



*The Center for Arts Education is committed to stimulating and sustaining quality arts education as an essential part of every child's education in the New York City public schools.*

*CAE provides tools and resources to deliver quality arts learning for all children. Our innovative teaching and learning programs—fostering collaboration with teachers and school leaders, cultural and community organizations—help build arts-infused school communities.*

*Our advocacy initiatives educate policymakers and the public about the need for and value of arts education as an essential ingredient in a well-rounded education and a fundamental part of children's health and well-being.*

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## THE CENTER FOR ARTS EDUCATION

### Research & Policy Briefing

May 2011

# Funding for Arts Instruction Insufficient and on the Decline in Many Buffalo City Schools

## School Budget Gap Threatens Further Cuts

### KEY FINDINGS

Nearly half of Buffalo public schools report that funding for arts education is currently insufficient and almost two out of five also report a decline in arts spending over the past three school years. This is according to a new analysis by The Center for Arts Education of arts education data collected in 2009 by the New York State Education Department for the first time.

The funding declines reported by schools date back to the 2006-2007 school year, before the onset of the recent recession and in a period during which overall funding for Buffalo public schools increased by 24 percent. With an expected budget gap of \$43 million next year and cuts to arts education programs once supported by the New York State Council on the Arts, arts education programming in Buffalo schools may take a serious hit in coming school years.<sup>1</sup>

The data in this briefing paper was collected by the New York State Education Department as part of schools reporting through the Basic Education Data Survey (BEDS). This briefing paper is one in a series that will report on data from several regions across the State of New York.

Our analysis of the BEDS survey data from Buffalo reveals that:

- 49 percent of public schools report that funding for arts education is insufficient;
- 38 percent of public schools report that funding for arts education has decreased over the past three school years;
- Just one of the 58 schools that completed the survey reported "abundant" resources for the arts;
- The declines have occurred while the overall Buffalo school budget has increased from \$713 million for the 2006-2007 school year to \$881 million for the 2009-2010 school year, an increase of 24 percent.<sup>2</sup>

1. Barbara O'Brien, "State Budget Eases School Aid Cut to 3.5%," Buffalo News.com, April 1, 2011;

<http://www.buffalonews.com/city/schools/article381694.ece>

2. City of Buffalo, 2006-07 Adopted Budget, §1:4; City of Buffalo, 2009-10 Adopted Budget, §1:4. [http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Mayor/Leadership/Archived\\_Budgets](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Mayor/Leadership/Archived_Budgets)

## A PERFECT STORM FOR ARTS EDUCATION

While history tells us that during difficult budget times the arts are often the first subject area to be cut from the school day, the declines in funding for arts education in Buffalo public schools may be symptomatic of a larger trend away from the arts that is occurring in many schools statewide and throughout the country.

According to the data collected by the New York State Education Department, almost two out of every five Buffalo public schools report arts education funding declines over the past three school years, and half report insufficient funding for arts education overall.

On first glance this would appear to be a sign of the economic times; however, the decline has occurred in a period during which overall school budgets in Buffalo increased by 24 percent, rising to \$881 million for the 2009-2010 school year.

National data reveals a pronounced narrowing of the school curriculum has taken place since the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) which places disproportionate weight on student achievement measured by state examinations in just two subject areas—Math and English Language Arts. According to a 2007 national study, 44% of districts reported cutting time on science, social studies, art and music, physical education, lunch or recess since the year NCLB was enacted.<sup>3</sup>

The overemphasis on high-stakes testing, combined with cuts to school and government budgets, is creating a perfect storm threatening arts programming at schools across the country; as budgets continue to decline, the imbalances will likely be exacerbated.

While funding alone does not guarantee that students are receiving a quality education, spending declines in arts education are a bellwether of how the arts are faring in public schools. Reduced funding can compromise the delivery of arts instruction as long-standing partnerships with cultural organizations are terminated, arts supplies are used up and not replaced, and the purchase of musical instruments and technology upgrades for the classroom are put off indefinitely.

This is especially disturbing as research shows that quality instruction in music, dance, theatre and visual art results in a wide array of social and academic benefits for students, including the ability to keep students in school and on track for graduation.<sup>4</sup> According to a previous study conducted by The Center for Arts Education of over 200 high schools in New York City, those schools with the highest graduation rates also consistently offered the most robust arts education offerings.<sup>5</sup> Buffalo, with a graduation rate hovering around 57 percent, and one of the lowest graduation rates for black males across the country, would be remiss to disinvest in arts education as it seeks to reverse this trend.<sup>6</sup>

Not only does the art-making process enrich student lives and give students something to look forward to at school, by an overwhelming margin Americans believes the arts are vital to a well-rounded education.<sup>7</sup> This support is typically strong in Buffalo, which boasts a lively cultural arts community, including the Albright-Knox Gallery, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, and a host of arts education providers that includes Young Audiences of Western New York, Just Buffalo Literary Center, CEPA Gallery, and Musicians United for Superior Education, among others. Even with such a vibrant cultural arts community, with such a large budget deficit on the horizon for Buffalo schools and no immediate signs of growth in revenues, it is likely that an increasing numbers of students will see diminished opportunities to participate in the arts during the school day.

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3. Among districts that reported a decrease in instructional time for the arts, average decreases in arts and music amounted to a loss of 57 minutes per week.

4. Heather J. Clawson and Kathleen Coolbaugh, "National Evaluation of the YouthARTS Development Project." *Juvenile Justice Bulletin* (May 2001), U.S. Department of Justice, The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. [http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/2001\\_5\\_2/page1.html](http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/2001_5_2/page1.html)

5. Douglas Israel, "Staying in School: Arts Education and New York City Graduation Rates" (New York: The Center for Arts Education, 2009). <http://www.caenyc.org/arts-education-report>

6. Michael Holzman, "Yes We Can: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males 2010" (Cambridge: Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010.) <http://www.blackboysreport.org/bbreport.pdf>

7. According to a 2005 Harris poll survey, 93% of Americans agree that the arts are vital to a well-rounded education for children. [http://www.americansforthearts.org/news/press/2005/2005\\_06\\_13b.asp](http://www.americansforthearts.org/news/press/2005/2005_06_13b.asp)

## NEW YORK STATE INSTRUCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE ARTS

As a testament to the value of arts education as part of a well-rounded curriculum, New York has a set of minimum requirements for arts education (music, dance, theater and visual arts) intended to ensure that every school across the state is providing at least a minimum level of arts instruction for every student.<sup>8</sup> Enshrined in the regulations of the state education commissioner, these instructional requirements have the power and effect of law, and it is the duty of the commissioner to enforce them.

Unfortunately, the state education department has not collected the data to accurately measure whether schools are providing students access to the arts education outlined in the regulations; and there is no mechanism in place to ensure that schools are providing the requisite arts education to students.<sup>9</sup>

As funding for arts instruction in schools declines there is a real threat that students will have less and less opportunity to enjoy a robust arts education. It is more important than ever that school leaders and education officials make the commitment to ensure students are receiving a well rounded education of which the arts are an essential part and to which all students are entitled by law.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Buffalo school leaders should ensure that arts programs are not disproportionately cut during economic downturns and that every child receives a vibrant and enriching arts education.
- The New York State Education Department should continue the collection of arts education data through the BEDS survey; however, the survey questions should be revised to align with the state instructional requirements for the arts.
- The New York State Education Department should issue a report on compliance with state arts requirements for schools throughout the state and require that districts with schools that are not providing the necessary instruction develop action plans with steps they will take to provide the minimum requirements for arts instruction to every student. ■

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8. New York State Education Department, "Part 100 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education," (Albany: Author, n.d.) <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/part100/pages/1002.html>

9. From the survey data collected by the state education department that informed this briefing, it is not possible to determine compliance with these state requirements.