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Gift Aims to Lift Dance Education

A \$4.3 million gift to Teachers College will establish a new doctoral program in dance education



Jody Gottfried Arnhold is called 'the godmother of dance education.' PHOTO: DEBORAH FEINGOLD

By **PIA CATTON**

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Philanthropist Jody Gottfried Arnhold has for years made dance education in public schools her priority. Now, she is ensuring that dance teachers have teachers of their own.

With a gift of \$4.3 million, to be announced Tuesday, she and her husband, John Arnhold, have enabled Teachers College, Columbia University to add a new doctoral program in dance education.

Master's degree programs are already offered at several institutions in New York and beyond, but doctoral-level programs are few, said Teachers College president Susan H. Fuhrman, who expects to start this program as early as next fall, pending state approval. The gift will pay for a program chairman and scholarships.

The goal is to produce master dance educators, as well as researchers, policy makers and leaders. “I’m trying to build the field,” said Ms. Arnhold. “I want these people to pepper the country, to be sitting at the table any time anyone talks about dance education.”

With this gift, Ms. Arnhold, who taught dance in New York schools and received a master’s degree from Teachers College, addresses dance learning at its highest reaches. But she has already made an impact at almost every level.

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To help codify what students learn, she was co-chairwoman of the committee that drafted the New York City Department of Education’s Blueprint for Teaching & Learning in Dance, published in 2005.

To train and develop educators, she founded the Dance Education Laboratory at the 92nd Street Y in 1995.

“I call her the godmother of dance education in New York City,” said Ana Nery Fragoso, director of dance at the Department of Education’s Office of Arts & Special Projects.

According to the Department of Education, there are approximately 250 certified dance instructors in city schools. These and future teachers could benefit, said Ms. Fragoso, from doctoral research projects into subjects such as assessing effective teaching tools or showing how dance-making sparks critical thinking skills for students.

“We need more people to do serious research on dance education,” she said.

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