THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

BRIEFING PAPER OF THE HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION
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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
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Oversight: Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Arts Instruction, Extracurriculars, and School-Related Social Activities

December 6, 2021
Introduction

On December 6, 2021, the Committee on Education, chaired by Council Member Mark Treyger, will conduct an oversight hearing on “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Arts Instruction, Extracurriculars, and School-Related Social Activities.” Witnesses invited to testify include representatives of the New York City (NYC or the City) Department of Education (DOE or the Department), students, parents, educators, unions, advocates, and other interested stakeholders.

Background

In prior hearings on COVID-19’s impact on student learning, this Committee has highlighted the challenges faced by all New York City public school students but especially vulnerable student populations, which has directly impacted their ability to learn in a remote environment:

- COVID-19 has had a disparate impact on low-income communities of color; thus, Black and Hispanic students are more likely to suffer a negative impact on learning due to the trauma of losing a family member to the virus;
- English language learners (ELLs), also known as multilingual learners (MLLs), normally face language barriers and other challenges. In addition to difficulties with English literacy, low-income immigrant families often have problems with digital literacy, which is generally low in households that do not have devices and internet access;
- For students experiencing homelessness, also known as students in temporary housing (STH), schools provide “a source of stability in an otherwise unstable life”1 with predictable routines, connections to peers, and relationships with trusted adults who can offer much-needed emotional support. Any disruption in learning, as occurred in the time between the closure of schools and when many STH received and were able to use an iPad, may have widened the achievement gap for these already academically-struggling students; and
- The approximately 200,000 NYC public school students with disabilities are also suffered learning loss during this pandemic who faced delays and/or reductions in receiving their mandated services.2

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Benefits of Arts Education

The benefits of arts education are well documented and numerous studies have shown that a comprehensive arts education helps students:

- Learn more effectively in all other areas of the school curriculum, including math, science, reading, and writing;
- Experience greater meaning, excitement and depth in what they learn;
- Score higher on both verbal and math SAT sections; and
- Achieve higher levels of academic success in college.⁽³⁾

In addition, a substantial body of research demonstrates that student satisfaction and engagement in learning increase with participation in the arts.⁽⁴⁾ Students that are highly involved in arts programs not only fare better in other subjects, they are also much less likely to drop out of school, especially those that come from low-income families.⁽⁵⁾ Besides improvement in students’ attitudes, attendance, and grades, studies have also shown that students develop additional skill sets, such as critical thinking, creative expression, observation, visualization, problem solving, innovation, constructive criticism and self-evaluation, through participation in arts programs.⁽⁶⁾

The National Endowment for the Arts, after tracking more than 22,000 students for 12 years, found that high involvement in the arts leads to students being five times more likely to graduate high school than those with low involvement.⁽⁷⁾ In addition, high involvement in the arts can lead to students from lower socioeconomic status having better academic outcomes as compared to students from high socioeconomic status who have lower involvement in the arts.⁽⁸⁾ In

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⁽⁸⁾ Id.
fact, the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University states that “arts education should be considered more intentionally as a dropout prevention strategy.” The first ever, and so far to date, report to look at arts education and graduation rates in New York City public high schools was published by The Center for Arts Education in 2009 and found a correlation between arts education and graduation rates among New York City public high schools. The report also showed that high schools in the top third of graduation rates had almost 40 percent more certified arts teachers per student than schools in the bottom third of graduation rates. Additionally, high schools in the top third of graduation rates fostered 25 percent more partnerships with arts and cultural organizations than schools in the bottom third. Furthermore, such high schools also had 35 percent more graduates completing three or more arts courses, and were 10 percent more likely to offer students a multiyear sequence in the arts than schools in the bottom third.

**Arts in Schools**

Research has shown that robust arts education in schools correlates with positive student impacts, including: “academic achievement, social and emotional development, civic engagement, and equitable opportunity.” However, in many districts across the nation, the arts have not been receiving the funding to make any meaningful impact as a result of budget cuts to the arts, an ever-growing list of state mandates that have focused classroom need on “teaching to the test”, and a public sense that the arts are not essential. According to the New York City Arts

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9. *Id.*
11. *Id.*
12. *Id.*
13. *Id.*
14. *Id.*
15. *Id.*
in Education Roundtable, prior to COVID-19, a majority of principals surveyed found that arts funding for their schools was generally insufficient.\(^{16}\)

Using a multi-year collaborative engagement process, in September 2017, the New York State Board of Regents approved the New York State P-12 Learning Standards for the Arts.\(^{17}\) These new standards recognized five arts disciplines: dance, music, theater, visual and media arts, with an emphasis on four processes common to all five disciplines: creating, performing, responding and connecting.\(^{18}\) Full implementation occurred for the 2018-19 school year.\(^{19}\) The standards:

- Recognize the essential role and transformative influence of technology in the practice and teaching of the arts;
- Incorporate grade-by-grade performance indicators for pre-K to eighth grade and three levels for high school: proficient, accomplished and advanced;
- Emphasize cross-disciplinary connections with other subjects such as math, science and literature; and
- Instill arts literacy, emphasizing conceptual understanding, which is a departure from the previous emphasis on knowledge and skills.\(^{20}\)

The DOE uses the State’s standards as a foundation for its own requirements for the city’s public school students.

**State and City Requirements & Guidelines\(^{21}\)**

- **3K, PRE-K, Kindergarten:** Each such school operating a 3-K, pre-kindergarten or kindergarten program shall establish and provide an educational program based on and adapted to the ages, interests, and needs of the children. Learning activities in such programs shall include dramatic play, creative art, dance and music activities.

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\(^{18}\) Id.

\(^{19}\) Id.

\(^{20}\) Id.

• **GRADES 1-3:** In grades 1 through 3, all students shall receive instruction that is designed to facilitate their attainment of the State elementary learning standards in the arts, including dance, music, theater, and visual arts. New York State Education Guidelines recommend that twenty percent of the weekly time spent in school should be allocated to dance, music, theatre, and visual arts. In New York City, arts compliance is measured at 101 hours throughout the entire school year, equally allocated between dance, music, theater, and visual arts.

• **GRADES 4-6:** In grades 4 through 6, all students shall receive instruction that is designed to facilitate their attainment of the State elementary learning standards in the arts, including dance, music, theater, and visual arts. New York State Education Guidelines recommend that ten percent of the weekly time spent in school should be allocated to dance, music, theatre, and visual arts. In New York City, arts compliance is measured at 93 hours throughout the entire school year, equally allocated between dance, music, theater, and visual arts.

• **GRADES 7-8:** All students shall be provided instruction designed to enable them to achieve, by the end of grade 8, State intermediate learning standards in the arts. In New York City, students will be provided with 2 one-half units (semesters) of approximately 54 hours of instruction per semester by a licensed arts teacher and may be offered in dance, music, theater and/or visual arts.

• **GRADES 9-12:** New York State Graduation requirements for the arts include one unit (one year) in visual arts and/or music, dance, or theater. In New York City, one unit of credit is the equivalent of approximately 108 hours of instruction by a licensed arts teacher.

**Reporting**

New York State requires all schools to provide data on arts education in order to “show trends in enrollments and teaching assignments across the years.”

Building on this reporting requirement, and to provide information on “arts participation, spending, staffing, and instructional programming to provide a comprehensive view of arts education in City schools,” DOE in 2007 launched its *Annual Arts in Schools Report.* The report includes data about arts teachers, arts budgeting, space for the arts, partnerships with arts and cultural organizations, and parent

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involvement. In addition to a system-wide report, DOE compiles individual Annual Arts in Schools Reports for each school, which can be found on the "statistics" page of each school’s website. The individual school Reports provide baseline information for arts education accountability, and can help schools identify areas of success and areas that need improvement. DOE’s last reporting cycle was for the 2019-20 school year. Below are some key findings from the report.

*Student Access and Participation in Arts Education*

![Percent of Schools that Offered Arts, By Arts Discipline](chart)

**Source:** DOE Arts in Schools Report 2019-2020

Of the 684 responding schools serving grades 1-5 in the 2019-20 school year (including elementary, K-8, and K-12 schools):

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25 Id.

26 Id.

- 99 percent reported providing instruction in at least one arts discipline;
- 94 percent provided instruction in two or more arts disciplines;
- 81 percent provided at least three arts disciplines;
- 64 percent offered all four arts disciplines to any grade 1-5; and
- 44 percent of schools reported providing instruction in all four arts disciplines to all grades 1-5.  

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Source: DOE Arts in Schools Report 2019-2020

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28 Id.
Arts Teachers and Professional Development

In 2019-20, 2,856 certified arts teachers were employed by the New York City public school system (up .25 percent from 2018-19, when there were 2,849 certified arts teachers). Of those 2,856 teachers, 1,332 were visual arts teachers; 1,039 were music teachers; 264 were dance teachers and 221 were theater teachers.

In 2019-20, 88 percent of schools had arts teachers participating in professional development activities, compared to 87 percent in 2018-19.

COVID-19 Impact

In response to the fiscal uncertainty brought upon by the pandemic, the Administration implemented a $2.1 billion citywide Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG) to address budgetary gaps in the Fiscal 2020 and 2021 Budgets. Of the $2.1 billion PEG introduced in the Fiscal 2021 Executive Financial Plan, $470.1 million was cut from DOE’s Fiscal 2021 Budget. This included a $15.5 million baselined cut to centrally budgeted middle and high school arts contracts that was not restored in the Fiscal 2022 budget cycle.

While DOE’s budget structure does not offer transparency on how much the City spends year over year on arts instruction, an analysis of DOE’s Arts Funding Initiative School Allocation Memoranda (SAM) shows a decrease of 59 percent, or $6.9 million in Fiscal 2021 when compared to Fiscal 2022. These SAM support individual schools with grants for programs such as Arts

29 Id.
30 Id.
31 Id.
32 The Council of the City of New York. Report to the Committee on Finance and the Committee on Education on the Fiscal 2021 Executive Budget for the Department of Education
33 Id.
34 Id.
Studio, Broadway Junior Arts, SING!, as well as provide schools with a per student supplemental grant for screened arts auditions, screened arts high schools, and programming for students with disabilities and multi-lingual learners. Total funding for these programs in Fiscal 2020 was $11.8 million, decreasing to $4.9 million in Fiscal 2021, and $4.2 million in Fiscal 2022.

The Office of Arts and Special Projects had to change, cancel, and modify arts programming for students and teachers. The 2019-20 Annual Arts in Schools Report outlines in detail programmatic changes to DOE’s arts instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some highlights include:

- In-person, end-of-year culminating performances and exhibits were not possible.
- In-person teacher mentoring and site visits were canceled.
- In-person professional learning for teachers was not held.
- The Office of Arts and Special Projects developed “Considerations for Blended and Remote Learning in the Arts” that provided guidance to school leaders and teachers to safely delivering arts instruction and strategies for effective instruction in remote and blended learning.
- Weekly instructional resources were posted on TeachHub to support teachers of dance, music, theater, visual arts, and media as they transitioned to remote teaching.
- Most culminating performances and exhibitions were moved online.
- Most professional learning opportunities were conducted remotely.

Extracurricular and School-Related Social Activities

Extracurricular activities are programs that are not part of the regular school curriculum and are structured around an activity, goal, or purpose. Some examples of extracurricular

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36 Id.
37 Id.
39 Id.
activities include sports teams, student government, student newspapers, arts programs, such as choirs, and educational clubs.  

**Benefits of Extracurricular Activities**

Involvement in extracurricular activities and after school programs is beneficial in a variety of ways for the K-12 population. Participating in activities outside of school can offer a place to form relationships and increases students’ chances of creating friendships, as demonstrated by research including students with disabilities involved in extracurricular activities which found that they were more likely to have friends than those who were not involved.  

Similar findings with racial and ethnic minorities non-white and immigrant adolescents showed that extracurricular activities facilitated socialization. Other studies have shown being involved in extracurricular activities reduces the likelihood of dropping out of school, as well as the likelihood of committing a criminal offense, and leads to higher educational achievement. Participation in extracurricular activities has also been linked to a decrease in anti-social behaviors.

There is also evidence that effective afterschool programs provide a wide range of benefits to youth, families and communities, as they can support social, emotional, cognitive and academic development, reduce risky behaviors, promote physical health and provide a safe and supportive environment for children and youth. According to the Afterschool Alliance, studies have found

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41 Id.
that afterschool programs improve students’ engagement in learning and motivation to learn, as well as increasing school-day attendance.\textsuperscript{47} In addition to promoting academic gains, afterschool programs have been shown to help develop key foundational skills and competencies, such as critical thinking, decision-making and communication skills and building self-confidence, that contribute to young people’s health and overall well-being.\textsuperscript{48}

\textit{Extracurricular Activities in NYC Public Schools}

New York City public schools offer a wide variety of extracurricular activities through after-school programs, sports programs and student clubs and activities at individual schools.

There are more than 900 City-funded after-school programs serving K-12 students throughout NYC.\textsuperscript{49} The Comprehensive After-School System of NYC (COMPASS NYC), operated by the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) through a network of providers, provides free programs located in schools, community centers, religious institutions, public housing and recreational facilities throughout NYC.\textsuperscript{50} COMPASS NYC programs offer a balance of academics, recreation, enrichment and cultural activities and “aims to help youth build skills to support their academic achievement, raise their confidence, and cultivate their leadership skills through service learning and other civic engagement opportunities.”\textsuperscript{51}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{48} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Id.
\end{itemize}
Interscholastic sports for all New York City public high schools is operated by the Public Schools Athletic League (PSAL). The stated mission of the PSAL is “to provide opportunities for educating students in physical fitness, character development and socialization skills through an athletic program that fosters discipline and sportsmanship.” Students in grades K-8 have the opportunity to participate in supervised physical activities before and after school through the CHAMPS Sports and Fitness Program. Schools may choose among several CHAMPS activities for the 2021–22 school year, including:

- Build Our Kids Success (Reeboks)
- New York Road Runners
- Play Rugby USA
- Special Olympics
- United States Tennis Association
- National Football League (NFL) (flag football)
- Jr. NBA

A vast array of other extracurricular activities and student clubs are offered at individual schools. In addition to PSAL sports, examples of other activities listed by schools include: Cheerleading, Chess, Chinese Language Culture Club, Debate Team, Entrepreneurship Club, Film Club, French Club, Girls Who Code, Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA), Model UN, Muslim Association, Photography, Podcast Club, Robotics and Yearbook, among others.

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53 Id.
54 The name CHAMPS stands for Cooperative, Healthy, Active, Motivated and Positive Students.
56 Id.
58 See e.g. listings for Bayside High School and Beacon High School at https://www.myschools.nyc/en/schools/high-school/.
NYC middle and high school students have the right to organize and participate in student organizations and clubs, as specified in Chancellor’s Regulation A-601, which outlines the process for establishing non-athletic student organizations and clubs. In order to receive a charter, each student club and/or organization must:

- be initiated by a group of interested students;
- have a purpose which is consistent with the school’s educational goals;
- have a faculty advisor who is a licensed Department of Education pedagogue;
- be approved by the student government;
- be approved by the principal who shall be the final arbiter in the chartering process.

Additionally, all student clubs and organizations shall be under the general supervision of the principal and membership must be open to all students in the school.

School-Related Social Activities

Like extracurricular activities, there are other events and social activities that are highly motivational and bring joy to students. Events and activities such as school trips, dances, talent shows, carnivals, festivals and other celebrations have long been part of the school experience. While some field trips are primarily recreational, most school-sponsored trips, such as to museums and zoos, offer hands-on learning experiences in an informal setting and have been shown to positively impact student achievement. Some events, such as cultural festivals and fairs, provide an opportunity to raise awareness of other cultures and celebrate the diversity within the school community. Other social activities and events, such as dances, carnivals, and talent shows, are

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60 Id., § I.E.
61 Id., § I.B & C.
more recreational in nature and are important in building school spirit and sense of community. In addition to providing a break from school routines, participating in social events helps students develop social skills and empathy, improve communication skills and build relationships. Perhaps the greatest benefit of recreational activities is to support mental health, by offering a greater sense of self-awareness and self-confidence.

Graduation ceremonies and accompanying celebrations, such as proms, are considered a rite of passage that mark an important transition in someone's life. More than just the culmination many years of hard work, high school graduation in particular celebrates the transition from childhood to adulthood and, featuring symbols like caps and gowns, provides a forum for families to acknowledge and celebrate this major milestone.

COVID-19 Impact

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City in March 2020 forced the de Blasio Administration to close all City school buildings and institute remote learning, in an effort to limit the spread of the coronavirus. While academic instruction was conducted online for the remainder of the school year, after-school programs, sports and other extracurricular activities

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64 Mia Smeds, “School events are important for community spirit,” JUSTED, accessed 12/1/21 at http://www.justed.org/school-events-are-important-for-community-spirit/.
66 ViewPoint Center, “Recreational Activities: Great for Many Reasons,” accessed 12/1/21 at https://www.viewpointcenter.com/recreational-activities-great-for-many-reasons/#:-text=These%20activities%20offer%20educational%20value,help%20improve%20one%27s%20mental%20health..
68 Id.
were not able to continue, except in a very limited capacity in a few dozen regional enrichment centers (RECs) set up to provide childcare for children of essential workers.\textsuperscript{70}

High school sports programs were shut down when schools closed in March 2020, but they resumed in April 2021, a month after high schools reopened, for a sports season that was extended through the summer.\textsuperscript{71} In August 2021, the City mandated COVID vaccines for high school athletes and coaches participating in sports considered “high risk” for contracting the coronavirus, with the initial dose required by the first day of competitive play in the new school year.\textsuperscript{72} The mandate applies to an estimated 20,000 students who participate in the “high risk” PSAL sports of football, volleyball, basketball, wrestling, lacrosse, competitive cheerleading, rugby and bowling, since it takes place indoors.\textsuperscript{73}

On September 10, 2021, the City expanded the COVID vaccine mandate to include students who participate in extracurricular activities that are considered high risk, such as chorus, band, and musical theater.\textsuperscript{74} In order to participate in the extracurricular programs, students were supposed to show proof of their first dose by September 27\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{75} The latest list of activities subject


\textsuperscript{73} Id.


\textsuperscript{75} Id.
to the vaccine mandate includes chorus, musical theater, dance/dance team, band/orchestra, marching band, cheerleading/step teams/flag team.\(^{76}\)

While the City’s after-school programs were initially closed along with schools in March 2020, some partially reopened weeks later to provide services in RECs and some others were able to offer limited in-person services or deliver them remotely.\(^{77}\) However, according to a September 28, 2021 update on DOE’s website, schools can resume after school programming and after school activities for the 2021-22 school year as they did before the COVID-19 pandemic.\(^{78}\) This includes school-based programs, DYCD programs and external afterschool vendors.\(^{79}\) All students and staff in afterschool programs must follow all DOE health protocols, including wearing a face covering and completing the daily health screening.\(^{80}\)

Likewise, all other school social events and activities were cancelled when school buildings closed in March 2020.\(^{81}\) In-person graduation ceremonies in 2020 were prohibited by then-Governor Andrew Cuomo, but new guidance was issued in April 2021 permitting them to resume effective May 1, 2021, with restrictions depending on type of venue or its capacity.\(^{82}\)

**Issues and Concerns**


\(^{79}\) Id.

\(^{80}\) Id.


\(^{82}\) Id.
As previously noted, arts education offers exceptional benefits to students, including enhancing engagement in learning, improving student achievement, reducing dropouts and increasing the likelihood of graduating. Despite these benefits, the arts continue to be underfunded, with $15 million cut from the City’s $21.5 million Fiscal 2021 budget for arts education services in middle and high schools—a roughly 70 percent reduction.

Similarly, involvement in extracurricular activities and sports programs is beneficial in a variety of ways, such as improving socialization skills; reducing the likelihood of dropping out of school, as well as the likelihood of committing a criminal offense; and leading to higher educational achievement. After-school programs provide more than just safe and supportive child care, research shows that that effective afterschool programs promote social, emotional and cognitive development, reduce risky behaviors, increase attendance and enhance student engagement and motivation to learn.

When school buildings closed for many months to prevent spread of the coronavirus, not only did all of these activities cease, but so did their beneficial effects on student engagement and motivation, and many students reported feeling unmotivated to participate in remote learning.

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Many high school seniors, in particular, were devastated when milestone events that would’ve brought together family and friends, like graduation, prom, grad night, and other end-of-year celebrations, were cancelled in 2020.\textsuperscript{88} Though graduation ceremonies were permitted to resume with restrictions effective May 1, 2021,\textsuperscript{89} it is unclear what the impact of these changes has been and will be moving forward.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Today’s hearing will provide an opportunity for the Committee to examine the DOE’s current plans to hear how they are using arts education to help address learning loss and the academic needs of students resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee will also hear DOE’s mitigation efforts around COVID-19’s impact on extracurricular and school-related social activities. Additionally, students, parents, teachers, unions and other educational stakeholders will also have an opportunity to raise their concerns.

\textsuperscript{88} Terry Nguyen, “‘I just want my family to see I got handed a diploma’: 5 students on how coronavirus has affected senior year,” April 1, 2020, Voxmedia, accessed at https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2020/4/1/21197425/coronavirus-missed-graduation-milestones-students.