our local in-school programs supported their curricular goals**. Thus, **through MTC Learning and Community Engagement partnerships and support for arts education in New York City as a whole, more schools are able to provide theatre-specific instruction that enhances students' college- and career-ready skills**.

Arts education should be available to ALL students, not just some. Unfortunately, only 31% of eighth-grade students met NYS learning requirements for arts education last school year. The [term and condition passed by the Council last year](#) revealed that 379 NYC public schools lack a certified arts teacher (about 1 in 5 schools) — **leaving thousands of students without a dedicated arts teacher in their school**. Furthermore, the combined implications of the Class Size Mandate





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rollout, the Governor's proposed changes to the Foundation Aid formula, and shifting federal funding stand to widen the arts education access gap for years to come.

Investing in arts education is an investment in our future. Therefore, I join my colleagues in urging our City to take action to ensure that all students have access to high-quality arts education. This includes:

- **Extend and baseline at-risk arts education funding (\$41M) alongside other education programs on the chopping block that were previously funded by federal stimulus dollars:** Following one-year funding to off-set expiring temporary 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 stand 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.
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- **Prioritize timely processing of contract renewals and extensions:** Our City must establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that agency staff process awards, extensions, and renewals in a timely manner so that service gaps are avoided (especially when it comes to the MTAC process within NYCPS).

Thank you for your attention and consideration,

Rae De Vine (she/they)

Director of Learning and Community Engagement, Manhattan Theatre Club

(212) 399-3000 x4250 | rdevine@mtc-nyc.org

Hello there, my name is Maryam, and I'm a bassist. That's how I almost always introduce myself. I am a high school senior currently participating in the Midori and Friend's 2025 NEXTGen Program, and I am honored to be here today at the It Starts with the Arts campaign. Sometime in the past few years I no longer was someone who "just plays" bass guitar, but a bassist. It's become a part of who I am, and I most certainly would have never become half the person I am today if it weren't for music. Specifically, I would have never become who I am today if it weren't for music education.

Music class changed my life. Before, there was no way I would have ever asked to speak in front of a crowd like this. I was, and still am in many ways, very shy and kept into my shell. But music has a way with uncovering our true selves. Music moves our souls and shows us parts of ourselves that we didn't even know existed. For me, it helped me find my voice and express myself through the strings of the bass, and for others it has done so much more. When I'm playing music with others we speak in a language that only musicians can understand, and it is a wonderful language. We speak through reality, pain, even school is on that list. Which is why I want to help others learn this musical language.

I'm lucky to have an amazing music teacher who has always believed in me and my classmates. Throughout rough times in school he helps us express our emotions and gives us a safe space to be ourselves and be loud and take space for ourselves. But again, I'm lucky. Many people don't have that. Many people don't even have music class or any art class in their school. To quote John Keating in *The Dead Poets Society*, "We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion." I'd like to generalize this a bit. We don't make art because it's cute. We make art because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. Imagine all the kids who could have grown up to be the next Bowie or da Vinci but never had the chance to find their passion. We need education in the arts. We need our freedom.

Public Testimony: 4/8 City Council Committee on Education

Nabira Zainab, NYC DOE student

Good morning, everyone. My name is Nabira Zainab, and I am a senior at the Urban Assembly School for Leadership and Empowerment in Brooklyn, New York. I live in District 45, represented by Council Member Farah Louis. Today, I am here to testify in support of Bill 1125-2024, which mandates the Department of Education to report annually on school librarians and library access in DOE schools. During our research, we constantly thought about how the lack of library resources might impact us in various ways.

In conducting research for our civic action project in our Government class, we uncovered a significant finding: schools with certified librarians experience notably higher graduation rates. For example, According to the article, "Study finds that high-poverty schools with a certified teacher librarian achieve a 5-year graduation rate of 79%" stating that low-income schools that employ accredited librarians report a graduation rate of 76% over five years. In stark contrast, schools without certified librarians show a graduation rate of only 43%. This gap is especially troubling for our Title 1 school, UASLE, where the absence of certified librarians places my peers and me at a disadvantage. Our extensive research clearly demonstrates that students in schools with certified librarians perform better academically. Enthusiastic librarians not only inspire a joy of reading but also help students cultivate essential research and media literacy skills.

By requiring the Department of Education to provide detailed information on the number of certified and non-certified librarians, the time students spend with them, and the operational status of school libraries, Bill 1125-2024 will illuminate the critical resources available to students. It is essential for Council Member Farah Louis and the committee to support this bill, as it emphasizes the vital role of libraries in education and ensures that all students, regardless of their background, have access to certified librarians for their academic success.

Thank you for your attention, and I urge you to support Bill 1125-2024.

**Written Testimony in Support of Librarians Count Bill**  
**Nandini Saldanha**  
**April 11, 2025**

Thank you for soliciting testimony from the community in support of the Librarians Count Bill. I am the mother to two daughters, Mira (age 14) and Leyla (age 12), both of whom attend public high schools in New York City. I believe having libraries in schools supports academic excellence and in our post covid world, also advances community building and mental health. We need libraries and certified librarians in public schools just as much as we need clean air to breathe. What troubles me is that too often libraries and librarians are seen as a luxury rather than a necessity. My hope for the next generation is to fix our mistakes. Readers can tackle the myriad of challenges that lie ahead with intellectual curiosity, out of the box thinking, and empathy.

I hope I can share here how public school libraries and librarians for my children have differed during the course of their academic careers to show how they have impacted their love of reading. The girls attended elementary school at PS59, also known as Beekman Hill International School, in District 2. Not only did they have a dedicated space for a library in a modern building, but the certified librarian, Lori Talish, was also a teacher. They would visit the library at least once a week. No wonder both my girls had an insatiable appetite for reading from a very young age.

Now when my eldest daughter graduated from PS59 and enrolled at MS104, Simon Baruch Middle School, I believed she would continue her reading marathons. COVID didn't allow us to enter the building prior to admission, but I had learned that they had a dedicated space for a library. I soon discovered while this space exceeded the size of two classrooms, there was no librarian. And without a librarian to help, classes and students simply didn't visit. There was no means of checking out a book. There was no one to encourage Mira to keep reading! The dominant thinking was that it was normal for kids to lose interest in reading at that

age. James Patterson said it best: “There are kids that love reading and there are kids that are just reading the wrong books.” It’s been night and day at Simon Baruch Middle School since a parent, Rebecca S., began helping at the library all day long, every day of the week. The library is now buzzing with kids checking out books, meeting with friends, and printing class homework or passion projects. Just this past week, while I waited for Scholastic to pick up their book fair from an adjacent classroom, I watched how three students, all with different needs, benefitted from their interaction with a librarian:

1) The first child came in looking to chat with Ms. Rebecca. He has appreciated her recommendations in the past and wrote her a card back in November for Thanksgiving, where he expressed his gratitude for “always being there.”

2) The second child who entered asked to use the printer in the library. Ms. Rebecca asked him what it was for. Inspired by anime and manga in books he had checked out, he told her that he was learning Japanese on the side.

3) The last group were three friends acting silly. When asked by Ms. Rebecca if they wanted a brain break, which was totally ok, or whether they would like some books, they said maybe a bit of both. With Rebecca’s help, two of the three left with some horror book titles.

The above shares just a glimpse into the transformative power of a librarian. They advise on so much more than books.


My eldest is currently a 9th grader at the High School for Math, Science and Engineering, a specialized high school with no official library or librarian. This is information that was not readily available on the school website and would have influenced our ultimate ranking of specialized schools. I believe knowledge is power and the Librarian Count Bill would hugely benefit families making decisions about high schools. HSMSE has approximately 1,000 books in a classroom run by one of the ELA teachers. This is far less than the 5,000 minimum of titles required under 8CRR-NY

91.1 (c). Students have access to the CUNY library, but special permission is needed and it tends to be more geared towards doing research. I have been told that the law does not require high schools under 700 students to have a full-time librarian. 8CRR-NY 91.2 (d). These schools, however, lack even a part-time media specialist. How do we hope to graduate students ready for college? Every high school, no matter its size, should have daily access to a library. This is written into law (8CRR-NY 91.2), but so seldom delivered! When our mayor set out to create additional specialized schools in the early 2000s, why did he not account for each having its own library?

We shouldn't kid ourselves (no pun intended). When we deny our kids school libraries, we relegate them to be less than their potential. We rubber stamp students growing up to be minions rather than leaders. Let's prioritize our children's future by giving schools the resources to fund both libraries and librarians. This campaign for libraries and librarians in all high schools should not be shot down on the basis of a zero sum game, where we must choose arts or a nurse over libraries and librarians. Building and budget constraints can not justify the lack of libraries and librarians given the current efforts to limit class sizes. Our priority must be to raise every child to be a productive and engaged citizen of the world with as many tools at his/her disposal. As the largest school district in the country, we must set an example by putting our children first.

Nora McCauley

Brooklyn, NY 11201



Thursday, April 10, 2025

City Council  
New York, NY

To the Members:

New York City public schools are required to have a library, I believe, but there is no requirement to have a librarian. At least this is what I was given to understand when my kids started elementary school at PS 261 in 2010, and the library was a dusty, shut-up room that was used occasionally for tutoring or meetings. Despite all the best intentions at an otherwise excellent and well-managed school, the money that could have been used to pay a librarian was needed elsewhere.

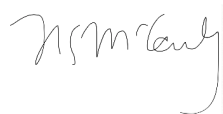
After a few years, the PTA was in a position to pay for a part-time librarian. Remembering how important the school library and librarian were to me as a child, I volunteered, helping to turn the dusty, disheveled collection back into a functioning library again.

Shortly thereafter, the librarian we were able to hire part-time took a full-time position at a nearby high school. Why would she not? And there we were, with a library again, but no librarian.

Touring middle schools with my kids, I always asked to see the library and asked what the library privileges were. Some middle schools did not even have libraries. At BHSIS, where my son went, the library was in the process of being re-established, but there was no librarian. At MS 88, where my daughter went, the librarian was a core part of the community, but after COVID and remote schooling, she was on maternity leave so there was no opportunity to use the library.

Literacy is so important! Kids are not even reading full books in class, only excerpts. Letting kids have experiences of autonomy and self-direction such as choosing what books to read is so important! Librarians are critical parts of any educational experience. Let's fix this.

Sincerely,



Nora McCauley

## **Verbal Testimony – Midori & Friends | NEXTGen Musician Program**

*City Council Joint Oversight Hearing on Ensuring Equity and Access in the Arts*

**Tuesday, April 8 | Committees on Cultural Affairs & Education**

Hi, my name is Parker Tiburcio. I am a native of the Bronx and an alum of the Theatre Production and Arts High School (TAPCo) and the Midori & Friends NEXTGen Musician program. I have been a member of Midori & Friends for about two years now, and I've seen them do tremendous work when it comes to bringing groups from different backgrounds together to create something beautiful.

In times like these, where mental health is declining and things are starting to feel less hopeful, it's such a beautiful thing to see a community come together and make something as powerful as music. Music is something we sometimes take for granted—it has helped us so much in our daily lives and has become almost a necessity. It brings light into dark situations and builds community in a way that few other things can.

But when we don't have access to things like instruments—because the cost of a piano is the same as one month of rent—it can make someone feel trapped, like they don't have an outlet to express their emotions. That's why we need music.

We're in an age where it feels like the world is collapsing on itself, and we have no way to stop it. We just have to keep going—but sometimes, that feels like the hardest thing to do. So if we can all have something that brings us joy and gives us a creative outlet, it can lift spirits and make the future feel a little brighter.

Music spreads messages. It brings people together. That's why we need it—and that's why we need to be able to afford it, so we can keep creating something beautiful, not just for ourselves, but for our communities.

**I urge City Council to invest in accessible, equitable arts education across New York City—to fund programs like Midori & Friends, so that every student, no matter where they come from or what they can afford, has the chance to experience the power of music. Because when we invest in the arts, we invest in healing, in connection, and in the future of our city.**



**Quadiar Dunn | Special Music School High School | Manhattan**  
**City Council Joint Oversight Hearing – April 8, 2025**

Good morning Chair Rivera, Chair Joseph, and members of the City Council.

My name is Quadiar, and I'm a 10th-grade student at a music high school in Manhattan. I'm also part of the NEXTGen Musician Program with Midori & Friends, and I'm here today because I believe music education should be a right—not a privilege.

At my school, we're passionate about music. But we don't always have what we need to grow. One of the biggest challenges we face is not having enough venues or spaces to perform. There aren't many platforms where young musicians like us can share our work with the community. Without access to real performance spaces, it's hard to gain experience, build confidence, or feel like our voices are truly being heard.

That's why I'm advocating for increased performance opportunities for musicians. Many musicians struggle to find platforms to showcase their talent. By providing more opportunities to perform, we could open real paths to building careers—and even change a musician's life.

Joining NEXTGen has changed the way I think about music. It's not just something I do—it's how I express what matters to me. In this program, I've connected with students from all over the city. We talk about the issues we care about—like mental health, safety in our neighborhoods, and access to the arts—and we use music to raise our voices.

We don't all come from the same place, but music brings us together. It gives us a safe space. A purpose. A way to lead.

We're asking the Council to invest in music education—not just for students who already have it, but for students like me, who are trying to make the most of every opportunity. That means funding for better access to rehearsal and performance spaces, support for music programs, and making sure every school has certified arts teachers.

Thank you for listening—and for believing in what the arts can do for students like me across New York City.

My name is Rachael Feldman, and I am a Teaching Artist, Administrator, Adjunct Professor, and Facilitator. I have worked with New York City Children's Theater (legally titled Making Books Sing), for the past three years as a teaching artist and education administrator. Through the City Council, we have been able to bring our programming to over 12,000 students across the five boroughs. Thank you for your support.

Between our signature residency programming ("Literature at Play"), anti-bullying workshops, and touring productions, we have had the honor of being many childrens' first introduction to theater, both as an audience member as well as a participant. Through our work, students have the opportunity not only to explore performance skills, but also develop literacy skills, story-telling skills, social-emotional skills, and self-advocacy skills.

With our DCA-funded residency programs, students have the opportunity to create their own original pieces of theater, where they have autonomy to decide what themes as well as storytelling modalities speak to them. They work through social issues associated with the books we bring in, working as an ensemble through problem-solving options and communication skill building, as well as exploring building scripts, songwriting, and improvisation.

As a student-centered and process-driven program, students have the opportunity to lean in to play and enjoyment, rather than being bound by what a final product is "meant" to look like. Our brilliant teaching artists facilitate sessions in a way that puts the students' wants, interests, and needs front and center. This level of agency is one that students rarely are given in traditional educational settings.

As just one of several dozen teaching artists on our roster, I alone have witnessed so many moments of students coming out of their shells, discovering new talents they didn't know they had, and sometimes even speaking out loud in English for the first time.

Last semester I had the gift of working with a school in the Bronx with predominantly immigrant students, many of whom did not speak much English, if any at all. When surveying which students wanted spoken lines, one student who had yet to speak out loud at all raised their hand. When running lines, they stumbled through pronouncing each word while reading off the script each time, clearly frustrated, but they did not give up. They slowly, carefully read their line out loud at our final share with the utmost confidence. Afterwards, the classroom teacher partner shared with me that she had never heard them speak a sentence out loud before in English.

In this same residency, we explored how more than just the humans in the story can have personalities and thoughts. When prompted to write a journal entry-turned-monologue from the perspective of any character, one student chose to write from the perspective of the picnic table around which the characters gathered. They wrote an insightful monologue about how it felt to be at the center of a family gathering, and how grateful they were to be able to observe everything, even if they could not participate. It was a level of emotional depth that I have never witnessed from an 8 year old, let alone an adult, and it was mined through the ability to be as creative and abstract as possible.

Nothing can replace the confidence that the arts can give students to grow at their own pace, when structured by expert arts educators. These programs deserve funding and support so that we can continue to support students who need it most.

The world is very scary right now. The arts make it possible to make sense of it all, and help students find their voices. Do not take that from the students of New York City. Thank you for your time.

My name is Rachel Altvater. I'm the librarian at Manhattan Comprehensive Night and Day High School, the largest and only transfer high school in the NYC Public School System with night classes. I have almost two decades of experience in education, childcare, and library work. Right now, I'm in my second year serving the "over age, under credit" population, and I couldn't be more proud of how much my students love our library.

Students come to the library in search of facts. They want to learn about great thinkers of the past, history that shaped the nation and the world, innovations that inspire them. They come looking for the keys that will unlock their power to communicate, to take care of themselves, and to be the best people they can be.

They also come looking for fiction. The students live so many lives through diverse novels beyond their wildest dreams. They imagine, they play, they work, they flourish into brilliant young adults. They love that they can learn new words, ask unconventional questions, and explore endlessly; they know that in the library, they have a safe space for all their expeditions.

A student told me, unprompted, "I would like to work in a library one day because I learn so much new vocabulary here." He was thrilled to find out that libraries have their own sets of vocabulary in the field of library and information science. This is why it pains me that, of our more than 1600 schools, there are fewer than 300 certified school library media specialists in functioning library spaces. If one student is brave enough to share his goal, how many others could be impacted in the same way? If one student believes in the future of libraries because of his own present in the library, how many more futures can we build through ensuring every school in our system has a dedicated, certified school librarian and a library?

We are well aware of the data that schools with libraries produce higher test scores and more engaged readers, but to see it in practice has made all the difference for me. If we don't know how many librarians there are in our system, we cannot increase student success.

Our libraries and librarians matter. The city must provide funding for all schools to run effective library programs, and make information about how many librarians are employed available.

Thank you.

I am writing to support the passage of Intro 1152, the “Librarians Count” bill. I am a graduate student pursuing a Library Media Specialist degree at Queens College, and ultimately hope to be a school librarian in a New York City Public School. While completing requirements for the degree, I have seen firsthand how important it is to a school community to have a certified school librarian who is able to maintain a school library and make it a vibrant place for students to learn and explore outside of the classroom. At the high school library where I am interning, students come to the library during lunch in order to read, do homework, use the computer, and socialize in a quieter setting than the cafeteria. In other words, the library acts as an invaluable third space that is attached to the school community and is a place for learning and engagement, but that does not come with specific academic expectations. The school librarian cultivates this environment by acting as a professional resource and mentor to students, and by selecting reading materials that they are interested in and cannot access in other ways.

Unfortunately, it has also become clear to me while working towards this degree just how bleak the employment prospects are in this field within New York City, and just how few schools within the DOE are receiving the high-quality library services they deserve. While looking for schools where I could complete internship requirements, I learned that the majority of schools in my neighborhood do not have a certified library media specialist, including middle and high schools that are required to have a certified librarian under New York State law. Not having access to a librarian means that students are not supported in learning invaluable research skills, or in their literacy journey, because they do not have access to books outside of the classroom that are interesting and meaningful to them and speak directly to their life experiences.

The fact that the DOE does not even report data on the number of school librarians or the services they provide makes it challenging to recognize the extent of this problem, unless you are directly affected as either a student or parent in a school without a librarian, or, like me, as an aspiring school librarian. The first step to remedying this problem and forcing middle and high schools to comply with state law and employ a certified school librarian is to mandate the collection of this data. I implore the Council to adopt this bill and take the first step in ensuring that every student in New York City has access to a school library with a certified school librarian, who will help them learn and grow as readers and citizens outside of the classroom setting.

Dear Members of the New York City Council Education Committee,

My name is Rebecca Breslaw, and I am a certified school teacher-librarian at PS 145 in Bushwick, Brooklyn. I am writing to express my strong support for Bill NYC Int. 1125-2024, which would require the Department of Education (DOE) to report annually on critical information regarding school librarians and library access in DOE schools. As a school librarian, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact that a well-resourced library and certified librarian can have on students' academic success, personal growth, and future opportunities. I work in a Title I school with 97% Latinx students, many of whom are 1st generation or English language learners. In the three years I've served as librarian at PS145, I have seen how access to a library has empowered students to find books they will genuinely enjoy, and pursue reading less begrudgingly. I offer each class independent reading time in the library, and every student has the right to choose their own book. While these may seem like small privileges to adults, offering these information-seeking opportunities is not a given, especially for students who may not have books at home. I remember, in my first year, when a newcomer asked me how much he owes me for his book. He had never been to a library before, and had no concept of libraries as public goods. It almost made me cry, and now I am happy to say that he is an avid reader and user of the Brooklyn Public Library.

Using my MLS degree to guide me, I have expanded the graphic novel, decodable, and Spanish sections at my school, and have diversified the collection to include titles about neurodiversity and kids of color, which my students need to feel seen and engaged in reading. In addition to running book circulation, the library is also a place to conduct research and develop digital literacy skills. This year, our 4th graders are doing a unit about Digital Citizenship, with topics ranging from Clickbait and reading laterally, to Cyberbullying and developing a balanced media diet. If the schedule at school changes and kids miss library, they ask me why they missed it and when they'll be back in the space again. If a kid is giving me a hard time, I find their interest and support them in pursuing learning more through books.

School libraries are more than just spaces filled with books—they are hubs of learning, creativity, and equity. In my role as a librarian, I have:

- *Facilitated 3, soon to be 4, author visits for students*
- *Organized 3 Career Days exposing kids to a diverse range of job possibilities*
- *Expanded and updated the library collection*
- *Supported classroom units of study*
- *Put on family events such as storytime and craft activities, as well as Open Library access for parents to check out books.*

Unfortunately, the decline in certified school librarians across New York City has created inequities that disproportionately affect students in underfunded schools. Without accurate reporting on the number of librarians and library access in schools, it is impossible to address these disparities effectively. Bill NYC Int. 1125-2024 is a crucial step toward ensuring transparency and accountability so that every student can benefit from the resources and expertise that school libraries provide.

I urge you to support this bill and advocate for equitable access to school libraries for all NYC students. Our libraries are essential to preparing young people for success in school and beyond—and we cannot afford to let them disappear.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for your commitment to improving education in New York City.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Breslaw

School Librarian

PS 145, Magnet School of Leadership Through Engineering

[rbreslaw@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:rbreslaw@schools.nyc.gov)

Thank you, members of the Committee, for the opportunity to speak on Int 1125-2024.

My name is Roy Rosewood, a resident of City Council District 29 and a public school librarian of eleven years in the city of New York. I'd like to begin by sharing with you all just what that means.

I started in the Lower East Side, at New Explorations for Science, Technology, and Mathematics, a K-12 school. At NEST+m, I balanced read-alouds for Kindergarteners with teaching seventh graders how to evaluate websites and high school seniors how to cite their sources— sometimes all in the same day! I also hosted Open Mics for students to share their talents in a safe space, ran creative writing workshops and gaming clubs for all ages, and always made sure books found their way into the hands of young readers.

I am now at the High School for Construction Trades, Engineering, and Architecture, a Title I, CTE high school in Ozone Park, where I wear many hats: a teacher of research skills; a college essay coach; the coordinator of our school's Peer Tutoring program; a collaborator on socio-emotional learning events; and a partner with CBOs such as Day One and South Asian Youth Action (also known as SAYA) on programs to better support our students.

During my time at CTEA, I've also connected our students with the Civic Engagement Commission's annual People's Money project and — with a note of appreciation to Council Member Schulman and her staff — on the Participatory Budgeting ballot initiatives for District 29, all so that our students can make connections between their lives and the power they have as citizens.

I share all this with you to give some context for the great range of services provided by any number of school librarians throughout New York City, running their own school library programs..

Some of that number you may know as constituents.

Some of that number have submitted testimony for today's hearing.

Yet, for all of that, I cannot tell you just what that number *is*.

That number — the number of school librarians in New York City public schools — as well as the number of school libraries? We do not know how many there are. There is not enough reliable data as of now to know how many there are, let alone in what districts and neighborhoods they can be found.

That is why this bill is so important.



We have to know where we need more school libraries, and where we need more certified school librarians, so that we can then work to help those neighborhoods and school communities get what they need.

With the data gathered from this bill, we will finally know what neighborhoods need the most support in building or renovating libraries in their schools, so that students will have dedicated spaces to learn such skills as how to do research, to fall in love with reading, and to become lifelong learners who give back to their communities.

This bill will let us discover which school districts have thriving school library programs, so that these programs and the school librarians running them can serve as models for districts that are just starting out.

There's a reason that you can't spell the word "accountability" without the word "count." And for school libraries, and school librarians, to count in all the ways I have shared with the Committee today — in all the ways that make school libraries so invaluable to our communities— we must first all be counted.

Thank you for your time.

Public Testimony: 4/8 City Council Committee on Education  
Sarah Stone, NYC DOE teacher

My name is Sarah Stone, and I have the privilege of teaching 12th graders at the Urban Assembly School for Leadership and Empowerment, a Title I DOE school located in city council district 44 and community school district 20. Thank you to all the council members who responded to advocacy emails from students or my invitations to visit our school - Crystal Hudson, Shahana Hanif, Justin Brannan and Alexa Aviles, to name a few. I am inspired by the students who have spoken before me and motivated by their commitment to justice and equity through literacy.

In our 12th grade Participation in Government course, students chose a civic action issue to focus on, and the lack of library access at our school resonated with many students and teachers. I am joining my students here today in support of bill 1125 - 2024. Transparency in data is a first step towards ensuring all NYC public school students have access to the comfort, imagination, resources, research opportunities, and learning experiences provided by school libraries staffed by a certified school librarian. As a Government teacher in the age of social media, fake news, increased polarization, and parallel web universes, digital literacy is a critical skill for our students. Librarians often serve as resources to students and teachers alike in identifying and utilizing credible sources, which our students need to navigate our ever-changing and often hostile world.

Libraries are an incredible hub of information and librarians are an incredible resource to support students in building research and critical thinking skills. School libraries are a necessary part of building college and career ready students with adequate literacy skills. In order to build young advocates able to not only navigate the world as it is but to advocate and create a better future, students need access to libraries in school. In order to create a more just and inclusive world, we first need to be able to imagine the world as it could be. Libraries provide windows of opportunity and imagination to students as they dream of the world they deserve to live in. Every NYC public school student deserves access to a school library to expose them to the possibilities beyond the brick wall, and to provide them with the 21st century skills necessary to achieve those possibilities. Thank you for supporting the passage of bill 1125.

My name is Ashley Marquez and I am 17 years old. I live in Borough park in District 44 and my council member is Simcha Felder. I am currently a senior at UASLE in Borough Park. I am testifying today to support the bill to require the department of education to report on school librarians and library access in New York city public schools.

I think school libraries and librarians are important because it keeps students involved and helps them learn. I used to go to the High School of Telecommunications. There I had access to resources like a library. When I went to the library, I felt safe and comfortable and it was a space where I could study independently. The library was large with many bookshelves, books, computers, printers, comfortable chairs, and librarians. The librarian was very nice and helpful and would answer any questions I had about a book I was reading. When I was taking US History, I remember reading a book about the American Revolution and I asked the librarian about what was life like back then. She had a lot of knowledge, and was able to do research and answer my questions. Also, I liked that the library was a calm quiet place to do work.

Now, I go to a smaller school that does not have a library. When I have questions about books I am reading, I can ask my teachers but they are often busy teaching. I liked having a librarian at my old school who was always available. When I want a quiet place to study I don't have anywhere to go. I get distracted when I try to study at home and wish I had a school library.

My classmates and I researched this issue about school libraries for our Government class. When we met with our school principal she said that she wants us to have a library and a librarian but because of our budget we can't have one. I support this law because hopefully it will help show the city council that we need more libraries and we need a bigger city budget for schools so every school can have a librarian.

4/8/2025

Members of the New York City Council:

My name is Sarah Goldin and I live in the Riverdale section of the Bronx. My son is in the first grade at P.S. 24 The Spuyten Duyvil School and my daughter is in 3K at Bedrock Preschool.

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support of the Librarians Count Bill (Intro 1125). I am shocked that my child's highly rated public school does not have a library. Every public school in New York City deserves a library and a school librarian. Libraries are a crucial part of learning and foster an early love of reading. They also teach critical thinking skills and research methods that will serve children throughout their lives.

I urge you to pass this bill and make sure that every student in NYC has access to a library and librarian in their school. Promoting literacy among children should be a top priority.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,  
Sarah Goldin

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Public Testimony: 4/8 City Council Committee on Education  
Sheema Zaira, NYC DOE student

Good morning! My name is Sheema Zaira, a high school senior at the Urban Assembly School for Leadership and Empowerment in Brooklyn, New York. I live in District 40 with Rita Joseph as my council member representative. Today, I am here to represent the 495 students in my school as well as all New York City students who understand the **urgency** of the “Librarians Count” bill. I testify in support of the 1125-2024 bill to require the Department of Education to record the accessibility of libraries in schools. Not only is this issue **detrimental** to the college readiness and academic success of students, but is also in **violation** of pre-existing laws.

According to the New York State Law on School Libraries, section 91.1 states that a library **has to be** “established and maintained in every school” and there should be a minimum number of books based on school size. Section 91.2 mentions that “each school district” has to have a “certified library media specialist” unless an “alternative arrangement” is “approved” of. Clearly, not every New York City school is complying with these state laws and recognizing the severity of this issue is not possible without data collection. It is **alarming** to my peers and I that the New York City Department of Education does not already have data on the accessibility of libraries. This bill will not only strengthen pre-existing laws, but hold New York City schools accountable for their violation of state laws.

Yes, it will take time and planning, but passing this bill will be **monumental** because the students in this city need more transparency and **clarity** from the Department of Education. I attend a Title 1 school with a majority immigrant student body that does **not** have access to a library. This means that my peers and I do not have a designated space to work on our assignments or the support of a librarian for research projects and finding books to read. Is it truly equitable for our city to continue accepting the disparity between public schools or is it time to reform our education system to serve the students? Because when you improve the lives of students, you improve the lives of **all citizens** in this city. We **highly** advise you to move forward with this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

My name is Shia-Malcolm Hawkins and I am an eleventh grade student at UA Maker. I thank you all for taking the time to listen to my testimony this morning.

I am a creator after being a student. Art is, and hopefully will be, part of my life for a long time. As a student, art allows me to learn at my own pace.

Maker offers a multitude of artistic spaces: photography, scrapbooking, design, computer animation and even a music club where students practice live music. These opportunities at creation are truly a blessing. But as a film student and a writer, I rarely have the opportunity to explore, create or learn about film, scriptwriting or camera operation. I'm fortunate to already participate in a film fellowship but I spend very little time there. Most of my time is spent at Maker Academy. A greater variety of artistic mediums would be extremely beneficial as some artistic languages may not work for some students. There should always be a space for students to explore and discover what works for them.

I love all of my teachers but it's the art teachers like Ms. Milton from my junior high school that I attribute the development of my passion for art. She helped me tap into my artistic potential. Calling myself an artist who religiously practices and evolves their work is freeing and when given the chance it changes my educational experience.

For example, in Earth and Space Science, my teacher allowed me to write and perform a short story on the progression of climate change. With this project, I created several versions of the story based on data I gathered over weeks. I sometimes struggle with word heavy lessons and using my means of expression to create a product I am proud of speaks to the impact of art in school.

Education is meant to be a doorway to our futures but who will we be if we don't find what makes us feel inspired, what makes us makers and creators? Once again, thank you for listening to me and have a good rest of your day.

My name is Sophia Clark. I am a 36 year old Harlem resident, creative, and branded content producer. I would like to share my experiences as a student at schools with and without libraries, and how they shaped who I am today.

My elementary and middle schools did not have a library - and I can tell you that I felt utterly cornered by the culture of those places. These are schools where uniformity is the key to order, and where little weird loners like me either had to fall in line, or feel invisible. Schools without libraries don't have the space or resources for children and youth to discover who they are in the context of safety and a love of learning. In our world of ever-increasing access to information (and not necessarily access to facts), we must create safe places for kids to explore themselves, new information, and also ask questions. We also must provide real, tangible examples of curiosity and respect as a key component to education. The library is no better place - the classroom alone is not enough.

When I was in high school, I struggled with finding friends and emotional safety. I wasn't athletic, cool, or confident. This means there wasn't a lunch table, locker room, recess court or playground where I could feel free from the academic and social pressures of school. The only thing worse than feeling alone as a young person is having that loneliness on display. Thankfully for me, there was (finally) a library. In addition to giving me access to a quiet place where being alone was socially acceptable, it also gave me access to information and a school's most critical resource- a librarian- someone who could take an interest in me as a young person and see my potential outside of my test scores. Here, I could foster my own identity and find resources. And I cannot tell you the value of having access to a computer in a place that was safe and monitored by an adult.

Most queer kids will tell you that information about our experience is not taught to us in school, nor is it a comfortable subject with our peers. But the library was the space where I could be myself, have access to safe and monitored resources, and eventually develop interests outside of my personal identity - which made me feel like a whole person, giving me the confidence to find my community. Now, I am a successful, self aware and community-minded adult, and it's because I have had a diverse range of experiences with teachers, advisors, librarians, etc, and quiet places to process how those experiences could inform who I wanted to be in the world. I'm grateful to my school library for being one of those places. Our kids deserve this experience and we as a society have the capacity to provide it to them. And I urge this committee to continue finding ways to ensure this fundamental resource is protected.

Thank you for listening.

Sophia Clark

Hello:

I am writing to add my testimony to the importance of having a certified school librarian in every school. As a New York City Public School librarian for the past 17 years, I have an obvious stake in the game, but for good reason.

When I joined the New York City Department of Education, there were about 700 librarians. Our bi-annual conferences were packed, full of librarians ready to learn and network and bring exciting ideas back to our school communities. Slowly, particularly with recession era budget cuts happening, our numbers began to dwindle. During my tenure as the president of the New York City School Librarian's Association, starting in 2011, we began discussing advocating for librarianship—how can we get the NYCDOE to honor the New York State mandate which insists all secondary schools must have a school librarian. This fall, at a meeting for Manhattan school librarians, there were about 45 of us in an auditorium. To see that not only have we made no strides toward reaching our goal, but that our numbers have shrunk dramatically, to be under 300 certified librarians in the entire City, is alarming.

School librarians are more than just folks who check out books. School librarians create a safe space. School librarians carefully curate collections of materials that allow each student and staff member in their school community to see themselves in the books, to know that they belong and that they are valued. School librarians allow students the space and the resources to pursue their interests and dreams and safely explore new ideas. Over puzzles, crafts, maker spaces and more, students can find a community. School librarians provide so much more than books and the room that houses them. School librarians are certified teachers who promote digital literacy, teach students how to access reliable information and help prepare them for college and careers beyond high school. Because the vast majority of my students have never had a librarian before, I am teaching them how to be a library user, how to access research databases, how to create properly formatted citations, how to use AI as a tool to support their work rather than blindly copying and pasting information they find.

The library is a vital part of a school community and hundreds of thousands of students are not being taught these skills and are not being provided with this safe space. Many teachers have never worked at a school with a school librarian. They then become administrators who have never worked with a school librarian. They do not understand the value a school librarian brings to their staff. I understand budgeting decisions are difficult, but I do not understand not prioritizing a staff member who serves every student in the building, who provides invaluable access to books, resources, technology, grants, and community partnerships that benefit the entire school community. We do our students and staff a disservice when we do not prioritize libraries and literacy. No amount of classroom book carts can replace a hand-picked recommendation from a certified school librarian. It is time that we follow the state mandates. It is time that we push beyond that and show our youngest students that they are deserving of a school librarian too. Do the right thing.

Thank you for reading,  
Teresa Tartaglione  
New York City Public School parent (PS 122Q and PS 85Q)  
Campus Librarian  
The Martin Luther King, Jr. Educational Campus



My name is Tess Rosenberg and I'm a MLS student at Queens College. I decided to pursue an MLS after I started working in a school library at a private school in Manhattan. Every day, I watch elementary school children trip over each other to get to their favorite book series first. I watch as one book circulates a group of sixth graders in the cafeteria. I watch eighth graders read through the entire graphic novel section, finally having access to the ones labelled YA with a quiet curiosity they often hide around their peers. I've seen kids that are dead silent in the classroom open up in the school library and feel comfortable to laugh and joke around. I've seen a seventh grader casually strike up conversations with a fourth grader, not with any teasing but a genuine interest in the younger student. It is a space filled with love and learning. The kids get to feel respected, curious, and empowered. They get to be active participants in the space and in creating their own journey with books. I chose the Queens college program because I want to work in public schools and the program offers certification for NY public schools. I want to work in public schools because I don't think the only kids who deserve this safe and loving space are ones fortunate enough to go to a private school. If New York City wants to be a great city, we need to create and invest in empowering and safe spaces where little New Yorkers can grow to be confident, bold learners. Please make the right decision. Please take the next step to putting New York City youth first.

Hello, my name is Vance Krichmaryov. I am a junior high school student at James Madison High School, and I am here on behalf of Midori & Friends as a part of their NEXTGen Program to advocate for music education.

To be specific, I am advocating for music to be accessible to each and every person who attends school in NYC. As it stands, music education is a small, minute part of general education that we have publicly in our schools. Only a set number of kids get to even try it—for the schools that have it—let alone go forth and further develop their skills, and this is what saddens me.

For music is the one thing that everyone loves. It connects all—whether through externalizing it through an instrument or even using your own body to sing or produce rhythm. Perhaps not everyone enjoys every genre of music, but there is ALWAYS one. This is why music education is a must. Because without it, many won't reach their full potential. Music is a means of understanding oneself more deeply, and in aspects you never even realized existed. It's the language everyone understands, yet also vastly varies in dialects.

This issue runs deeper as well. People not getting their rightful education affects more than just the person not gaining it. Without everyone having the chance to access music education, we miss out on valuable relationships with one another and the feeling of connectedness that comes with it. A place to belong, that perhaps some might not have in their own lives yet.

I have personally seen—despite my youth—time and time again how music creates deep unity and profound communities, small and large, to work together as though they've known each other all their lives, even though they've just met five minutes ago. It is why I am able to stand here today, in front of the City Council of the very state I grew up in, with confidence and pride in my fellow musicians and myself, to ask for your help in strengthening our musical education.

**I urge City Council to increase funding and support for music programs in all public schools. Make music education accessible to every student—not just the lucky few. Because when we invest in music, we invest in connection, self-expression, and stronger communities for the next generation.**

Thank you.

My name is Zalykha Maria Mokim and I am one of the few librarians left in our city's public schools. Today I am not only speaking as an educator, I am speaking as a public school mother.

To everyone hearing my testimony today, I'd like to ask you: when you were in school, did you have a school library with a librarian? Do you believe that children in the city should have the opportunity to choose books, to have a safe open space for learning and work with a teacher on independent inquiry?

Throughout our city, libraries have been gutted. Don't get me wrong, they are spending money on renovations, but these renovations are being done without librarian staffing. We're also building new buildings, but these libraries aren't being fully accessed to their full potential – they're just spaces. In our budgets, books are being bought, but collections aren't being curated or developed with the population of students in mind to use for years to come.

The private schools in our city offer access to the most affluent children, but our public schools deny this basic educational right to our students. I want my child and all our children to have the same opportunities as others. Libraries are not a luxury, libraries are a necessity.

Libraries with certified librarians are essential to education. Librarians provide access to information, and are necessary in helping students and educators navigate the Internet and the world of Artificial Intelligence.

Librarians know how to access information. Librarians know the latest books. Librarians help cultivate a safe space and a culture of reading in their school communities.

We need a certified school librarian in every school. Anything less, is detrimental to our children's education.

I am now a school librarian on a campus serving over 1800 students - with only one librarian. But prior to this year, in all 12 years of my DOE service as high school history teacher, I never worked in a school where students had access to a library in their campus. As a history teacher, this was appalling – almost all post-secondary research skills require the skills of using a library (and a librarian!) to access materials not otherwise available. I grew up in suburban Massachusetts and my high school had a library I used everyday - as a middle child, libraries were often my only quiet place to study and work in addition to providing access to novels and nonfiction that reflected my life and exposed me to people and experiences different from my own. Now, as I raise my own child in Queens, I want the same for them – access to a school library from K-12, with a certified librarian keeping the collection current, teaching media and information literacy skills, and being a part of the village that prepares our young people for their future. This bill is just a first step, but a necessary one, to know exactly how many certified librarians there are, how many library spaces there are, and where the gaps are. Currently there is no accountability for schools that misuse library funds and resources or that don't prioritize hiring fulltime certified school librarians. We all know examples of this through word of mouth, why not make this data transparent and available?

I am hoping to draw your attention to the absolute necessity of libraries and access to libraries in our schools and communities.

As reading levels and scores among our children drop, we have to be able to protect our communities ability to sit and research in safe, well equipped spaces, with knowledgeable librarians to guide and support learners, readers and researchers.

As a child, I spent every Saturday in the Library, being dropped off at 10am and picked up when the library closed. I devoured books, peacefully reading quietly and safely in the Children's Wing.

I consumed books, under the watchful and patient eye of our librarian. I would like every child to have the same opportunities I was given as a child ~ to immerse in literature, to explore other worlds through books, to gain knowledge and confidence by reading.

Libraries in schools are even more important. Libraries in schools provide access to information with immediacy ~ allowing students, teachers and staff infinite opportunities to expand their work and their minds. Librarians are the heart of a good school: welcoming learners into a space that is free, available and catered to their needs. I applaud and am in awe of my library here at our high school. Not only does our fabulous librarian have her finger on the pulse of what our students want to read, she also provides a thriving fully accessible place to learn, read, meet, and relax. The room is beautiful, not only because it is filled with books and sunshine, cozy chairs and couches~ it is also filled with an air of welcome, ease and endless possibilities.

School libraries play a vital role in the educational ecosystem, offering much more than just a space for reading. They are dynamic hubs that support literacy development, foster community, and teach essential skills for life in the digital age. Here's why school libraries matter, incorporating key concepts such as third spaces, literacy, digital citizenship, and community:

## **1. Fostering Literacy and a Love for Reading**

School libraries are foundational in developing literacy. They offer students access to a wide variety of books that match different reading levels and interests, which helps to cultivate a love for reading. A rich selection of resources encourages exploration beyond textbooks and supports vocabulary development, comprehension, and critical thinking skills. Libraries also provide opportunities for students to engage with diverse narratives and ideas, expanding their understanding of the world. I see this first hand as my students excitedly ask me if a specific book has been returned.

## **2. Creating Third Spaces**

A "third space" is a term used to describe a social space that is neither home nor school, but serves as a neutral, welcoming environment for learning and personal growth. School libraries serve as third spaces by providing a quiet yet engaging environment for students to read, study, or collaborate with peers. These spaces help reduce stress, encourage creativity, and foster social interaction in a non-judgmental setting. Students from different backgrounds and grades can connect in a relaxed space, promoting inclusivity and belonging.

## **3. Promoting Digital Citizenship**

In the age of technology, students need to understand how to navigate the digital world safely and responsibly. School libraries are key players in promoting digital citizenship. Librarians teach students how to critically evaluate online resources, avoid misinformation, and respect others online. They also educate students on issues such as privacy, copyright, and cyberbullying, helping them develop ethical behavior in the digital landscape.

## **4. Building Community**

A school library is more than a place for individual learning; it can also be a hub for building community. It is a space where students, teachers, and parents can come together for shared learning experiences, from reading programs to workshops. Libraries also provide opportunities for collaborative projects, where students can work together on research, presentations, or even creative endeavors like writing or art. By hosting events and activities, libraries encourage student involvement and strengthen ties between the school and the wider community.

## **5. Supporting Diverse Learning Needs**



School libraries are critical in supporting students with diverse learning needs. They offer resources like audiobooks, visual aids, and assistive technologies to support students with disabilities or those who struggle with traditional reading methods. In addition, the library environment can be tailored to meet the needs of different learning styles, providing flexible learning opportunities for all students.

## **6. Encouraging Critical Thinking and Inquiry**

School libraries encourage students to be curious and ask questions. With access to a variety of books, periodicals, and digital resources, libraries help students develop inquiry-based learning skills. Librarians guide students in conducting research, evaluating sources, and synthesizing information—skills that are essential not only in school but also in the broader world.

## **7. Cultivating Lifelong Learning**

The library is a place where students can access information beyond the classroom and beyond their immediate curriculum. It instills a habit of lifelong learning, where students learn how to be independent learners and problem solvers. By offering resources on various subjects, libraries allow students to pursue interests and passions that may not be covered in the regular curriculum, helping them become self-directed learners.

## **8. Promoting Equity and Access**

School libraries play an important role in promoting equity by providing all students—regardless of socioeconomic background—with access to resources they might not otherwise have. Whether it's books, internet access, or educational software, libraries ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed, leveling the playing field and giving every student the tools they need to thrive.

## **Conclusion**

School libraries are much more than places filled with books; they are dynamic, inclusive spaces that nurture literacy, promote community, and teach students critical skills in a digital age. By supporting literacy development, encouraging social interactions in third spaces, teaching digital citizenship, and creating an environment for exploration and collaboration, school libraries contribute significantly to both individual student growth and the overall educational community.

Councilman Restler and Speaker Adams, though I wasn't able to attend the hearing for amendment 1125-2024, I want to provide personal testimony for why requiring the city Department of Education to collect data on school libraries and school librarians is important.

I'm a librarian and alumna of Queens College who's currently studying to get certification to work in a school setting rather than in a public library system. My career is just beginning, but I've already seen the impact of what a robust, well run library and a dedicated librarian can do for students.

Librarians are as integral to education as classroom teachers, despite what some don't know and misunderstand. Reading is the key to all other types of learning; struggling there makes most other subjects difficult. In and out of the classroom, reading allows students to follow their curiosity and their passions, find answers to questions, and understand the world they live in. Students who don't have a librarian who can focus on giving them a safe, comfortable, age appropriate and useful environment in which to dig deeper than is often possible in a traditional classroom are inherently at a disadvantage.

Librarians support curriculum, but on a deeper level they support students in growing, maturing, and becoming better versions of themselves. It's a big responsibility, but it's also a unique and special one. They encourage students to become better communicators and collaborators, more creative, and more resilient. They can have a hand in showing students they're not alone by giving them access to books and information.

Why should young New Yorkers not be afforded these opportunities? It's a shame that in a city with as much available to them as New York, students have lost out on everything a school library can give them.

They deserve so much more, they deserve a capable, knowledgeable, and empathetic librarian in their lives just as much as their peers who live in more suburban and/or affluent communities. Libraries had a massive effect on me as a student, and seeing that there's a need here in New York City Public Schools has inspired me to work towards filling the gaps. I want to be for my future students what my teachers were for me. Without accurate data, it's difficult to even begin to tackle putting more librarians in schools, increasing literacy, and improving students' overall academic experience and wellbeing.

A library and a dedicated librarian to keep it running is a luxury; not in the sense of being frivolous, but in that it's incredibly significant and necessary. If we want the next generation of New Yorkers – regardless of race, ethnicity, economic or social status, ability, identity – to be successful, why can't we give them the tools they need?



# SUPPORTS



The United Federation of Teachers represents more than 190,000 employees including teachers and classroom paraprofessionals, along with school secretaries, attendance teachers, guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, adult education teachers, administrative law judges, nurses, laboratory technicians, speech therapists, and 60,000 retired members. We also represent teachers and other employees at a number of private educational institutions and some charter schools.

**Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations**  
**Res. 0741-2025 (Rivera): Resolution designating May 10 annually as Judith Jamison Day in the City of New York to honor her life and legacy as a dancer, choreographer and longtime artistic director of the groundbreaking Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.**

## Summary of Resolution

This resolution would designate May 10 annually as Judith Jamison Day in the City of New York to honor her life and legacy as a dancer, choreographer and longtime artistic director of the groundbreaking Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

## Statement of Support

The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) supports designating May 10 annually as Judith Jamison Day in the City of New York. Not only was Judith Jamison an innovative and immensely talented dancer and choreographer, but she was also a teacher and a mentor. She taught others with support and encouragement, pushing them to overcome any obstacles that stood in their way. Judith Jamison also placed the values of representation and diversity at the center of her work. She put a spotlight on the experience of Black women and she uplifted dancers of color.

Judith Jamison serves as an example of how we as educators hope to teach and empower all our students in the classroom daily, and we support this resolution to honor her legacy.

**FOR THE ABOVE-MENTIONED REASONS, THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS SUPPORTS THE PASSAGE OF THIS RESOLUTION.**



# SUPPORTS



The United Federation of Teachers represents more than 190,000 employees including teachers and classroom paraprofessionals, along with school secretaries, attendance teachers, guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, adult education teachers, administrative law judges, nurses, laboratory technicians, speech therapists, and 60,000 retired members. We also represent teachers and other employees at a number of private educational institutions and some charter schools.

## **Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations Res. 0844-2025 (Zhuang): Resolution recognizing May 10 annually as Chinese American Railroad Workers Memorial Day in New York City.**

### **Summary of Resolution**

This resolution would recognize May 10 annually as Chinese American Railroad Workers Memorial Day in New York City.

### **Statement of Support**

The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) supports recognizing May 10 annually as Chinese American Railroad Workers Memorial Day in New York City. While building the transcontinental railroad, Chinese workers were forced to work in dangerous and unfair labor conditions. They were paid less and worked longer hours than white workers, and many of them lost their lives on the job.

In response to these horrific conditions, Chinese workers organized to demand higher wages and shorter workdays.<sup>1</sup> This organized stand against unfair labor practices required resolve and bravery. It also paved the way for the unions of today, and it is our duty to remember the Chinese workers who built our country's railroads.

**FOR THE ABOVE-MENTIONED REASONS, THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS SUPPORTS THE PASSAGE OF THIS RESOLUTION.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mocanyc.org/collections/stories/railroad-chinese-labor-strike-june-24th-1867/>

UFT OFFICERS: Michael Mulgrew, *President* • LeRoy Bar, *Secretary* • Debra Penny, *Treasurer* • Michael Sill, *Assistant Secretary* • Thomas Brown, *Assistant Treasurer*  
VICE PRESIDENTS: Karen Alford • MaryJo Ginese • Anne Goldman • Leo Gordon • Janella T. Hinds • Richard Mantell • Mary Vaccaro

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Audrey St. Clair, Asst. Commissioner, Program Services

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: DCLA

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lance Polivy

Address: 31 Chambers Street

I represent: DCLA

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Melissa Jacobs

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYCPS

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nicole Tanzien

Address: 571 Arington Ave, Brooklyn

I represent: Dancewave

Address: 182 4th Ave, Brooklyn

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/15/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Salma Baksu

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 04/08/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mafor Mamba Tsu

Address: 90 Monroe St; Brooklyn NY 11216

I represent: Siren-Protectors of the Rainforest

Address: 90 Monroe St; Brooklyn, NY 11216

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1175-2024 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maddy Dittler

Address: [REDACTED] 1105 Astoria, NY

I represent: Bozell H. LaGuardia High School / 1st music dept / 1st m

Address: 100 Amsterdam Avenue

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125-2024 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aja Emboff

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: Fiorella H. LaGuardia High School

Address: 100 Amsterdam Ave

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125-2024 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 04/08/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dar A. Ashikhmina

Address: 100 Amsterdam Avenue, New York

I represent: LaGuardia High School

Address: 100 Amsterdam Avenue, New York

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 112 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Student

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aurora Day Dunbar

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ginger Meagher

Address: 520 8th Ave

I represent: TDF

Address: Suite 501

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jenny Fox

Address: 11201

I represent: Librarians = Literacy

Address: n/a

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rachel Cohen

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Librarians = Literacy

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Che Buford

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Arts Education

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MEGAN MUTTREJA

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Brooklyn

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1115 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jessica Patrick

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Brooklyn

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nancy Bedard

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ BKlyn

I represent: Legal Services to NYC

Address: 40 Worth St. NY, NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Courtney Boddie

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: New 42

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Ariel Savransky

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: 92 NY

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Tia Powell Harris

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: City Center

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

 Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms 



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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Trenton Price

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Salvadori

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paul Thompson

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYCPS

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lordelia Vane

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYCPS

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

# THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Hannah Berson

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NVCPS

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

# THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Eric Edwards 11216

Address: 1360 Fulton St. 2nd Fl, B'KLYN NY

I represent: Cultural Museum of African Art

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

# THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOHN SCANDONE TEACHER

Address: JACKSON

I represent: Brooklyn High School of the Arts 'CITY N'

Address: 345 DEAN ST.

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lisala Beatty

Address: 412 W. 42nd St. 5th Floor

I represent: Musica and the Brain Building Co.

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Eve Wolff

Address: 350 Ave. de la Guardia

I represent: Dancing Classrooms

Address: 1350 Ave. de la Guardia

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4.8.25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Judith Insell

Address: [REDACTED] NY, NY 10031

I represent: Bronx Arts Ensemble

Address: 50 Van Cortlandt Park So. Bx, NY 10463

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Skye E. Kowaleski

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn, NY 11218

I represent: Brooklyn Arts Council

Address: 20 Jay St.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Danice Weisman

Address: 122 East 42 Street NYC

I represent: Education Through Music

Address: 122 East 42 Street NYC

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shirley Dubin

Address: [Redacted] Jamaica, NY 11451

I represent: QBRA PEP

Address: Speaks on self

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4-8-25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Arden Armbruster

Address: 110 William St 14<sup>th</sup> Fl

I represent: NYC INDEPENDENT BUDGET OFFICE

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Araya Henry

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: The Whitney Museum

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 9/3/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ashley Margaret

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: DoE Student - LACIE

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 9/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nabira Zainab

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: DOE student - VASLE

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Louie Maku

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Brooklyn NY 11213

I represent: Third Street Music School

Address: 235 East 11th St, New York NY 10003

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gina Costanza

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Brooklyn, NY 11233

I represent: PS23K and MEANYC

Address: 100 Irving Ave

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tai Bar-Zemer

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn NY

I represent: Partnership with Children

Address: 1 bathing park plaza

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 9/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sarah Stone

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: DOE teacher - UACCE

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Tom Zlabine

Address: [REDACTED] NY 10573

I represent: York College / CUNY

Address: 94-20 Guy R Brewer Blvd Jamaica NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chema 2019

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: DOE student- VASIE

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Student

Date: 4/8/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Quadir Sun

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Mickie & friends

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Student - April 2025

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: C. Laine

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: ~~student~~ Mickie & friends

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brian Wagner-Young

Address: [REDACTED] Astoria NY 11003

I represent: New York State School Music Association

Address: Westbury NY

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4-8-2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anthony Ball

Address: [REDACTED] NY, NY 10032

I represent: The Little Orchestra Society

Address: P.O. Box 321945, NY, NY 10032

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vance Krachmarov

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: Midori & Friends Next Gen

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Student

Date: 4/08/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maryam Budron

Address: [REDACTED] Astoria NY 11106

I represent: Midori & Friends

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Student

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Parker Tiburcio

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Midori and Friends

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jacqueline Cruz

Address: [REDACTED] Bklyn NY 11217

I represent: NYCA TA NYC Art Teachers Assoc

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/2021

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jen Dayton

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Midon & Friends

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/08/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: David Freudenthal

Address: 881 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue

I represent: Carnegie Hall

Address: 881 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: AMBREEN DURESHI

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: EDUCATIONAL VIDEO CENTER

Address: 16 CLARKSON ST, NY, NY 10014

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maddy Emerson-Simpson (age 7)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Abby Emerson (mom)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

WITH AMBREEN OURESHI  
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Franchesca Thomas (Franny)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Educational Video Center

Address: 16 Clarkson St (City as HS)

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LUCY SEXTON

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NEW YORKER FOR CULTURE & ARTS

Address: 64 Bleeker St

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lindsay Working - Yp

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: ACO

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mike Smith

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Bell Tel. Co.

Address: 296 Broadway

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Arthur

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: ACO

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

▶ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◀

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ché Buford

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: American Composers Orchestra (ACO)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JJ Marler

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: ACO Teaching Artist

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dionne Figgins

Address: 390 Broadway

I represent: Ballet Tech

Address: 390 Broadway

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 04/08/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rachel Watts

Address: 45 W. 34th St. Suite 1210

I represent: Arts Connection

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: April 8, 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amanda Selwyn

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ 10012

I represent: Notes in Motion

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher  
IS 93 w/ student

# THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Frankie Dascola

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYS AF, MEANING, IS 93

Address: 6056 Forest Ave

Student  
@  
IS 93

# THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jayden Stahl

Address: [REDACTED] Maspeth NY 11378

I represent: I.S. 93 Ridgewood

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Student  
@  
IS 93

# THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/2/05

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tal Center

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: IS 93

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



Student  
@ 93  
IS

# THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: April 8, 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Giovanni Stahl

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: CD 93 Ridgewood

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

# THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ETORIS DANCIN

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Ridgewood Regent

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

# THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sami Abu Shumays

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Flushing Town Hall

Address: 137-25 Northern Blvd

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sofia Guevara

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: 15. 93 Ridgewood

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeremy A Guman

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Ridgewood

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**Appearance Card**

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Kimberly Olsen

Address: [REDACTED] LIC NY 11109

I represent: NYC Alliance in Education Roundtable

Address: 570 8th Ave NY, NY 10018

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**Appearance Card**

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Jacqueline Chen

Address: [REDACTED] NY 10083

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**Appearance Card**

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

**(PLEASE PRINT)**

Name: Lauren Camto

Address: [REDACTED] Bklyn 11222

I represent: urban librarians unite

Address: 87 Richardson St Bklyn 11211

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. ✓ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Samantha Lee

Address: [REDACTED] New York NY

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125-2024 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Arlene Lavarde

Address: [REDACTED] Bellerose 11426

I represent: Myself

Address: same

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125-24<sup>20</sup> Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christine Gavin

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn, NY

I represent: self

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1125-2024 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: April 8, 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Roy Rosewood

Address: [REDACTED] Forest Hill, NY 11375

I represent: Self

Address: (same as above)

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Francesca Thomas

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: 3<sup>rd</sup> Educational Video Center (EVC)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ambreen Gurnshi

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Educational Video Center (EVC)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Martina Neighbors

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Smug Harbor Cultural Center + Botanical Garden

Address: of Staten Island

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: April 8/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lesly Arenas

Address: 464 44th Street Brooklyn NY

I represent: Urban Assembly Navar Academy

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shia-Malcolm Hawkins

Address: 85-05 35th Ave Jackson Heights

I represent: VA Maker Academy

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/8/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Leon Johnson

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: Self

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marqus Jones

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: Brooklyn Community Services

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/8/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sharon Brown

Address: [REDACTED] NY 11436

I represent: Rose of Sharon Enterprises

Address: 43 Madison Street 3F

Brooklyn NY 11238

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms