

New York City Arts in Education Candidate Survey Project

Mayoral Candidates

The following questions were designed to determine candidates' positions on a number of issues related to the delivery of arts education (including music, dance, theater and visual arts) in New York City public schools. Questionnaires were delivered to all declared candidates for the Office of New York City Mayor.

Candidate: Christine Quinn

1. What meaningful experiences, if any, with the arts, either in school or otherwise, did you have in your life and what did you gain from these experiences?

When I was growing up, my mother had my sister and me taking every kind of lesson she could find, in addition to our regular school day. She believed this was critical to helping us grow up to be well rounded and strong young women. We took things like nature classes, swimming and ice skating, but also ballet, painting and pottery making.

Those early lessons - especially painting, which was my favorite - gave me a real appreciation for the importance of the arts both to individuals and communities. That perspective served me well as the Council Member that represents both the gallery district and theatre district, and as Speaker, where I've fought to protect funding for many of our city's cultural institutions. My experiences as a young girl also help me appreciate the fact that for many students the arts can be the one thing that keeps them engaged in their education, that makes them excited to go to school in the morning, and that presents a moment to catch them and possibly open them up to a broader love of learning. The arts also offer many potential future careers for young New Yorkers, whether on the creative or business end.

2. It is widely acknowledged that access to a well-rounded curriculum is a key component of a quality education. However, numerous studies show that over the past decade disciplines such as art, science, and social studies are getting crowded out of the school day. In New York City, for instance, only half of all elementary schools are providing the arts instruction that is outlined in state education law. What strategies do you envision for broadening the school-day curriculum?

First and foremost, we need to reduce the emphasis we've placed on high stakes testing in our schools. New York City is a place that understands the value of art and culture and of thinking in new, creative ways, and we need a school system that makes time for art and music, science and technology, physical education, and creative thinking. But that's simply not possible in a system where everything builds towards a series of standardized tests.

There's always going to be some testing – federal and state laws require them and it's essential that we have a strong system of accountability in place in our schools so we know how students are progressing toward college and career readiness. But we've seen how our prioritization of high stakes tests in math and ELA has reduced teachers' ability to focus on other important subjects.

As a first step, we need to work with the state to eliminate field testing. Last year, approximately 488,000 students across New York took field tests made up of nothing but trial questions. We pay companies like Pearson millions of dollars to administer standardized tests, and I believe they can afford to test new questions without placing the burden on our kids and teachers.

And while testing must be one way we measure student achievement, it should not be the only way. Some schools use alternative assessments that are even more effective at measuring student performance, and holding everyone accountable. One such measure is the portfolio assessment, where teachers evaluate a collection of student work that showcases the information they learned and progress they made throughout the year. Portfolios are already being used at several of the city's top performing schools – schools that place a priority on giving students access to a broad, holistic education with access to the arts – and I propose we continue to expand these and other alternative assessments.

I also believe that we can make more time for diverse instruction by extending the school day, and keeping more of our kids in a structured education program until 6pm, five days a week. We'll start by targeting schools that face bigger challenges - the 100 schools with the highest percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

There are a number of ways that different schools and districts have found to extend learning time. The most comprehensive involves actually increasing the number of hours that both students and teachers are in school. These additional hours provide schools the time they need to increase instruction in a variety of subjects, especially art, music, and other subjects that will enrich and broaden students' lives, without reducing time spent on core academic instruction.

3. How, if at all, would you restructure the current system of school governance? How might this impact the delivery of arts instruction in city schools?

Mayoral control has brought a new level of accountability to the system, and that is a good thing. I don't think there should be any weakening of mayoral authority or power. I do believe that New York City should have full municipal control of our schools, and that the Department of Education should be a full city agency so that the legislative body that has the oversight of our schools is the City Council and not the State Legislature. I do not believe that decisions that affect our children should be determined by a Senator from Onondaga County, or that parents should be forced to travel to Albany to lobby for improvements to their schools instead of just taking the subway to City Hall. The more that New York City is both in control of and accountable for our schools, the more likely it is that parental priorities, like arts programming in every school, get addressed.

Additionally, while there are some principals in the city who love the Children First Networks they've chosen to work with, I know that many more believe we lost a lot when we moved away from a geographically based support structure for schools. Returning to a geographic structure will allow schools to better share resources, especially those in the arts, with other schools close to them. As Mayor I would explore new structures that allow schools to benefit from newer supports they have developed, while restoring a helpful level of geographic connectivity.

4. The arts are recognized as a core subject area here in New York and at the federal level. However, while many schools in New York City do provide quality arts instruction, access to this instruction is far from universal. How would you ensure equity in the delivery of arts education in the following key areas:

A. Funding: Principals consistently cite budget constraints as the chief obstacle to providing arts education at their schools. While schools receive "Supplemental Arts Funding" each year (formerly known as Project

Arts), as of 2007 principals are not required to spend these funds directly on arts education. What would you do to ensure that every school in the city has the resources to provide every student with a quality education that includes the arts?

Principals are working hard to meet their schools' needs with limited resources, so I understand the temptation to use Supplemental Arts Funding on other priorities. But allowing these funds to be used for programming outside the arts means that in many schools there's nothing left for music, dance, art, and theater. And students are the ones who suffer when that happens.

As Speaker, I have worked hard to keep as much money as possible in principals' budgets so they don't have to make difficult choices, like deciding whether to lay off an essential school aid or provide arts programming for students. In the 2011-2012 budget, I saved more than 4,000 teachers from layoffs, and in the 2012-2013 budget, I saved the jobs of 650 paraprofessionals through budget restorations. Additionally, I have secured \$25 million for the lowest performing middle schools during my time as Speaker. Most recently, I called on the State to restore the \$240 million cut from the Department of Education's budget because of a lack of agreement over teacher evaluations. Kids should not have to suffer because adults couldn't come to a deal.

We have been facing challenging economic times for several years, and we've all had to tighten our belts, but I've made funding schools a priority and will continue to do so as mayor.

B. Qualified Instructors: Highly qualified certified arts teachers are the cornerstone of a quality arts program in schools. However, whether due to budget constraints, school size, or other factors, almost 20% of city schools have no certified arts instructor on staff. How could the city ensure that all of our public school students receive instruction from qualified instructors?

While spending for arts education has been declining since the 2006-2007 school year, there has actually been an increase of \$24 million, or about nine percent, in money spent on arts personnel expenses over the past five school years. While I would like to see a reversal in the overall decline, I believe that our spending on arts professionals is an encouraging sign.

I support small schools and I know from personal experience that the positive attention students can receive from adults in a small school community is crucial for many young people. But small schools' have small budgets that make offering a wide variety of courses challenging, if not impossible. Some schools already offer campus-wide programming; this has been especially successful with sports teams in the city. We need to increase the number of campus-wide offerings across the city in the arts, foreign language, and Advanced Placement level classes – with the costs of staff shared across schools – so students in small schools don't have to make sacrifices to be known by their teachers and administrators.

There are wonderful nonprofit organizations already working with the city to place arts professionals and high quality arts educators in schools. We need to continue to nurture these partnerships and use them to make sure that every student has access to a long-term, comprehensive arts education.

C. Space: Lack of available in-school arts space is one of the top challenges principals face in implementing arts education. What policies would you implement to prevent the loss of arts spaces in public schools due to overcrowding, co-location, or other factors?

Space is one of the main challenges facing schools in our city and it has a major impact on education in the arts. I believe that co-locations - both charter/district and district/district - are necessary in our city, but I think we need to be much more thoughtful about the way we do them. Part of being more thought-

ful is ensuring that when we co-locate schools, all of the schools in a building have access to space for art, music, and physical education courses. These are crucial classes that make school more engaging for many students – and they are required by state education law. We have to make sure that all schools are set up to be able to successfully offer these courses, whether or not they are co-located.

We also have to be creative when we think about space in our schools. We must develop ways to use space flexibly that are both teacher and student friendly. And we must provide support to principals to help them maximize students' and teachers' schedules and use all of the space and time available for programs in the arts.

In addition, I'm proud to have passed the Schools FACT Act, requiring the DOE to provide more accurate and detailed information on school capacity and facilities. This is important both because parents have a right to be informed about capacity issues when making decisions about their child's school, and because even if we don't have funds to dramatically increase school capital construction tomorrow, we need to begin assessing need and planning so that we can efficiently use any resources as they become available.

D. Partnerships: New York City has a rich array of cultural resources, including arts and cultural institutions and professional artists that play an important role in the lives and education of some of our school children. How would you ensure that all public school students and their families could enjoy meaningful engagement with these resources?

I believe that every student in the city should have access to New York City's vast array of cultural resources. While many schools already have partnerships with museums, theaters, and other arts organizations, often those partnerships only offer opportunities to some classes in a school. Any many schools are totally disconnected with our cultural institutions.

I would like to see the Department of Education conduct a review of art offerings currently available in schools, so we can develop a clear picture of our art deserts, both in terms of partnerships and school-based instruction. Then, we need to work with schools and with cultural institutions to expand the pie and increase the number of opportunities available to New York City's students.

I would also encourage our wonderful cultural institutions to work together to create sequences of experiences that build off each other, so students' interactions with and visits to partner organizations build off each other over the years and create richer, more meaningful experiences.

In addition, I have been a major supporter of community schools as a way to boost student achievement by better coordinating all the services available in our city, from health clinics to after school programming, and making them more easily available to students and families. I have been working with the UFT, Zone 126, and other community organizations to bring pilot community school efforts to several neighborhoods. As we continue to expand those efforts, there will be even greater opportunities to capitalize on the offerings of our city's cultural institutions.

5. The city's accountability system places a heavy emphasis on student performance on state assessments in English language arts and math. Currently, performance assessments for the arts are being piloted in city schools and while the arts can potentially factor into a high school's report card grade, the overall impact is minimal. Are there ways you would consider expanding or revising the school accountability system to incorporate the arts?

I am fully supportive of the DOE's efforts to make it easier for parents to evaluate options for their children's education. There absolutely needs to be meaningful accountability in our system. That being said,

there are problems with the progress report system. Under the current system, we've seen great schools, schools parents love, where students have access to diverse learning experiences and rich curriculum - including multiple classes in the arts and music - receive C's on their progress reports. We've also see schools that rise to great heights to meet their students' diverse needs and challenges go unrecognized and unrewarded for that effort. When that happens, it creates a sense of confusion, fear, and distrust that can be incredibly divisive and damaging to students, families, schools, and our entire educational system. I would work to develop a system that better accounts for the work being done to educate the whole child in classrooms, schools, and throughout a student's educational experience, instead of one that focuses so heavily on standardized test scores to the exclusion of other important factors.

6. How would you engage teachers, parents, the arts and cultural community, city agencies, and other interested stakeholders to expand access to arts education both in-school and outside of the school day?

As mentioned, the community school model provides great opportunities to engage all stakeholders to improve the availability of arts education for students. I also recently announced a package of proposals called Parents Matter that will improve the way we engage with families around education issues. It focuses on three distinct components of parent engagement: giving parents the tools to help their children succeed; being responsive to parents looking for help; and including parents in decisions about their child's education. We'll make sure every Parent Coordinator and Family Advocate is fully trained, supported, and resourced. We'll introduce a CompStat for our Parent 311 hotline to track the amount of time it takes for a family's issue to get resolved, and make that information public so we can all be held accountable. And we'll better engage our Community Education Councils, and the Chancellor's Parent Advisory Committee.

In addition, I'll build on work I've done with the arts community throughout my tenure as Speaker. I have more theaters in my district than any other elected official in the world and I have made it a priority to protect funding for them and for other cultural institutions citywide. Having these kinds of resources available to everyone who lives in our city is part of what makes living here so great and government has a key role to play in protecting and nurturing non-profit arts groups of every shape and size.

Expanding access to art and design education has also been a focus of my efforts to launch a new design week called NYCxDesign, which will debut this May. We've been encouraging our partners to offer programming in our public schools and I plan to keep expanding Design Week's educational offerings in years to come with the goal of raising awareness about design and showing our city's young people that it is a viable career path for all of New York City's students.

As Speaker, I have also been proud to increase funding for the city's Cultural After School Adventures Initiative, a partnership between the City Council, the Department of Youth and Community Development, and the Department of Cultural Affairs. The programs in the initiative provide a wide array of high-quality cultural experiences that promote intellectual and creative exploration to youth enrolled in afterschool programs.

Additional comments?

No additional comments.

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