



New York City Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire Arts Education Public Policy 2009 Election

The following questions are designed to determine candidates' positions on a number of issues related to the delivery of arts education in New York City public schools. Questionnaires are being delivered to all certified candidates for the Office of New York City Mayor. Responses will be posted on The Center for Arts Education's website and provided to the public and press. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

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Candidate Name: Bill Thompson

Date: 8/28/2009

1. If elected Mayor, what policies would you pursue to ensure that all public school students receive a quality arts education?

As Mayor, I will reverse Mike Bloomberg's misguided policies with a renewed commitment to providing quality arts programs to all our children. Increasing and enhancing arts education is very important to me, in part because I remember the tremendous impact that music had on my own education.

According to the DOE's own records, less than half of New York City middle schools offer the overall level of arts education required by State law. This is absolutely shameful. Arts programs provide our young people with the opportunity to explore their creativity and imagination, which in turn helps them develop skills that will serve them well into the future.

Studies also show that arts programs favorably impact student performance. I have long been committed to increasing access to the arts 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 the Project A.R.T.S initiative created by former schools chancellor Rudy Crew and then-Mayor Giuliani. That program created incentives for schools to embrace spending on arts

enrichment. Sadly, Mayor Bloomberg ended this program in 2007, eliminating all guarantees that funds would be used for arts education.

As Mayor, I will initiate a program modeled on Project A.R.T.S in order to ensure that per-capita allocations are given to schools specifically for students to pursue their artistic abilities. I will also change the DOE's current approach, which focuses heavily on math and reading scores while neglecting subjects like history and the arts. Our students need the widest range of influences to nurture their capacity for self-expression. Mayor Bloomberg and the DOE's failure to make arts education a priority has hurt out children and their development.

2. How can the cultural resources of New York City be leveraged to positively impact the lives of school children?

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 the Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School and the Studio Museum of Harlem.

3. What policies would you put in place to prevent drop outs and increase the City's graduation rates?

First, we need to get back to basics. We must fix the curriculum so that we're not just teaching to the test but teaching the whole child. Students have become expert test takers, but cannot retain or apply what they know in a context other than the test environment. We must teach math, reading, and writing—but we must also teach science, civics, history, arts, music, geography, and physical education. Central to this effort is a renewed focus on arts education, which would help more kids stay in school. With all its focus on improving scores, the DOE has lost sight of the true objective: improving schools by improving learning.

Next, we need to start telling the truth about school graduation rates and performance. My office recently released two audits finding that the DOE doesn't have measures in place to prevent the manipulation of test scores, and that it is unclear whether all students who received diplomas actually earned all the required credits to graduate.

There must be an honest accounting of performance, both inside and outside the classroom. Schools should undergo an accreditations type review every two years so that we can restore and maintain credibility in our school system. The findings of the review must be made public.

We must put the public back in public education. Parents should have a voice in their children's education and future. They should not be shut out and must have a place to go when they have questions or concerns. Options to encourage parental involvement should be streamlined and the number of District Family Advocates must be expanded.

We must end the privatization and the deregulation of our public school system. The lack of oversight and supervision over the last seven years—with little accountability—has put the school system at serious risk. It has allowed for the proliferation of no-bid contracts, the hiring of private firms to perform the tasks of public employees, and it has meant the closing of the neighborhood public school. I will ensure that a system of checks and balances is in place.

Finally, we must design public school choices that work. Chancellor Klein has dismantled many of our large high schools and replaced them with small high schools and charter schools. These schools provide a solid option for many students, but they don't work for all students—and charter schools often exclude special needs children. As Mayor, I will work to reduce class size and supply prompt technical assistance to schools in need.

4. What policies, if any, would you support to prevent the loss of arts spaces in public schools due to overcrowding or other factors?

The impact of school overcrowding on our communities is enormous: larger class sizes and less individual attention for students; less available space to provide art, music, and science education to ensure that students receive a well-rounded education; lack of room for physical education; and disengagement by parents who may decide to send their children to non-public schools or to relocate from New York altogether.

In May, I released a report exposing massive overcrowding in New York City schools, primarily due to a seriously flawed capital planning process. The report is a five-borough, neighborhood-by-neighborhood analysis contrasting the new seats provided in the 2005-09 Capital Plan with expected population growth. It identifies communities that have been rapidly expanding, and faults the Department of Education for failing to adequately plan for enough new school capacity.

My report found that the capital planning process for public schools in New York City is broken. There are too many neighborhoods with overcrowded schools—elementary schools in particular—and no relief for years to come.

In response to these findings, I proposed new mechanisms to finance and accelerate school construction, including measures to facilitate development of buildings combining schools and residential or commercial uses. This could create new school capacity without adding to the already strained DOE capital budget and, in some cases, solve one of the School Construction Authority's biggest problems—finding land to build new schools.

I have also proposed that the DOE and the School Construction Authority make a number of changes to ensure that their capital plans accurately anticipate the growing needs of our communities.

As Mayor, I will implement my report's recommendations, because school overcrowding contributes significantly to the loss of arts spaces in our public schools.

5. Do you support the reinstatement of per pupil dedicated funding for arts education in all New York City public schools?

Yes. As mentioned earlier, I supported Project A.R.T.S during my tenure at the Board of Education, and was saddened that Mayor Bloomberg decided to end the program two years ago. In the years since, we have seen arts programs cut significantly while, since 2002, the DOE has handed out approximately \$300 million in no-bid contracts. The Administration's priorities are wrong. As Mayor, I will put children first by restoring arts education funding, while eliminating no-bid contracts.

6. Should the New York City Department of Education lead remediation efforts or other interventions for schools found to be out of compliance with state arts education requirements?

Yes. The Mayor and the Chancellor have an obligation to our City and our children to adhere to the highest standards. Yet our schools are not even in compliance with State requirements, and it is clear that the Mayor and Chancellor have failed to achieve this most basic responsibility. Their inaction is an indication of how little they value arts education. As Mayor, I will make the arts a priority again by ensuring that the DOE takes the lead in making our schools compliant with State law.

7. Should school Progress Reports include reporting on a wider array of factors, such as data from the Annual Arts in Schools Report, compliance with state education requirements or other?

Yes. Throughout my time as Comptroller, I have fought to make the DOE more transparent and accountable. By including data from the Annual Arts in Schools Report and other sources, we will be providing parents and other stakeholders with a more accurate and complete picture of what is occurring in our schools.

8. Do you support the creation of a citywide task force to examine access to arts education offerings in City public schools?

Yes, but it must be part of a larger effort between government leaders, school officials, teachers, parents, and the arts community. A task force can only do so much. The real key to success is leadership that is committed to increasing and enhancing arts education in our public schools. As Mayor, I will be a champion for arts in education.

9. Should the City expand career and technical education offerings citywide to include more creative and innovative learning opportunities?

Yes. For years, I have been advocating for an increased investment in Career and Technical Education programs. In today's rapidly changing economy, it is important that our school system change with the times.

In 2007, my office released a report finding that vocational programs are more successful overall than other high schools in keeping kids in school and in graduating students. Additionally, most students who complete a vocational course of study go on to two- and four-year colleges.

Despite this success, however, many of these schools have been neglected. Some are relying on equipment that is two generations old. To address this problem, I have proposed greater funding for CTE programs; more partnerships with private companies that offer training and internships; and making these programs 5-year courses. These efforts will go a long way toward ensuring that our young people have the opportunity to develop their creativity and pursue a diversity of interests.

10. Do you support more comprehensive pre-service training for principals and teachers in the area of arts education and arts integration?

Yes. Pre-service training will raise awareness about the importance of arts in our schools. I am certainly in favor of any additional training that supports our educators while helping to integrate arts into a broader, more holistic curriculum.

We can no longer tolerate the erosion of arts education in our schools. It is time that dance, music, visual arts, and theater are valued and treated as an integral part of a child's academic experience.

Please return completed questionnaire by August 10, 2009 to:

The Center for Arts Education

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