



News

## Theater Oriented H.S. Kids Say They're Often Treated with "Meanness" by Kids on Sports

**Michael Presser is the Founder and President of Inside Broadway, currently celebrating their 40th anniversary season of bringing live theatre into the lives of our city's children. He has an interesting take on the harsh reality on the "meanness" that theatrically oriented kids in high school can experience at the hands of the jocks, the athletically oriented students.**

MICHAEL PRESSER(/TAG/-/META/MICHAEL-PRESSER)(/TAG/-/META/MICHAEL-PRESSER) | 07 APR 2023 | 12:58



Michael Presser of Inside Broadway feels very at home in a theater as he's been bringing live theater to schools for several decades.  
Photo: Elena Olivo, Inside Broadway

Recently, I joined in a panel discussion on the role that the arts play in education. During the question-and-answer session that followed, a young man said one obstacle for kids who want to join theater activities in school is a "meanness" that student athletes direct towards them.



mean by meanness?

Kids who are involved in scholastic sports—and often their parents— simply don't see the benefit of a theater education, he said, and have even gone so far as to call it a waste of time. In their worldview, sports is king. Strength and prowess on the field or on the court are the coins of the realm, and especially potential scholarships.

A student interested in the theater and a career in the arts would probably feel hesitant due to the attitude of his peers.

Now those of us who've lived in and worked in the arts our whole lives, especially on Broadway, know the truth. Ballet dancers require as much if not more rigorous training, strength, and physical stamina than participants in most sports. The same can be said to singers about the years it takes to develop a vocal technique.

But how do you explain this to people who, apparently, have closed off their minds to this entire realm of human endeavor?

The answer is education, and that takes money.

When we talk about funding education in the arts, we often focus on the lives of those who take classes, and who are exposed to the arts as possible careers. But it's more than that. All kids should have a chance to taste the arts, to be exposed to them, so this inherent "meanness" won't grow out of, well, ignorance.

I have spent 40 years bringing arts to children, and I know as a society we just don't accept the arts as a crucial part of our lives. But they are. And that's where the money comes in. In order to solve this vague cultural problem of perception, of meanness, we need a change in the way the New York City Department of Education does its budget, and especially in the way arts education is handled in that budget.

At this very moment, the Mayor and the City Council are doing their annual budget dance. The Mayor publishes his budget – cutting, cutting, cutting, invariably – and the Council publishes its, with many of its priorities closer to the ground and more embedded in individual neighborhoods than the Mayor's.

The school budget falls in the Mayor's purview, but funding from the arts is buried under the supplies category. Some of that comes to organizations like Inside Broadway to operate arts and education programs in city schools, but it is so easy to cut without a specific budget line.



musical revues. In today's school classrooms, children are being exposed to all of the art disciplines, and with the addition of artists into school instruction and performances by professional artists, they are experiencing interactions with people who are practicing their art.

It is therefore time for arts and education to have a dedicated budget line so that if reductions are necessary, the impact can be part of a legitimate public discussion like many other items in the city budget.

Of course, let's not forget the possibility of increasing the arts and education budget so that more children can participate.

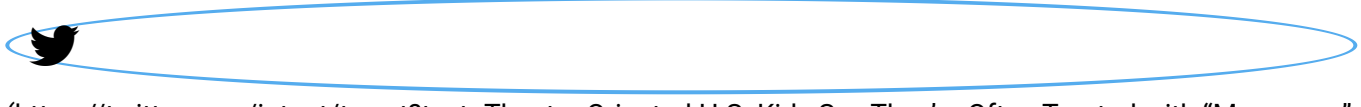
I'm not opposed to sports in schools because they certainly have their value and appropriate place. I do however want to see art properly represented and supported in the new Department of Education budget.

It's time for all of us to put to rest any "meanness" or attitudes of inferiority towards the world of the arts for children.

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