



JOSÉ M. OSORIO/TRIBUNE PHOTO

Dancer Damian Woetzel, from left, soprano Renee Fleming and cellist Yo-Yo Ma take part in a school assembly Monday.

# Class action

Cultural plan emphasizes arts in schools, but funding an open question

**BY MARK CARO  
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Flanked by arts superstars Yo-Yo Ma, Renee Fleming and Damian Woetzel at a Pilsen elementary school, Mayor Rahm Emanuel placed the Chicago Public Schools at the forefront of the long-awaited Chicago Cultural Plan 2012, unveiled Monday.

As had been discussed in drafts and numerous community meetings that began in February, the Cultural Plan, the city's first since the Harold Washington administration's from 1986-87, emphasizes boosting the arts in the city's neighborhoods. But the No. 1 initiative among 10 laid out in the plan

is "Reinvigorating arts education and creating new opportunities for lifelong learning."

"During the planning process, arts education consistently emerged as the No. 1 concern of Chicagoans, and without fail it was the most discussed issue at every one of our community meetings," Cultural Affairs and Special Events Commissioner Michelle Boone told students, educators and arts leaders assembled in the atrium of Manuel Perez Jr. Elementary School. "So for the very first time, the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events will collaborate with Chicago Public Schools to launch a new Arts Education Plan as the cornerstone of the Chicago Cultural Plan 2012."

But with a total of \$1 million allocated for both plans in the city's \$6.5 billion budget proposal for 2013, it's unclear how many of the recommendations might be put into practice. The Cultural Plan offers cost estimates for each of its recommendations that add up to tens of millions of dollars per year.

The newly released "abstract" for the Arts Education Plan, slated to be completed in December, states as its "guiding principle" that "every student will receive a quality arts education — meaning that every student receives a comprehensive and sequential study of every art form, including visual art,

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# Arts action in the classroom

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music, dance and drama from pre-K through 12th grade.” One key goal is to “make arts a core subject by dedicating 120 minutes of arts instruction per week for elementary schools.”

In a news conference preceding an assembly for the Perez students, faculty and visitors, Emanuel said the city had “short-changed our kids” before he pushed for an expansion of the school day and year.

“We were making choices between math and music,” he said. “We were making choices, in my sense, between reading and recess. We were making all sorts of choices that were wrong for our kids, wrong for our teachers and wrong for our city. And because of the full day ... we will have arts education in our schools to make sure that our children get a full education. In addition to that, this Cultural Plan will make sure that our neighborhoods get the type of economic development that we saw downtown.”

For a cultural center such as Chicago, Emanuel said, “to not have the basics in our neighborhoods and in our schools is a big hole, and that hole just got filled.”

In addition to requiring 120 minutes of arts education per week, the Arts Education Plan recommends allowing drama and dance classes to count toward CPS’ high school graduation requirement. Currently there is no minimum requirement for the arts in elementary school, and students typically must take one year of visual art and one year of music to graduate high school, a CPS spokeswoman said. Some district schools lack a certified art teacher on staff; the plan suggests requiring either one such teacher per school or one for every 350 students.

“We’ve not always done a great job with respect to arts in the schools,” Chicago Board of Education President David Vitale said at the news conference, later adding: “We know that arts education strongly correlates to better student performance in all subjects, and that’s the overall goal of the Arts Education Plan. We want to create better students through arts education.”

The daughter of two music teachers, Lyric Opera creative consultant Fleming flew to Chicago between her performances of Verdi’s “Otello” at the Metropolitan Opera in New York to support the push for more arts education.

“The bottom line is that focusing on core subjects has not worked as a strategy for improving schools and improving performance, and I believe firmly that integrating the arts into even core education helps children retain and understand and really absorb what it is that they’re learning, besides enriching their lives, besides enabling them to develop as individuals,” Fleming said.

In an emailed statement Monday, Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis called the



Fourth-grade students at the fine and performing arts school follow along in a ballet steps demonstration by Aspen Institute arts director/ex-ballet-star Damian Woetzel.



Renee Fleming flew to Chicago for the cultural plan unveiling in between performances in New York.

recommendation of the Cultural Plan is an “adopt-a-school arts education program” for corporate and nonprofit businesses.

Monday’s visits enabled Perez, which calls itself “a fine and performing arts school,” to present a kind of idealized version of how arts and education can be integrated. Not only is Ma depicted in a “Dream Band” school-wall mural that also shows Elton John, Ludwig van Beethoven, Bob Marley and Gene Simmons, but the renowned cellist got a chance to laugh at his caricatured self before heading into a music classroom and appreciating the lessons lining the walls.

“Don’t try to create and analyze at the same time,” Ma read. “Good.”

Fifth-graders gave the 57-year-old Chicago Symphony Orchestra creative consultant a school T-shirt, which he wore as he rehearsed two songs with these students and then took part in the news conference and assembly. In another classroom, soprano Fleming and Aspen Institute arts director/ex-ballet-star Woetzel worked with four children preparing a poetry reading for the assembly.

The presentation included Fleming and CSO woodwind and horn players leading the school in “America the Beautiful,” Woetzel directing the audience in a ballet routine; and Ma duetting with obviously thrilled music teacher Linda DeGuzman as the kids sang “It’s a Small World” in English, Spanish and Mandarin.

“A generation that grows up without arts actually lacks imagination,” Ma said afterward. “You can feel that in the political discourse, the lack of civil discourse, because what the arts do is actually create conversations and create organic growth, and I think without that we will have more of a fractious, fractured population, which is not what a better union is all about.”

Asked why he has spent so much time working on initiatives in Chicago, Ma said, “Because I think if anything is going to change in our country, the best place for it to start is in Chicago because this is a great city with strong shoulders and great will-power and a constituency that really wants to make things happen.”

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## The plan by the numbers

The city released its 2012 cultural plan Monday suggesting more than 200 initiatives and 36 recommendations. In the works since October 2011, here is what went into forming the plan.

### PUBLIC INPUT

**8** Town halls

**20** Neighborhood conversations

**50+** Additional cultural conversations and meetings

Twitter followers  
@ChiCulturalPlan

**1,500**

People reached in person

**4,700+**

Downloads of draft plan

**16,000+**

People reached online

**35,000+**

### 10 PRIORITIES OF THE PLAN

#### People



- 1 Foster arts education and lifelong learning.
- 2 Attract and retain artists and creative professionals.

#### Places



- 3 Elevate and expand neighborhood cultural assets.
- 4 Facilitate neighborhood cultural planning.

#### Policies



- 5 Strengthen capacity of cultural sector.
- 6 Optimize city policies and regulations.

#### Planning



- 7 Promote the value and impact of culture.
- 8 Strengthen Chicago as a global cultural destination.
- 9 Foster cultural innovation.
- 10 Integrate culture into daily life.

SOURCE: City of Chicago

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proposed 120-minute art requirement “an excellent start,” but she noted: “Arts studies must be fully supported and cannot be left to the vagaries of funding sources.”

CPS already faces a budget shortfall it estimates will reach \$1 billion next year.

The broader Cultural Plan also calls for re-examining zoning, permitting and licensing rules that affect people who sell and make art, and using city resources to help foster and promote arts offerings in neighborhoods such

as Uptown or Bronzeville as an economic development tool. The prospect of using art to draw traffic and business excited Philip Thomas, president and CEO of eta Creative Arts Foundation, which runs a gallery, theater and musical performance venue in the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood.

“Here on the South Side, there’s a dearth of economic opportunities, and we certainly have a lot of cultural assets,” Thomas said. “So that’s really the

way forward for us as a community.”

But Laura Weathered, the Near Northwest Arts Council’s executive director who attended three public meetings on the plan, expressed concern that city priorities might override the opinions of ordinary citizens when it comes time to decide what to fund.

“The city, they’re on a fast track to whatever they have in mind,” said Weathered, whose advocacy group was founded during the meeting process for the city’s previous cultural plan.

Lyric Opera General Director Anthony Freud, who said he met with Boone frequently during the Cultural Plan’s formulation, said he’s happy to see Chicago boosting culture in such an official way.

“I think it’s absolutely great that the city is embracing the importance of culture from so many different perspectives: social, economic, technological and just embracing the fact that it is unthinkable for culture not to be a central part of why Chicago’s a great place to live and a great place to visit,” he said.

The plan cost \$250,000 to formulate, with the vast majority coming from private funders, a Cultural Affairs spokeswoman said. A city contract shows that \$230,000 of that went to Toronto-based consulting firm Lord Cultural Resources, which coordinated about 30 public meetings and helped assemble the plan.

The mayor’s office said half of the \$1 million 2013 budget allocation will go to public schools and half to other goals in the Cultural Plan. Boone said Monday that more than one-third of the plan’s proposed initiatives will cost \$50,000 a year or less to implement and can be achieved over the next two years. But the majority are pricier. Plan estimates note, for example, that expanding Chicago Public Library evening hours could cost between \$250,000 and \$1 million annually.

The city is hoping for assistance from private partners; one