GOTHAMSCHOOLS

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Arts organizations unite to press candidates on arts in schools

by Philissa Cramer

Dozens of organizations are teaming up to press mayoral candidates to explains their plans for arts education. Lately, mayoral candidates have been quick to share their positions on "community schools" and merit pay. But they have so far stayed pretty quiet about the role of arts in schools.

A coalition of dozens of arts advocacy organizations is hoping to get them talking. Today, the groups called on the candidates to complete a questionnaire about their plans to support arts education.

Under the Bloomberg administration, the arts have not been a top priority. Schools got a new "blueprint" for arts instruction from the Department of Education, but budget cuts have meant that schools have had to turn to outside partnerships to help them offer arts programs, and many students still do not spend as much time in arts classes as state regulations require.

Like many advocates, supporters of arts education see the arrival of a new mayor as a chance for change.

"We look forward to seeing what the next generation of leadership in this city has to say about arts in our schools," said Eric Pryor, executive director of the Center for Arts Education. "The arts are essential to a well-rounded education that develops creativity, innovation and other critical 21st century skills. This is a huge priority for hundreds of thousands of parents."

The questionnaire asks candidates to explain how they would "broaden the school-day curriculum" to include more arts instruction and how their plans to overhaul the Department of Education's organizational structure would affect the arts. It also asks them how they plan to give all schools equitable funding, space, and instructors for arts programs. And, after pressing Chancellor Dennis Walcott to attach higher stakes to arts instruction last year, the organizations want to know how the next mayor would factor the arts into his or her school accountability metrics.

Candidates for public advocate, comptroller, and borough presidents, in addition to mayor, are being asked to complete the survey — and submit a video, if they want — by the end of the month. They can also share a personal story: The questionnaire asks respondents about their own experiences with the arts, both in school and elsewhere in their lives.