

# NEW YORK POST

## ED. DEPT. GIVES ARTS PROGRAM CULTURE \$OCK

By DAVID ANDREATTA Education Reporter



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February 22, 2007 -- A decade-old, \$67.5 million program to restore the arts in public schools has all but been eliminated in the Bloomberg administration's latest overhaul of the school system.

Chancellor Joel Klein said yesterday he does not support schools being forced to use money from the program, Project ARTS - insisting that principals should be allowed to spend money on art programs as they see fit.

His remarks followed charges by arts educators that the program, a Giuliani-era initiative that gave per-capita allocations to schools specifically for the arts, would be cut this fall under the restructured school system.

They said they were informed of the program's fate last week at a closed-door meeting at the city Department of Education headquarters.

Project ARTS amounts to around \$60 annually per student - enough, advocates said, to help schools train teachers to incorporate art into their curriculum, pay for art supplies and even hire full- and part-time art teachers.

"I don't think there's a person in the arts-education community who isn't going to tell you that this isn't going to be catastrophic," said Richard Kessler, executive director of the Center for Arts in Education.

"Kids are going to lose the ability to participate in the arts," Kessler continued. "There will be losses to licensed art teachers, supplies, services of cultural organizations, trips to museums and operas, all of those things."

The department said the arts supporters are misinterpreting of the agency's intentions, and insisted no decision has been made to cut Project ARTS.

But a statement issued by the chancellor yesterday left little doubt that the restructuring would remove spending restrictions on principals, thereby allowing them to allocate money, once earmarked for certain initiatives, to other purposes.

"There shouldn't be a floor or a ceiling when it comes to arts funding in any of our schools," Klein said. "We don't earmark funding for reading or math, we just demand results. The same should be true of the arts."

He added that the department would begin asking parents, students and teachers to assess the quality of arts education in annual surveys beginning in the fall.

Klein said such quality reviews would give principals an incentive to maintain arts programs because the

arts have been shown to improve overall student performance.

But many advocates said the argument doesn't hold water.

They pointed to 2001, when then-Chancellor Harold Levy, facing a budget crunch, allowed principals to spend Project ARTS money on anything they wanted. Spending on the arts dropped by half, advocates said.

"There is a concern that without Project ARTS being categorically restricted there will be a tendency of many principals who are either neutral or hostile to the arts to spend the money elsewhere," said David Shookhoff, chairman of the New York City Arts in Education Roundtable. "That, indeed, is the logic of the department's policy."

Rudy Giuliani had steadily increased funding for the program, from \$25 million in 1997 to a peak of \$75 million in 2000.

Funding has remained steady at \$67.5 million since Mayor Bloomberg won control of the school system and hired directors of visual arts, music, dance and theater.

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## **Home**