

March 13, 2024

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To Rachel Hise, Chair Leggett and the Accountability and Implementation Board:

Arts Education in Maryland Schools is a statewide 501(c)(3) dedicated to ensuring that public school students in the state of Maryland have equitable access to robust arts education. We advocate for this both on the basis of Federal law (ESSA), which requires the arts as part of a well-rounded education, and State law (COMAR), which requires all Maryland public school students have access to all 5 arts disciplines in grades PK-12 (access to experiences in grades PK-5, access to courses in grades 6-12), and on the basis of research that shows the vital role that the arts play in whole-child development. The arts provide myriad benefits including strengthened critical thinking skills, social and emotional development, and sense of belonging.

AEMS is aware of, and is deeply concerned by, much of the reporting surrounding the comments made by Ms. Hise and Chair Leggett [during a virtual meeting with officials of Worcester County](#) regarding Blueprint funding and its uses for the school system.

The comments from these AIB members, as they have been reported on, about areas that should or should not be prioritized in school funding have been made to appear to be in contradiction with both the Blueprint's Comprehensive Implementation Plan and the Code of Maryland Annotated Regulations (COMAR) for Fine Arts.

Ms. Hise commented about the limitations of the funding formula, such as its inability to address transportations costs. Based on the reporting, it seems that this comment was conflated with part of a question asked by Worcester County Commissioner Anthony Bertino regarding athletics and band, which many have taken to imply that the AIB's position is that these areas are prime targets for budget cuts. This effect appears to have been exacerbated by Chair Leggett's comment that "the Blueprint and the funding and the formulas that are provided will not do everything that people may want to do at the local level and there will have to be some difficult choices."

The Blueprint's Comprehensive Implementation Plan includes a reminder warning against exactly the kind of programmatic cuts which the AIB is being reported as having offered as a solution to funding problems: "The Blueprint for Maryland's Future and the updated CCR standard are **not intended to alter** the need for high quality programs and content in **fine arts**, civics, physical education, and other areas that are necessary to provide a holistic education and enable every student to be well-rounded..." (Pillar 3.1.1(b))



Pillar 3 of the implementation plan also states that “Blueprint law specifically authorizes the use of Foundation formula funds and Concentration of Poverty grant funds (through FY 27) for LEAs to meet the requirements of Code of Maryland Regulations: Title 13A, Subtitle 04, SPECIFIC SUBJECTS, including [13A.04.16.01](#), which includes the arts.” Students are required by COMAR to have arts experiences in grades PK-5 and a choice of courses in grades 6-12, so the exclusion of courses and opportunities including band would be in violation of state regulation.

While AEMS has taken the time to understand the full context of the comments that were inaccurately reported, we cannot expect all parties affected by such inaccurate reporting to have the time and capacity to do similar research. **We respectfully request that the AIB release a clarifying statement** both to the public and directly to the Worcester County Board of Education that addresses the inaccuracies regarding the activities and school programming that is or is not covered by Blueprint funding. These statements have been reported through multiple outlets, multiplying the misinformation that needs to be addressed. If left uncorrected, these reported statements have the potential to endanger arts education in Worcester County and beyond, despite their significant contributions to student life.

We are aware, as per the recent AIB meeting on January 18, 2024, that the AIB is increasing its communication activities to ensure that the public has a clear understanding of the Blueprint and its ramifications. In addition to general informational communications, targeted interventions such as the one we are requesting are an important part of ensuring the successful rollout of this transformative education policy. We look forward to seeing a clarifying statement regarding the Worcester County meeting of late February.

Thank you for your service, and please don't hesitate to call on AEMS for collaboration or conversation regarding arts education as we all continue to work towards a world-class education for all of Maryland's students.

Sincerely,

Rachel McGrain
Executive Director