



Arts Education in Maryland Schools

October 26, 2023

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Dear Interim Superintendent Wright,

On behalf of Arts Education in Maryland Schools, welcome to the Maryland State Department of Education! At this crucial, transformational moment in Maryland's education history, we are grateful that you have returned to Maryland to provide much-needed leadership for Maryland's educator workforce.

[Arts Education in Maryland Schools \(AEMS\)](#) is a statewide 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Baltimore City committed to ensuring that all students in the state of Maryland have equitable access to high quality arts education. Founded in 1997 as the result of a collaborative effort between the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland State Arts Council, AEMS remains dedicated to our charge of bringing the necessary and formative power of robust arts education to Maryland's public school students through advocacy programs, professional and leadership programs, and resource building and sharing.

We know from both research and lived experience that the arts are an essential part of children's growth and development. The necessity of the arts is also reflected in Maryland's state laws in the Code of Maryland Regulations [13A.04.16](#), which requires access to all 5 arts disciplines of Dance, Media Arts, Music, Visual Arts, and Theatre for students P-12 including 1 arts credit to graduate high school. The federal [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA) also acknowledges music and the arts as essential components of a well-rounded education.

We also know that, while many students across the state are thriving in their arts classrooms, there are also students throughout the state who do not have meaningful access to arts education, whether it be a lack of access to a plurality of arts disciplines or a lack of access to meaningful depth of study and sustained learning. [Research has shown](#) that participation in arts learning leads to higher academic outcomes in areas such as reading and language arts and mathematics. We know that when children learn through the arts the whole child is accessed and nurtured, and we know that a world-class education must include robust arts education.

Our recent advocacy efforts to protect against unintentional consequences that might stifle the arts in the rollout of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future include organizing oral and written testimony from educators, parents, and students to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future Accountability and Implementation Board

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(AIB). This resulted in multiple explicit callouts of and protections for arts education in the AIB's [Comprehensive Implementation Plan](#) (Pillar 3.1.1(b)).

AEMS also initiated [outreach to former superintendent](#) Choudhury, in collaboration with Maryland's arts educator professional associations (Maryland Art, Dance, Music, and Theater Education Associations), which led to the re-empaneling of the vacant Fine Arts Education Advisory Panel. This [COMAR-required body](#) is designed to advise the Superintendent on fine arts education issues and best practices in Maryland. Additionally, AEMS has long been a grantee of MSDE's Fine Arts Initiative grant, administering the [Maryland Centers for Creative Classrooms](#) arts educator professional development series.

In its efforts to share resources, and to align with recommendations from the 2014 [Governor's P-20 Leadership Council Task Force on Arts Education in Maryland Schools](#), AEMS has been working with MSDE's Data Office to make State Longitudinal Data Sets on arts education enrollment, staffing, and access available through the Maryland [Arts Education Data Project](#), run by Quadrant Research. The necessary data-sharing agreement was signed by former superintendent Choudhury in March of 2023, and the initial data dashboards will be publicly launched in the coming weeks. This data platform will provide necessary information to stakeholders at all levels that can inform LEA- and state-level policy decisions, equip community- and teacher-based advocates, and highlight model arts education communities and arts education communities that need targeted support.

We look forward to continued opportunities to work in collaboration with MSDE to increase the quality and access of arts education for Maryland's public school students. Thank you for your service to Maryland's students and the dedicated educators, administrators, and advocates who support them.

With gratitude,

Rachel McGrain  
Executive Director, AEMS