

School Merger Opposed

Need Seen for Both Performing Arts
And a West Side High School

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

As parents of students of the High School of Performing Arts, we wish to take exception to part of the letter from Shirley Kaye which appeared on May 27. We feel sure that after we tell you our viewpoint you, too, will feel as we do.

Of course there is a tremendous need for a new improved academic West Side high school and we are wholly in support of this proposal. However, we are not in favor of merging a high school of performing arts with such a proposed school. Our reasons for this are many:

A zoned neighborhood school and a specialized central school are by their very nature incompatible.

With the neighborhood students numbering 2,400 and the Performing Arts students 600, it is obvious that the needs of the majority will have priority.

Performing Arts is what it is because of its vocational orientation. It is a double-purpose school, preparing both for college and for the professions, with the focus on the professions. The fact that 100 per cent of its students who have applied for college have been accepted and the fact that the majority of graduates do go to college do not make Performing Arts an academic school.

Correlated Work

Most established professionals in the performing arts recommend at least some college work, if not the full four years. The academic work at Performing Arts is taken in the focus of the vocational. The academic teachers are arts-oriented. Correlation between the two is made wherever possible. This concentration would be dissipated in the proposed merger. If the school is no longer vocational, it is no longer Performing Arts.

"The vastness of New York City's public school system permits the organization of specialized high schools to an advanced degree. These schools are one answer to the challenge of how to meet the complexity of individual differences. Young people who are well adjusted to each other's best interests are brought together in one school and an educational program is planned for them in terms of personal realization and individual happiness." (The above is a quote from the Board of Education's own publication, Curriculum and Materials—May-June, 1957.)

The High School of Performing Arts, now in its tenth year, has amply demonstrated its professional, cultural and practical worth. Culture along with science are the two positive weapons that our country must develop in its international relationships.

For Expanded Curriculum

Instead of merging this school, whose students are proving themselves in every phase of the arts, let it expand, let it grow, let it round out its curriculum to include training in stage direction, choreography, play-writing, composition, orchestration and in all the allied arts, in theatre, upon which both the musician and dancer depend. New York City's own radio and TV productions could and should emanate from this school.

What we need from the Board of Education is foresight, not hindsight. We have to move ahead, not back. We must develop to the furthest potential the creative abilities of the children with special talents in our city. We must also have a new West Side academic high school. One thing has nothing whatsoever to do with the other, except that we parents must fight for both.

DOROTHY SUMIN,
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New York, May 27, 1958.