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High School Summer Program  
Education in the Bronx: Music and arts education  
How important is it to the Highbridge community? Is it available?

For as long as I could remember, I have always loved to sing. As I got older, I became increasingly interested in music and the arts. Because of this, I also see how much it is lacking in schools in the Bronx and, more specifically, in the Highbridge Community. Going to schools here, I felt like an outcast. I was getting lots of music and arts education at my after school program, Highbridge Voices, but none at school. I remember feeling as though no one shared the same interests as me, so I had trouble relating to others and making friends. Education of the arts is said to be very important to the development, health, and education of people. I began to wonder if lack of this education in the Bronx could actually be hurting the community.

If you look closely, there are many problems in the Highbridge community. We have high obesity rates and low life expectancy, and then we have problems and concerns about our education system. Is there possibly something that could change, or even help us take a step to improve this? There are many theories and solutions, but often times, music is the last choice. Ironically, there are many ways that being involved with music and the arts, could help improve some of these problems.

It has been calculated that 90% or more of high school students in the south Bronx, are not ready for college-level work by the end of four years of high school. Of course, colleges are looking for good grades. That is not all, however. Colleges also look for quality involvement in activities! Music can be that activity. Being a part of a music program, or getting music education in school, benefits students in getting them ready for college. Not only can it raise IQ and

standardized test scores, but it helps the student to be well-rounded, which are two things colleges look for in a student.

Yes, music can help high school students, but why not get it to them earlier. Starting to introduce music and arts education to a young child can be even better. It may be a surprise to some, but music actually facilitates learning other subjects and enhances skills that children use in other areas. For example, when children are involved in music it works the brain harder and can even help in language development. Musical training physically develops the part of the left side of the brain, which is known to be involved with processing language. These are things that children would inevitably use throughout their school years and even after that.

Music and the arts helps students and children feel happier and more confident. These things are activities that require emotion and expression. This can mean anything for the individual. A song could have many different meanings depending on the interpretation of it. The student interprets his or her idea of the meaning while singing it, allowing them to express themselves and maybe even better understand themselves. If a child can understand themselves, it helps them socially and makes them want to be more involved in such activities, or just with others. All of this helps a student socially, since it brings people together and it makes them healthier mentally, because they will be able to gain confidence in themselves.

Highbridge Voices is working very hard in bringing music into the community. "We are great with the kids that we serve, but with the amount of students we have to turn away or dismiss, depending on his/her situation, it just isn't enough. It could be bigger," said Mary Clementi, the executive director of the Highbridge Voices after school music program. She believes that there should be more music and arts education in the Bronx, and Highbridge Community and agrees that music can teach us about ourselves and teach us to be well-rounded. Another thing that Clementi brought up, which I found very interesting, was that music

teaches people to think of a variety of ways to solve one problem. In a choir like the ones we have at Highbridge Voices, we learn to work as a team. This requires us to think of different ways to work with others in order to solve one problem or to do one thing. One of her theories as to why there is not enough music and arts education in this community is because there is very limited knowledge <sup>about</sup> of it. People may not fully understand or know what jobs are available for a musician. Then again, <sup>what?</sup> the musicians that they are introduced to are mainly celebrities through television or internet. A goal like that may seem unreachable or unrealistic to some. She then brought up the point that most musicians can be found in higher income places. The income in the Highbridge community is relatively low. Without music and arts, there is no attraction for musicians and artists.

After gathering information on this topic, I was able to come up with a survey to ask the people in the community to see what they think. I wanted to see what was really going on in the community regarding music and arts education. Thankfully, all 30 people I surveyed agreed that music and art is an important factor in one's education. When asked what could be done to make the education better, 47% said more extra curricular programs in music and art, 13% said more focus on math and science, and 33% said both of these. When asked about the level of music and arts education given in the community, most people answered 4-5 and second to that amount chose 10. It seems as though there are mixed feelings about this situation. Many of the people I asked, had their first answer as "I don't know" and then sort of took a guess. Next, I wanted to see if the people in the community thought that having more of this music and arts education could help heal the community. I asked them if they felt it would benefit the people in the Bronx healthwise and education wise. Healthwise, 28 out of 30 people said yes, and 29 out of 30 people said yes to education wise. Lastly, to get more of an insight of the music and art education given in schools, I asked some students, 14 in total, if they felt like there was enough

given in his or her school. The answers were pretty close, but 8 of them said no and 6 of them answered yes. Not all of them, however, go to school in this community. Unfortunately, only 9 students go to school in this community, and 5 of them said that there isn't enough.

Overall, most people aren't sure about how much music and arts education is given in the community, but they do know that there is some. Music and arts education looks to be important to people in the community, and it seems like most people want more of it. I do know that music and arts education is important, but even after this research I am not exactly sure if it is a huge problem to the people in this community. I hope that in the future there could be a better understanding of music and arts. There are many benefits healthwise and education wise. It can serve as a motivation for people in both ways, and also simply lifts the spirits of people!