



Arts Education in Maryland Schools

To the County Board of Executives of Cecil County:

3/1/24

**Board of Trustees**

Jane Coffey (Co-Chair)  
Anita Lambert (Co-Chair)  
Kristin Cox (Treasurer)  
Byrone Brown  
Christen Cromwell  
Sheila Gibbs  
Jessika Williams

**Executive Director**

Rachel McGrain

**Director of Operations**

Peter Dayton

**Communications**

**Manager**

Alissa Gittens

**Operations & Policy**

**Assistant**

Patrick O'Reilly

**Board Emeritus**

Karen Footner  
Lyn Frankel  
Susan Magsamen  
Mary Ann Mears  
Brian Sullam  
Danita Beck Wickwire

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 applauds the proposed School Year 24/25 budget most recently proposed by Superintendent Dr. Jeffrey Lawson and approved by the Cecil County Board of Education. A budget is a moral document, outlining the priorities and values of the body that administers said budget, and we believe that the budget's proposed additional funds beyond the Maintenance of Effort funding is a laudable response that advocates for the interests of Cecil County's students, teachers, and families.

We have already seen the kind of damage Maintenance of Effort budgeting can cause to the arts in Cecil County. From at least School Year 18/19 up to School Year 20/21, Cecil County was a leader in the field of Media Arts education in the state, with an average of 19 educators teaching Media Arts courses to over an average of 6,000 enrolled students per year. In School Year 21/22, only **3** educators were employed to teach Media Arts courses to only **49** enrolled students. These are the kinds of total program collapses that we have witnessed under current County Executive leadership, and are at risk of multiplying without the kinds of investments proposed by Dr. Lawson and the County Board of Education.

As a moral document, the budget proposed by County Executive Hornberger constitutes an assault on the very project of public education in Cecil County Schools. Given the implications of this budget, programs that in other counties of Maryland have been assumed components of the experience available to all county tax paying residents would be cut or become paid add-ons to an increasingly bare-bones experience. Families with less means in Cecil County would see their public school life grow bleaker, emptier, and lower quality, while the county's more affluent families could afford to send their children to private schools in Cecil County, Delaware, or southern Pennsylvania and have richer and more fulfilling experiences (experiences matched by the public school offerings of other Maryland counties).

190 W. Ostend Street, Suite 200 Baltimore, Maryland 21230

410.779.1287 | [www.aems-edu.org](http://www.aems-edu.org)

   @artsedmaryland



While the County Executive's proposed budget has catastrophic consequences for programming across the board, as arts education advocates we are painfully aware of how the already-undervalued arts are so often first on the chopping block of school budgets. Yet arts learning is not only beneficial but crucial to whole-child development. As just a single example from among the arts disciplines, instrumental music education boosts neuroplasticity, synchronizes the brain's cerebral hemispheres, and strengthens neural pathways; all of which produce long-lasting impacts on the brain ("[Music for Every Child.](#)" [San Francisco Conservatory of Music](#)). These are the kinds of assets to child development that County Executive Hornberger's budget eliminates from the free, public education in Cecil County. Families who want to access these developmental benefits will have to pay for additional services outside of their public school experience. The inequities inherent in this paradigm are clear and unconscionable.

Far from making Cecil County a "beacon of good governance" as [previously claimed](#), County Executive Hornberger's financial priorities would establish Cecil County as a beacon for deep inequity and [inadequacy in public services](#). Already as we have spoken to arts educators and administrators from other Maryland jurisdictions, Cecil County has become a byword for backwards budgeting and they have expressed gratitude that "at least it's not like Cecil County."

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future was passed into law with the overwhelming support of the Maryland General Assembly because they believed in the necessity of **increasing** our investments in Maryland's public school students in order to ensure that they are receiving a world-class education, and to position Maryland's students as globally competitive in academics and the workforce. We will here remind Cecil County of key language from the Blueprint Accountability and Implementation Board's Statewide Implementation Plan: Pillar 3.1.1(b) states that the Blueprint for Maryland's Future is "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." Maintaining this high quality programming is not possible without the additional funding requested by the County Superintendent. We urge all parties to pass a budget that uplifts our public school students, provides them with the resources, staffing, and experiences that they need to thrive in their academics and personal development, and to acknowledge in their budgeting the key role that the arts play in student's academic performance and quality of life. We believe that the proposed budget by Dr. Lawson accomplishes these goals and we urge the County Board of Executives to approve his recommended funding levels.

-Peter Dayton, AEMS Director of Operations

190 W. Ostend Street, Suite 200 Baltimore, Maryland 21230  
410.779.1287 | [www.aems-edu.org](http://www.aems-edu.org)

 @artsedmaryland