

# New York City Arts in Education Candidate Survey Project

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## Mayoral Candidates

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*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: Bill Thompson**

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?

Art has always been a part of my life. Whether it was the music of my youth, my first visits to the Metropolitan Museum or my experiences with art in our communities there has always been a vibrant artistic presence in my community. Arts education used to be a weekly experience when I was growing up in New York City and going to school, and that imbibed in me a deep appreciation for its value, its importance and the way it can change perspective.

What I have gained from art, is what we have all gained—a deepening of the spirit, an appreciation for beauty, a greater understanding of the strength, compassion and courage of my fellow man and the achievements we are able to overcome when faced with adversity.

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?

One of the first focuses of my administration is going to be fixing the curriculum. We need to do more for our students than encouraging memorization; we need to help them develop critical thinking and comprehension—skills that will serve them now and in the future.

While we must ensure that our students graduate with necessary skills in math, reading, and writing, how will future generations build greener buildings, resolve conflict and explore the farther reaches of our universe if we do not spark our children's interest in science, civics and geography at an early age?

I've long said that we need to teach a whole student and I believe that subjects like art, literature, civics, history and music should all be part of that broad curriculum.

Arts and music programs provide our young people with the opportunity to explore their creativity and imagination. They help student performance, which is why I am long been committed to increasing access to the art in our schools.

During my tenure as President of the Board of Education, I helped lead the "Music in the Schools"

program, which brought music education to public school students. I also strongly supported a program that created incentives for schools to embrace spending on arts enrichment.

As Mayor, I will appoint a Chancellor that understands the fundamentals of what goes on in a classroom and understands that a broad curriculum benefits our communities and prepares our children for life. And to provide children with this enriched curriculum, the school day and year should be extended—including Saturday school.

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?

I have been a constant advocate for reforming the way our schools are organized. That begins with parent involvement at the school level. As Comptroller, I released a report that specifically recommended how we could change School Leadership Teams so parents and the community at large would have a more significant role in determining the direction of their school.

I also believe we should give Community Education Council's an actual voice in the education process. This way, parents will be able to be a partner in their school community, and be a part of the decision making process when it comes to our their neighborhood schools work. For too long CECs have been shut out of the process while the DOE has forced policy on them. We should make parents a partner in education once again.

All of this will contribute to arts education. The more invested parents are in their children's education, the more value they will place on the curriculum they see everyday in the classroom. What we hear time and again is that parents want to see less of a focus on teaching to the test, and arts education can be a major part of that transition.

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?

I strongly supported Project Arts, and was genuinely disappointed that Mayor Bloomberg eliminated all guarantees that the funds would be used for arts education. Our students need the widest range of influences to nurture their capacity for self-expression. To help insure equity, I will initiate a program modeled on Project Arts in order to ensure that per-capita allocations are given to schools specifically for arts education.

**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?

Teachers are the lifeblood of our school systems, and especially when it comes to specialized subjects like arts education. But we have consistently seen teachers threatened with layoffs, pay cuts, and fewer resources. We need to leverage the high quality teaching force we already have, which is why I have proposed additional pre-service training for instructors in the arts, so they come into the job with an additional awareness about the importance of education in the arts.

But just as importantly, we need to promote arts education across our curriculum, something I have pushed for since I first ran for Mayor in 2009. By increasing the focus on arts in our schools, we will attract more experienced art instructors to our schools. We live in one of the artistic capitals of the world, where historic works of every kind hang on the walls of our museums. There is no doubt that we can bring the highest quality instruction to our schools to give our students a renewed appreciation of art.

**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?

Overcrowding in our schools has been a constant and ongoing problem, and as schools grow more crowded it has pushed out programs like arts, physical education, and science. Parents have grown more and more disillusioned with the curriculum in their schools and the space their children are given to learn.

As Comptroller, I released an extensive report detailing how space was being incorrectly developed, and gave a neighborhood-by-neighborhood breakdown of how we can plan better to serve our students. The capital planning process has failed to provide the kind of long term growth plan that will ensure our students have a place to learn.

We need to revamp the way our school construction is financed, so we do not put added strain on our capital budget but we do properly allocate funding for construction in the right places. In addition, The DOE and the School Construction Authority need to look at their planning process to ensure that the future plans for new seats and spaces stays in line with neighborhood growth.

By planning adequately and prioritizing spending, we can ensure that our children have access to the space they need for years to come.

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?

New York City is the cultural capital of the world. We must utilize all our City's natural and cultural resources in order to give children the first-class education they deserve. We cannot limit studies to just textbooks and chalkboards. We must immerse students in our City's rich history, our arts community, our museums, and our parks—all of which make New York City the cultural capital of the world. That is why I strongly support experiential learning, field trips, and field programs that add to, build on, and enhance classroom learning.

We also must work to develop public-private partnerships between schools, parents, businesses, and cultural institutions so that our children are exposed to a diversity of experiences and perspectives that will enhance their education. One example that can serve as a model for future efforts is the successful partnership between Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School and the Studio Museum of Harlem.

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 have consistently advocated for a less test-centric model of education, where outcomes dictate curriculum and not the other way around. We need to have a demanding, innovative curriculum for our students that includes arts, physical education and analytical learning. If we do that, college readiness levels will rise, students will perform better and performance will improve. That is because curriculum will be dictating results, and assessments will truly reflect student performance.

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?

We need to leverage amazing resources we have in this City. Extensive public-private partnerships already exist in the art world, but we need to make sure we are bringing the resources from those efforts directly into our schools, especially in neighborhoods that have traditionally been shut out from that kind of learning. We also need to expand our after school programs, which often provide a window into the art world that learning during the day cannot.

Between living in one of the world's greatest cities for art and the infinite creativity of our students, we can build a comprehensive partnership between the arts community and the education community that promotes learning well beyond the classroom.

Additional comments?

No additional comments.

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