



PUBLIC CITIZENS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH
Statement by Gretchen Elise Walker, Arts in Education Director, PCCY
School District of Philadelphia, School Reform Commission
February 16, 2012

Good evening commissioners. My name is Gretchen Elise Walker and I represent two separate arts initiatives — Picasso Project and ArtsRising – both of which work to increase youth access to the arts in Philadelphia public schools.

First I want to thank you. After my testimony on behalf of 21 schools who have applied for arts project funding to Picasso Project at the last SRC meeting, we held a fundraising resources workshop for teachers and arts organizations at Public Citizens for Children and Youth. Your colleagues Mike Sonkowsky, Deputy Chief for Grants Development and Compliance, Tessie Varthas, Content Specialist – Art Education, and Jeanne-Marie Hagen Executive Director from Philadelphia’s Children First all added substantive information to our workshop. This was an example of successful partnering between the District and community organizations that are trying to help support the district teachers and students.

This information is available for the public and will be updated regularly at www.pccy.org.

I am here today to empathize with the tough decisions you have to make in narrowing the budget for FY 2012 and beyond. All services are important for students. At the same time I want to remind you what students say about arts being essential part of their educational experience — sustained, consistent, sequential learning in visual and performing arts from certified teachers being the anchor of this learning. And while partnerships including arts partnerships add further dimensions and project-based learning opportunities to students’ and teachers’ lives, successful partnerships with outside artists and organizations are most often grounded by full time certified arts teachers at schools. Students need the opportunity to learn sequentially and develop skills in all the visual and performing arts.

Thank you for keeping arts teachers in the schools — if I may paraphrase Stuart Friedberg, an art teacher at Baldi Middle School who pointed to the city’s “You’ll Love the Arts in Philadelphia” marketing campaign: the city’s focus on arts as an economic and cultural driver of progress must be matched by the school district. Any other approach is short sighted. If arts are important to the viability of the city, arts teaching is essential to every student’s school life.

Quotes about arts learning in schools

“The thing I liked most.....is that I learned different skills that I can carry for the rest of my life.” (10th grader)

“I enjoyed making the charcoal portraits. Although I do not now how to draw, i felt like a true artist.” (10th grader)

“I sang protest songs that my ancestors used to sing. It made me proud because I felt closer to my heritage.” (9th grader)

“Collaborating was something that made me proud. I never worked with that many people in a group before. It was a pleasure. Another thing I’m proud of is the searching I did; I have never searched for that much information. Now I research even more in other projects. “(9th grader)

“What I liked most about my project is that we looked deeper into finding information, in which help us relate our topics to social protest. I enjoyed learning about others in their projects. We took essential events, and controversies which happen in three decades. “(9th grader)

“Seeing the finished project and all my effort put into this made me very happy and proud to see that I’ve accomplished something.” (6th grader)

Teacher & Administrator Quotes”

“The art mural is a daily reminder of the importance of art in the curriculum, and the beauty that art brings to the school and to the community.” (Administrator)

“What a special thing it was to see a girl who otherwise "checks out" in my core class, come alive through her work on the arts.” (Teacher)

Thank you for your time.