



# IESP POLICY BRIEF

## Arts Education Quality Rubric and the *ArtsCounts* Initiative

### Introduction

In 1975, New York City found itself on the verge of bankruptcy, and newly-elected Mayor Abraham Beame was forced to enact massive cuts in the city's budget. Some of the hardest hit programs were arts education classes in the public schools – funding for programs in visual arts, dance, music and theater were slashed from the Board of Education's budget and arts teachers were laid-off from all public schools, essentially eliminating all arts education from the curriculum.

Although many of the city's cultural and artistic organizations subsequently stepped in to provide arts programming for youth, it wasn't until the 1990's that funding for arts education was restored directly to the public school system through the establishment of the Center for Arts Education and the creation of ProjectARTS. In 2003, the DOE developed the *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts* in an attempt



Grade 4, PS 121, Bronx, Courtesy of Studio in a School

to establish a city-wide pre-K – 12 arts curriculum for schools to follow as a model. Four years later, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein then outlined the first-ever accountability plan for arts education in terms of both student access and program quality, further signaling the importance of the arts to a students' overall education. As part of *ArtsCounts*, the Institute for Education and Social Policy at NYU, in conjunction with the DOE's Office of Arts and Special Projects and the Arts Education Task Force, was asked to refine and pilot-test a Quality Arts Education Rubric that could be used by school leaders, arts educators, and cultural organizations to measure program and instructional quality of arts education in their schools. This report looks at the development of this rubric as it fits into the larger *ArtsCounts* initiative and progress made toward the goal of providing all New York City children with a high-quality arts education.

## ***ArtsCounts***

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In an effort to increase accountability for arts education, Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein launched the *ArtsCounts* initiative in July 2007. One major component of their plan was the inclusion of arts metrics in the Administration's measurement of school performance, the results of which would impact schools' Progress Reports, Annual Compliance Reviews, and Principal Performance Evaluations.<sup>1</sup> *ArtsCounts* organized its measures of arts education around four main indicators: a) recognition by students, teachers and parents of access to arts education in schools; b) the number of high school students receiving a Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation through the Arts; c) student participation in arts education according to New York State Education Department Instructional Requirements; and d) the quality of their arts curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

## ***Annual Arts in the School Report***

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That same year, the DOE set out to collect data from the previous school year, 2006 – 2007, in an effort to establish baseline information against which progress of *ArtsCounts*' goals could be measured. Culled from the Annual Arts Education Survey, Department of Education (DOE) databases and the DOE Learning Environment Survey, the results of the first district-wide Annual Arts in the Schools Report were released March 2008. The *Annual Arts in the Schools Report 2006 – 2007* identified both schools that were excelling and those that needed targeted intervention, with the ultimate goal of measuring progress and the creation of strategies that would strengthen the overall delivery of arts education. The second Annual Report, covering the 2007 – 2008 school year, was subsequently released in October of 2008. The reports found that the following progress had been made since *ArtsCounts*' inception:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NYC DOE website, <http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/teachlearn/arts/artscount.html>.

<sup>2</sup> *Supra* note 1.

<sup>3</sup> NYC DOE website, [http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/ArtsReport/2006-07/ArtsReport\\_M364.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/ArtsReport/2006-07/ArtsReport_M364.pdf)

- 45% of elementary schools offered all four art disciplines in 2007 – 2008, up from 38% in 2006 – 2007
- 33% of middle schools offered all four art disciplines in 2007 – 2008, up from 17% in 2006 – 2007; student participation also increased in all four disciplines
- 27% of high schools reported offering all four art disciplines in 2007 – 2008, up from 9% in 2006 - 2007
- 89% of schools reported having one or more cultural partners, up from 82% in 2006 – 2007
- Arts Education Liaison positions were established in more than 1,200 schools, assisting principals in planning arts instruction, choosing cultural partners, and completing the Annual Arts Survey
- Aggregate school arts budgets were maintained and per capita arts spending increased in 2007 – 2008 despite the elimination of \$100 million from NYCDOE’s overall budget mid-year cuts

Despite the progress made, however some measures of success remained stagnant or lessened. For example:

- Although an additional 152 certified arts teachers were hired, the total amount of schools with at least one certified arts teacher dropped from over 80% in 2006 – 2007 to less than 72% in 2007 – 2008
- In all disciplines except theater, 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported participating in arts during their high school career at a lesser rate in 2007 – 2008 than in 2006 – 2007; for example, participation in visual arts decreased from 60% to 49%, and participation in music decreased from 63% to 44%

## Arts Education Quality Rubric

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As part of the OASP’s strategic plan to ensure and measure the quality of arts education in NYC public schools, IESP at NYU and the Arts Education Task Force worked together to develop and pilot-test a quality tool that could be used to measure both program and instructional quality in schools.

### Methodology & Findings

IESP researchers first conducted four focus groups to understand how teachers and principals assess quality arts learning in the four discipline areas with respect to: a) instruction; b) programming; c) collaborations between schools and arts and cultural organizations; d) effectiveness of teacher practice and; e) impact on school culture and student outcomes and how they determine quality with respect to instruction. The focus groups were conducted in April and May of 2008 and included eleven participants, all of whom were classroom arts teachers from the elementary to the high school level, with one principal. Overall, the focus groups showed a fair degree of consistency regarding art teachers’ perceptions of quality arts instruction, the challenges they face, and the supports they need to provide such instruction.

**Challenges in Arts Education.** Of paramount significance, and a recurring theme appearing across all groups, was the perception of arts education within the context of student learning. Most participants felt that arts education is not taken seriously, is relegated to “elective status”, and is viewed as a “fun extra” with little educational value. As evidence, they cited inadequate facilities and materials to teach their subjects, instances

of students being pulled from arts classes in order to complete work for other “more serious” subjects, and the practice of asking arts teachers to substitute for academic-subject teachers. This is complicated by limited instructional time due to necessary set-up and clean-up time. Teachers were also frustrated about the impact of budget constraints on arts programs, repeating that resources to arts programs are cut, staff is diverted to other subjects, and space gets relegated to academic subjects. Lastly, they acknowledged there that is a tension between the current emphasis on test scores and devoting time to subjects that do not factor into the assessment of a school’s adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind.

**Possibilities for Arts Education.** In spite of the aforementioned challenges, the participants still overwhelmingly expressed their belief in the importance of arts education in students’ academic and personal development. Specifically, teachers discussed the possibilities the arts hold in offering a different venue for student learning; it gives students an outlet for creative ideas and energy, provides an opportunity for success for less-academically orientated students, and can be particularly constructive for students with learning challenges. For example, dance might be helpful for students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), while drawing might be a productive avenue of expression for students who have difficulty communicating through written work. Finally, arts class in school is often students’ only exposure to the arts, and so it is important to preserve its value within the curriculum.

Teachers also felt that arts instruction could be enriched by integrating the arts in other areas of the curriculum (e.g., using the arts to explore concepts in science or as a lens for exploring history), and, conversely, by integrating other areas of the curriculum into the arts. Additionally, they felt that the arts curriculum itself needs to be enhanced. They agreed that students would benefit from a cohesive arts program that introduces students to different media and then allows for advancement as students’ skills and interests grow.

Furthermore, all agreed that quality arts education requires the same kind of planning and sequencing as other academic subjects; lesson plans need to be created, and a logical, sequential schedule of classes needs to be followed. Thus, arts teachers need the same kind of planning time and resources as subject teachers. Along the same lines, teachers felt that it is important for students to learn that art is more than the technical skills involved in creating a tangible piece of work, and argued that a comprehensive arts curriculum would include instruction in arts evaluation and critique, as well as history.

Teachers also agreed that quality arts programs require a good deal of administrative support. At the most basic level, teachers felt that the support of the principal is critical to a strong, well-functioning arts program. A qualified teacher is another cornerstone; however, as in other fields, certification is not always synonymous with “being qualified”. For example, some artists become teachers out of necessity, but are more interested in pursuing their own art rather than cultivating artistic talent in others. Also, some art teachers have a core area of expertise, but are unable to translate their skills to other areas, or to communicate the technical aspects of

the work. Through discussion, focus group participants agreed that a good arts teacher is a talented artist who wants to communicate and inspire his/her students.

Participants also spoke about the value of collaborations with external partners. While all agreed that these partnerships are extremely valuable and provide students with opportunities they might not otherwise have, managing the partnership requires a good deal of extra work and effort on the part of teachers. Thus, support for these partnerships at the administrative level is needed. Such support would also help to institutionalize the partnerships, so they could be sustained even in the absence of the initiating teacher.

**Differences & Similarities Among Grade Levels and Positions.** While there was general agreement about the challenges facing arts instruction and the elements that could help enrich it, there were some differences based on the age group being taught. For example, elementary and middle school teachers tended to focus on the physical constraints placed on their teaching by lack of space and resources. They were also concerned that the arts are not recognized as an important form of expression for young children. Indeed, several elementary and middle school teachers talked about the ways that arts can provide a constructive outlet for youthful energy, and that it can be an important medium of expression for pre-literate youth. High school teachers, on the other hand, were more concerned about the lack of cohesiveness of arts programs, and the problem of students' experience with the arts ending up being a collection of different classes, rather than a comprehensive program of instruction. Both groups were equally concerned about the validation of the arts as an important component of a young person's education, as well as the expendability of arts programs in the face of budget constraints. Administrators tended to be most concerned with funding; "the arts are much more costly than other subjects. Choosing between teachers and supplies is a challenge."

**Recommended supports needed for a quality arts education program.** Focus group participants identified several important aspects needed to support a quality arts education program. These include:

- Adequate space
- Adequate time
- Adequate materials
- Supportive administration
- Institutionalized external partnerships
- Integration of the arts across the curriculum
- Teachers (arts and other subjects) working together to support the arts – collaboration on lesson plans that integrate the arts into academics and vice versa
- Cohesive arts program – clear, sequenced, offers experience in different media, but also opportunities for advancement
- Qualified teachers

## Implications

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The Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts has helped to validate art as a critical component of the education of young people. Still, more needs to be done to ensure that art is viewed as an integral part of a child's education. Our research suggests that one way to accomplish this is through the development of systems and strategies geared toward integrating art into the curriculum and the daily life of schools. One such strategy might be to find time for art and academic subject teachers to work together to link art with the academic curriculum and, conversely, to link the academic curriculum with art. Another important component would be the creation of a program of arts instruction that is sequential and accommodates increasing skill. Administration can also play a critical role in ensuring the vital role of art in education; our research reveals that support from the administration can provide validity for art in a school, help allocate resources in appropriate ways, and manage and nurture partnerships with community-based arts organizations.

Kate Landon, Meryle Weinstein and Robin Jacobowitz contributed to this brief.

For more information contact:

**The Institute for Education and Social Policy**

Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development | New York University  
82 Washington Square East, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor | New York, NY 10003

**Phone:** 212.998.5880 | **Fax:** 212.995.4564 | **Email:** [iesp@nyu.edu](mailto:iesp@nyu.edu) | **Website:** [steinhardt.nyu.edu/iesp](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/iesp)

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