

September 2011



Dear Art School Participants,

Thank you to those of you who attended the recent meeting about the renovation plans for the Educational Alliance's flagship building and how it will affect the Art School. It was helpful to gain a better understanding about your interests and concerns and we hope you came away with a fuller perspective about the organization's plans. We are writing to share highlights of that discussion and provide additional information.

Renovation Plans

We are absolutely committed to ensuring that the Educational Alliance Art School remains a vital community art school far into the future. We greatly value arts instruction and the critical and vibrant role art, both its creation and its display, plays in strengthening our community and giving people a voice. The Art School is core to our work.

Our goal in rebuilding our flagship building is to ensure that it is sustainable for another 125 years and that it continues to be a resource for everyone in our community, with programming that evolves based on community interest. This programming will undoubtedly include the Art School, early childhood education, youth development, health and wellness, adult education, community gatherings and performances, and older adult programming.

The renovated Art School and galleries will be located on the ground floor where the space has been designed specifically for studio and gallery use. Art School Director Walter O'Neill was actively involved in discussions with our architects in design of the space. Art classes in many disciplines, affordable prices, scholarships for young people, open studio time and exhibits by established and emerging artists as well as students will all continue. Studios will have ceiling heights of nine and a half feet and new windows and ventilation systems. The entire building will be greener, more efficient, and most important, sustainable. We are determined to keep the renovation on schedule and on budget.

We understand that some of you are disappointed about our plans for the renovated Art School and regret this. We ask that you understand that with finite space and funds we had to make a series of choices so that the organization as a whole could continue to thrive and grow and serve our entire community. We hope you will stay with us and come to love the new space.

Welding and Photography

Several students expressed disappointment that the Art School in the renovated building will not include a welding studio or darkroom. As we said at the meeting, fitting all the desired programmatic elements into the finite space of the building necessitated a number of compromises. In the current building the dedicated Art School and Gallery space is about 4,900 square feet. The comparable space in the new building will be 4,000 square feet.

After much deliberation, following consultation with building and insurance experts, we came to the conclusion that housing a welding studio in a community center that serves many different populations poses too great a safety risk. We made the decision not to reproduce the photography studio because it, unlike the other studios, cannot be used flexibly to accommodate multiple art disciplines.

Prior to our meeting we had been planning to try to sell the photography and welding equipment. However, given your feedback, we have decided to donate the equipment, ideally to another not-for-profit organization in the neighborhood or elsewhere in the city, that could offer comparable programming. We welcome your suggestions about organizations that might be interested in the equipment, no sooner than January 2012, as we pursue this possibility.

Classes During the Renovation

Many of you wanted to know why we planned to put the Art School on temporary hiatus during part of the renovation. At the beginning of our planning process, we hoped to secure an alternative venue for the Art School. We searched for affordable temporary space but, regrettably, we were unable to identify anything suitable.

Having heard your deep interest, we are trying to continue some Art School classes between February 2012 and when the Art School reopens. Our hope is to locate classes within our existing Educational Alliance facilities and local schools. We are committed to preserving affordable tuition and therefore will not take on temporary space that would incur any significant costs.

Early October Meeting

As promised at our August 30th meeting, we will host a 90 minute meeting for Art School students who were not able to attend the August meeting, where we'll also discuss identifying local organizations that would be interested in accepting our donated welding and darkroom equipment after the new year. The meeting will take place on Thursday October 27 from 6:30 to 8:00PM. Please RSVP to Jeanette Herrera at artschool@edalliance.org or 646 395-4235.

Sincerely,
Lynn Appelbaum
Chief Program Officer