



PUBLIC CITIZENS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Testimony of Gretchen Elise Walker

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Philadelphia City Council

Committee on Education

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Good morning, Councilwoman Blackwell and Education Committee members, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak. My name is Gretchen Elise Walker and I am Director of Arts Education at Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY). I am here on behalf of ArtsRising, an arts for children and youth initiative collectively led by the Philadelphia Ed Fund, Fleisher Art Memorial and PCCY.

I am here to testify about Resolution 120088 concerning school closings and the consequential impact on neighborhoods: specifically the clause stating

WHEREAS, After-school evening, weekend, and summer school program closings including cuts to sports, music, and the arts are being proposed.

I would like to urge Council to remember the essential role the arts play in keeping youth engaged in school, successful in school and constructively engaged in their communities.

PHILADELPHIA AS LEADER IN ARTS & CULTURE

THANK YOU. Thanks to the leadership of our Mayor Nutter and steadfast arts and youth supporters on City Council, Philadelphia has experienced an arts renaissance in recent years. Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance has consistently documented the effect of the arts on the local economy. Gary Steuer's appointment as Chief Cultural Officer serves to further steward this focus on arts and the creative economy.

The School District of Philadelphia has also made great efforts to reignite the powerful arts engine that it once was in the heyday of Gamble & Huff, before a decades-long decline in arts offerings. Even as an economic downturn began to reveal itself, the School District of Philadelphia hired an unprecedented 180 art and music teachers between 2008 and 2010. This happened as other cities caved to budget and testing pressures.

The city has stepped up for the arts industry, and has recently voted number one city for the arts by Travel & Leisure magazine! Now it's time for the city to help the District provide parallel support for students' arts education, within the spectrum of essential services for children and youth that are threatened by the current budget crisis.

EFFECT OF CUTS ON SCHOOLS & STUDENTS

The arts are essential, both in schools and communities, and what's offered in school is inextricably connected to the health of the surrounding community.

In September, 20% of the District's visual arts teachers were cut. This can be estimated as loss of visual arts instruction to 16,000 students.

Now I'd like to highlight what some students have recently said about the essential role the arts play in their school and community lives.

6th Grader at Lea School: "Lea Visual Arts Team is basically an afterschool program that helps make our school beautiful. And making a neighborhood better starts with making its school better. And if we take away art we take away that."

6th Grader at Lea School: "If you take away art — kids will take it out on each other psychologically"

WHAT ARE OTHER CITIES DOING?

Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino and Laura Perille, executive director of EdVestors, write in the Boston Globe, March 13th:

At a time of great stress on Boston's school budget, private philanthropists and charitable foundations launched an initiative to raise \$10 million to increase access, equity and quality of arts learning for all students. The city and its schools stepped up with increased public funding for arts teachers. It's a model that can be replicated in cities and towns across the Commonwealth and the nation.

Philadelphia also has a public-private initiative, ArtsRising, that benefits from the Administration's support- with a mission to improve and expand equitable access to arts education for all children in the greater Philadelphia region so that youth are better engaged in school and in their community, persistent through high school graduation, and prepared for post secondary opportunities and the 21st Century Workforce.

In Kensington, ArtsRising helped strengthen arts instruction at Stetson Middle School, increasing collaboration and student access to digital arts technology. Now, ArtsRising is organizing community stakeholders, in collaboration and conversation with both EPIC and PhillyRising leaders, to leverage resources on behalf of arts for children and youth in the neighborhood. Why?

Inside of school, the arts increase engagement and learning. Outside of school, the arts create stronger communities, healthier business districts, and more positively engaged youth.

TIME FOR PHILADELPHIA TO KEEP ARTS STRONG IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

- **The arts are essential, both in schools and communities**