

Friis, John

From: Mallory Nugent [mallory.nugent@hotmail.com]
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To: Friis, John
Cc: eca_pace@yahoo.com
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It's funny that I received the information about ECA possible closing today. Last night, I made the trip from New Jersey to Brooklyn to see a fellow alum lead his Big Band in a truly unique, enjoyable show. I graduated 5 years ago, and my appreciation for the things I learned, the people I met, and the arts have only grown. I didn't grow up to be a dancer/choreographer as I thought I would when I was in the ECA Dance Department. I am a social worker, who works with teenagers who have spent their lifetime in the foster care system. These kids are disheartened, traumatized, apathetic, angry, drug and gang involved, and a year or two a way from being entirely on their own...which if you talk to them, they kind of always have been. ECA didn't make me grow up to be a dancer...it made me grow up to be a person who believes in the priceless value of individuals and the impact one person can have on the lives of many. As an adolescent I watched Susan Matheke, Willie Feur and Mariane Banar-Fountain transform angry, troubled teenagers into self assured young adults; young artists. They opened my mind and my heart. When I work with my teenagers, I remember the example I saw at ECA, and that sometimes all a kid needs is one person who believes in what they are and can be. Today I am a successful adult, with a job I truly care about, not because of what I learned in my English or Math class, but what I lived at ECA. I don't know whether these incredible individuals who changed countless lives are "certified" to teach high school...but highly qualified? I think you would be hard pressed to find more highly qualified. When you meet such passionate, committed teachers, you tend to think that they are one in a million. It defies logic that ECA would be crawling with such professionals-but that is exactly the case. My story is not unique. Talk to any of my fellow alum, from any department, and we all get the same nostalgic half smile when we talk about ECA and the experience that changed our way of viewing the world and ourselves. Within the walls of ECA kids who would never have given each other the time of day in the halls of regular high school, worked collaboratively to create works of beauty and meaning. Art gave them a reason to consider that there was more to a person than the high school labels we were so quick to place on each other (nerds, freaks, cool kids, goody goodys, druggies, goth, prep, athlete). If ECA is forced to close, or kids are told they can't attend because of a money issue, or teachers are told that some piece of paper will prevent them from sharing their gifts and wisdom, you will be robbing future generations. At a time when education is so desperately in need of reform and our youth are in such dire need of support, to take away such an incredible, shining example of everything education should be is down right criminal. Save ECA.

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