



**PUBLIC CITIZENS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**  
**Statement by Gretchen Elise Walker, Picasso Project Coordinator, PCCY**  
**School District of Philadelphia**  
**Student Reform Commission (SRC)**  
**January 19, 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.

**I am here to testify about the importance of the arts.** I understand the tremendous budget pressures right now. But teachers are speaking loud and clear about how they see the arts as a pivotal key that leads to solutions in schools in 3 areas:

- learning skills about self-expression,
- making other academic topics matter, and—in light of the Blue Ribbon Commission report, please note:
- improving school climate and culture.

The Picasso Project is in our tenth year as an initiative of PCCY. We offer approximately \$50,000 a year to support 10+ schools a year do collaborative projects that teachers and school staff develop from a vision, put into a plan, and implement with community partners such as arts orgs, local CDCs and businesses.

This year we received 100 inquiries. 80 teachers came to workshops about how to apply. 35 submitted proposals. We granted \$50,000 to 13 programs in a ceremony at World Café Live on Tuesday January 17th. The programs are:

**Bregy Elementary School**  
**Cassidy Elementary School**  
**Cleveland Elementary School**  
**Excel Academy South**  
**Greenfield Elementary School**  
**Jackson Elementary School**  
**Mifflin Elementary School**  
**Motivation High School**  
**Nebinger Elementary School**  
**Powel Elementary School**  
**Robeson High School**  
**Sankofa Freedom Academy Charter School**  
**Youth Study Center**

An example of an innovative program is:

1. **Mifflin Elementary School-- THE PEACEFUL POSSE: \$4,500.** The Peaceful Posse – 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Graders will work with Physicians for Social Responsibility, East Falls Community Council volunteers, and Philadelphia University textile design students, on a program in violence prevention. These students will then work with students K-5 to develop violence prevention skills. The culminating project will be the creation of a large quilt, displayed in the school entrance hall.

**22 more schools submitted creative, compelling proposals but our funds did not suffice. What can we do for these schools?** Some – such as Harrison – are in their last year of existence, hoping to offer a glimmer of an arts experience to their students who have NO arts faculty at this time.

A list of these 22 additional schools that were NOT funded and still need support, their project names and brief descriptions of arts genre is ATTACHED.

**ALSO ATTACHED IS THE MEDIA ALERT AND DESCRIPTIONS OF 13 FUNDED SCHOOLS.**

I am here to make the point that school communities see the ARTS as a solution to problems with school violence, academic engagement, and student self-efficacy.

I am also here to ask: In a tight budget, what can we do for the schools that are trying so hard to bring the world into their school walls through the arts? Can you make the district's grantwriting expertise available to these schools? Can you help them help themselves?

Thank you for your time.

Gretchen Elise Walker  
Picasso Project Coordinator  
Public Citizens for Children and Youth  
1709 Benjamin Franklin Parkway, 6th Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19103  
gretchenelise@pccy.org / [www.pccy.org](http://www.pccy.org)