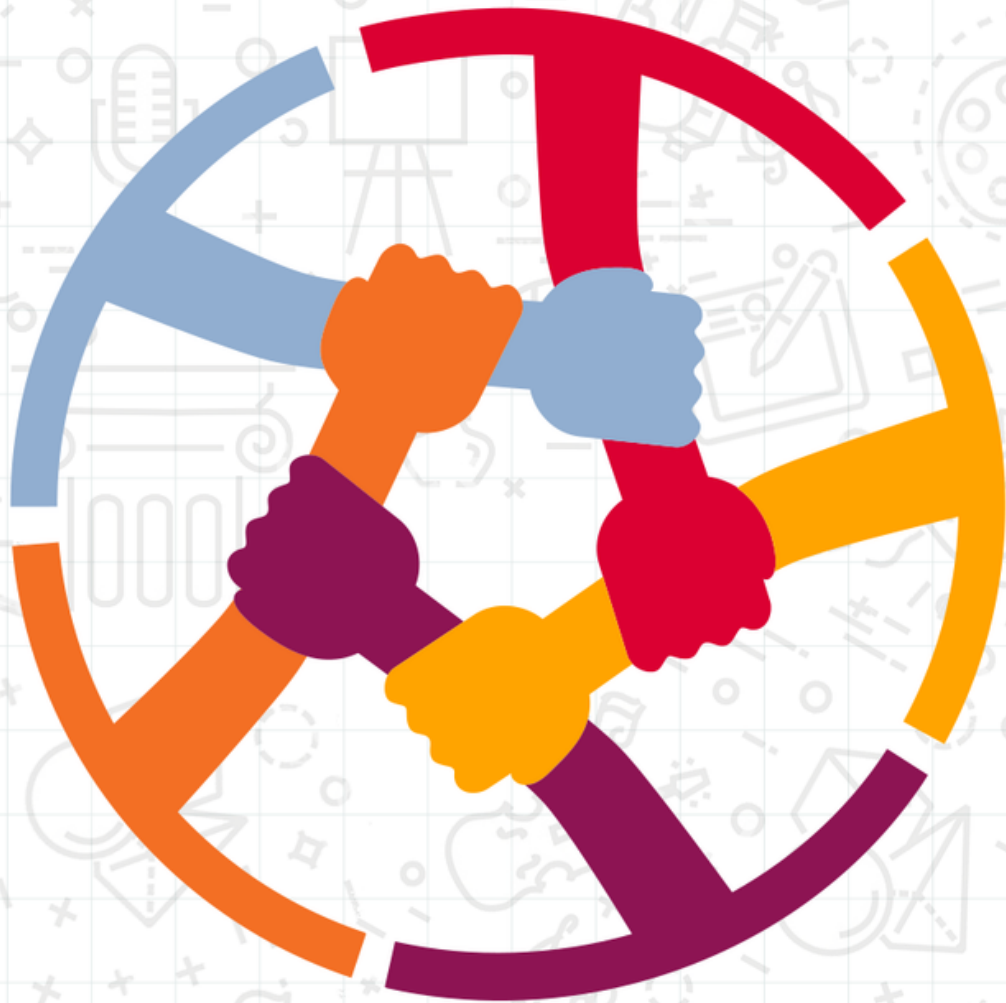


STRENGTHENING ARTS EDUCATION Infrastructure in Maryland:

A Community Listening Session Report

NOVEMBER 2023



by: **AEMS**
Arts Education in Maryland Schools

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS) is the statewide arts education advocacy organization for Maryland. Our mission is to ensure that all students in the state of Maryland have access to high quality arts education by mobilizing power to communities through advocacy programs, professional and leadership development, and resource building and sharing. In order for us to meet our mission, we acknowledge the importance of being transparent and responsive to the needs of our constituents. AEMS released a [report on its FY20-21 listening sessions](#) in September 2022.

The qualitative input of this report complements the quantitative data of AEMS [Maryland Arts Education Data Project](#) in its effort to document the state of arts education in Maryland's Public Schools. This report compiles information from meetings that AEMS conducted with arts educators throughout the state from March 2022 to May 2023 as part of a community listening initiative, variously known as Community Listening Sessions and Arts Educator Town Halls. These sessions were designed as a forum for arts educators to directly communicate with AEMS regarding the needs in their individual local school systems, as well as an opportunity for AEMS to increase its outreach to, and to share advocacy resources with, educators. Acknowledging the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly with spikes of COVID cases such as the Omicron Variant, these listening sessions and town halls were conducted virtually using the Zoom platform. AEMS also strives to remain geographically accessible through the use of Zoom for these meetings.

Methodology

AEMS held Community Listening Sessions on the following dates:

- March 30, 2022
- September 29, 2022
- March 28, 2023
- May 17, 2023

A total of 30 arts educators took part in these meetings, representing all 5 arts disciplines.

Arts Educators Disaggregated by Arts Discipline*

Dance	Media Arts	Music	Visual Arts	Theatre	Unknown
10	2	11	8	2	1

*Some individuals represented more than one arts discipline, leading to a greater count of educators by discipline than total attendees.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Five AEMS staff members in total conducted these meetings in various combinations:

- Peter Dayton, Interim Executive Director / Director of Operations
- Rachel McGrain, Executive Director
- Jessika Williams, Development Manager
- Alissa Gittens, Communications & Community Mobilization Manager
- Patrick O'Reilly, Public Ally Fellow / Policy & Operations Assistant

In part due to transitions within the organization, two different agendas were used across these four meetings.

Meetings held in calendar year 2022 took the following format:

- Introductions from AEMS leadership
- An overview of AEMS
- Educators were invited to respond to six prompting questions
- Educators were invited to view others' responses to the prompting questions
- Group discussion on the themes emerging from the responses
- Educators were invited to share personal stories of the positive impact of arts education in their communities and in the lives of their students
- Adjournment

The six prompting questions were:

1. Currently, what does your arts education community/classroom look like? (environment, engagement, etc.)?
2. What is the continuing impact of COVID-19 on arts education in your community?
3. What issues of educator fatigue/attrition/retention have you observed in your arts education community?
4. What would you like the future of arts education to look like in your community, in the county, in the state?
5. What kinds of resources/support do you need?
6. How do you feel that AEMS' work is relevant to your priorities?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Town Halls held in calendar year 2023 took the following format:

- Introductions from AEMS leadership
- Educators were invited to introduce themselves
- Educators were invited to respond to a Mentimeter prompt: “Choose 3 words to describe your school year.”
- An overview of AEMS and updates about current issues
- Guided questions or time for open discussion, based upon the number of attendees and their level of participation.

Guided questions prepared for these town halls included:

- How is the Blueprint impacting your classroom/school? What’s going well/not going well?
- How are you involved in decision making and influencing change in your school community?
- What resources and tools could AEMS provide to make it easier for you to advocate in your local setting?
- Other miscellaneous thoughts/questions about what’s going on at your schools, how AEMS can support, etc.

After the completion of these Community Listening Sessions and Town Halls, AEMS compiled the responses and transcriptions of conversations. All quotes within the report are transcribed responses from Maryland K-12 public school educators with minor edits for grammatical clarification.

In addition to the transcribed quotes, the narrative report includes reproduced selections from the educators’ shorter responses to the prompting questions. These are grouped first by which question the responses correspond to, then by thematic similarity within those responses. After the body of the report, there is an appendix which reproduces some of the educators’ responses that are quoted in the narrative report. Because this data was collected using two different methods, the appendix is organized into the different themes that emerged from the aggregate data. Occasionally quotes are represented in multiple areas if the entire quote covers more than one thematic area.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of Meetings

AEMS' mission states mobilizing power to communities as a means of ensuring that all students in the state of Maryland have access to arts education. One avenue by which AEMS seeks to mobilize power to communities is by directly basing its programming in the concerns and issues of its constituents. AEMS held these community listening sessions to discover current trends and issues in the Maryland arts education ecosystem and to address those issues in order to strengthen Maryland's arts education infrastructure. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this purpose was expanded to ensure that AEMS was informed about the myriad of new challenges that educators faced in the switch to remote learning and further pandemic collateral damage to arts programs. As the process of implementing the landmark Blueprint for Maryland's Future unfolds, this purpose has expanded to ensure that AEMS was aware of the impacts of Blueprint implementation on classroom education and to assess 'on-the-ground' educators' awareness of changes coming in the near and mid future as a result.

Purpose of the Report

AEMS presents this public-facing report to ensure a transparent alignment of our work in information-gathering with our commitment to the value of community. AEMS seeks to illuminate and highlight the power communities have to make systemic change. This report uplifts and centers the voices of arts educators: both the current transformative impact that they have on their students as well as the impediments that prevent arts access, interfere with educators' delivery of instruction, and fail to provide necessary support for meaningful arts education. Additionally, the findings of this report necessitate a call to action for Maryland's education leaders to address local and systemic issues that arts educators around the state face. The needs and concerns that educators raised, which this report enumerates, will also form the basis of AEMS' advocacy efforts to ensure that Maryland leaders hear their constituents' call to action.

CENTRAL THEMES

Snapshots of the State of Arts Education

Initial responses by arts educators regarding their feelings on the school year were ambivalent experiences of arts education in Maryland's Public Schools. Further prompts and conversation elaborated these cursory reactions, but the even split of positive (9), neutral/euphemistic (4) and negative (13) descriptors speak to the fulfillment of the work, the positive impact of the arts, but also the cynicism and the lack of support or validation that Maryland arts educators experience. While positive language was largely varied, there was a greater consensus around negative descriptors, such as "exhausting" (4/13) and "chaotic" (3/13) speaking to the impact of a lack of support on morale and lack of support on the quality of delivered instruction and student experiences.

Snapshot Summary

Positive Descriptors	Neutral/Ambiguous/Euphemistic Descriptors	Negative Descriptors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fun• Exciting• Memorable• Happy• Productive• Insightful• Amazing• Promising• Rewarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Busy• Interesting• Informative• Fast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exhausting (4x)• Chaotic (3x)• Telling• Overworked• Abused• Frustrating• Hardworking• Disappointing• Stressful

ARTS EDUCATION'S COMPARATIVE VALUE

A Systemically Reinforced Structure which Shapes Parents' Priorities Away from the Arts

“Arts classes are not treated as a core content area because it is not tested so it does not matter for whether or not you are held back. The implicit message is that arts classes are less important.”

Maryland educators who participated in our meetings expressed dismay at the vicious cycle that fine arts curriculums and programs are subjected to. Structural devaluation of arts programming (only 1 credit required for graduation, over-emphasis on standardized testing¹) leads to administrative devaluation of arts courses (lack of priority in scheduling and inaccurate terminology²) that reinforces parental and familial devaluation of students engaging in the arts, resulting in the administrative devaluation of arts education. Because families do not see arts courses listed as a part of the core curriculum they may feel justified when discouraging students from either taking arts courses, seriously engaging in arts classes, or pursuing arts majors in higher education and creative careers. Once this results in a decline in enrollment for arts programming, the diminished metrics can lead administrators to perceive that there is a lack of student and familial desire for the arts.

Educators commented on the connection between the financial incentives (or disincentives) related to performance in standardized tested areas and parents' implicit and explicit priorities for their children lamenting that “the system is set up to make students feel like they have to pass content classes to avoid summer school.” Another educator's remark clarified “the fact that parents have to pay for summer school encourages parents to only care about the tested courses to avoid summer school costs.”

Pragmatic parental and cynical administrative priorities can adversely influence students' own understanding of and engagement with the arts. An educator noted

1. Historical, like No Child Left Behind, and present, like the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

2. Terminology such as “Electives, Specials, Enrichments, Supplementals”, all currently used by Maryland Public Schools in various local education agencies, obscure the equal legal standing of the arts within the code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR). Just like standardized-tested subjects, the arts are required for K-12 Maryland students and arts credits are required to graduate. See the AEMS FY20-21 report for more information on the administrative culture of arts unappreciation in Maryland schools

CENTRAL THEMES

that “Our numbers are down across the board (band, choir, dance, and theatre) since Covid - recruiting and retention are difficult when students got a taste of online courses and were able to essentially graduate” without performing arts experiences. Another educator shared that their students are “feeling discontented and as though they can use art classes as a break,” approaching these courses in the similar manner in which schools have belittled them with non-essential labels as if those “classes don’t matter.” In this kind of environment, students could be said to be accurately picking up on the tone set by school administration that views the arts as optional and frivolous. An educator noted that “in some schools [arts educators] are not asked what they need for their classes.” “As always,” one educator pointed out, “it’s a question of value, and the greater population seeing the value in arts education and investing in it. There is so much creative problem solving and thinking that occurs within arts education.” Arts educators are currently stretched to capacity with creatively solving the problem of the lack of investment in their work and programs.

EDUCATOR SUPPORT

Arts Educators’ Roles and the Need for Greater Staffing Support

“They often feel like they are the last thought about in the building.”

In this kind of environment where teachers feel devalued, the axiom that success breeds success could be inverted to the formulation that struggle breeds struggle. Faced with the negative effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on enrollment in arts programs, on student behavioral issues, and on unmet student learning outcomes, arts educators are also experiencing that their programs do not have adequate support for all learners, do not have substitutes, and that they themselves are being pulled outside of their content areas to support other areas.

Multiple participants commented that “coverage is what is very tiring to teachers since we cannot get subs!” In an effort to helpfully brainstorm, another educator highlighted the need for arts substitute teachers and offered “I wonder if we can try to bring college arts education students in as substitutes.” This kind of creative pragmatism speaks to the dedication of educators, though it does not solve the underlying need for more fully-licensed educators that would decrease the demand for substitutes.

CENTRAL THEMES

This need for substitutes also impacts arts educators who are pulled to cover areas outside of their own expertise, as one educator commented that arts educators “are being asked to teach classes outside of their discipline like PE.” Educators spoke of the strain of “trying to get enrollment up with the threat of teaching out of area coming up.”

Continuing the theme of arts educators being put in the position of navigating duties beyond their expertise, participants commented on the issues caused by having to instruct students with special needs despite no specific training to qualify them to do so. For many content areas other than the arts, students with special needs are either taught by a certified special educator or have paraprofessionals to assist them in a general education setting. However, during many arts courses, all of the students are present in the same classroom without paraprofessional support or additional training for the arts teacher. Educators noted that “paraprofessionals' time during “special area” classes (aka arts) are treated as more of a break time, leaving students who need those professionals without them. If teachers bring up this issue then it is the teachers who get in trouble with the administration. Something needs to be done at the state level.”

AEMS agrees that robust intervention (though at both state and local levels) is necessary to ensure both that arts educators and students are better positioned to have a positive and healthy experience in the school building. As it stands, “Classroom teachers need more adults. Too many kids in the room with too many individual needs. More paras, more teachers in general.”

CONTINUING IMPACTS OF COVID-19

“Student engagement is a bit more difficult this year [‘22-23 school year] - I feel due to the “virtual learning” from last year.”

In addition to navigating the needs of students who need paraprofessional support, arts educators are facing the continued ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic on students’ learning and mental health, as well as the disproportionate impact on performance-based arts.

CENTRAL THEMES

Apart from the most salient issue of “still many student absences,” arts educators “are still seeing many of the social and emotional ramifications of COVID.” One educator reported that “this year I’ve had to take a lot of time to co-regulate with my kids.” Another brought up the “double impact on students - ½ are craving more personal interactions and the other ½ don’t want any in person interactions.” These social-emotional issues that educators are observing in their students speak for the need of increased administrative support for the arts, since the arts are well-positioned to meet the challenge of the traumas of the pandemic. According to the Johns Hopkins University-based [International Arts and Mind Lab](#), “a growing body of evidence shows that making art—painting or drawing, dancing or singing, poetry or journaling—is a smart way to build coping skills, manage emotions, relieve stress, and express oneself.”

Even so, beyond the emotional navigation, educators expressed that “engagement is more difficult - students on phones or devices- and harder to hold attention. 1:1 devices have made this more difficult than ever.” The more-than-a-year of screen-based teaching and learning has left educators still searching for answers on how to best bring students back into the tactile and embodied world of artistic practice. Speaking to the continued screen-based nature of student engagement, one educator noted that “students are still more interested in signing up for computer based arts classes (digital music, digital art) than classes where they will have to perform like dance and theatre.” While media arts is an important and growing arts discipline, students should have access to experiences in all arts disciplines, including those of dance and theatre, where the importance of risk-taking and freedom to learn through mistakes takes on a physical, visceral form.

Lastly, an educator raised the issue of student engagement as it relates to continuity of learning. Not only are educators finding it difficult to gain interest and excite students in class, but “keeping students for all four years is a challenge,” despite this educator coming from a particularly art-robust school, “with theater, dance, band, choir, 3D art, and 2D art.” Continuity of learning and depth of study are significant in ensuring that school community-building programs like school choirs, band programs, theatre productions, and dance teams can be sustained, as well as leading to increased benefits in student academic performance and wellbeing³.

3. Ruppert, Sandra S. Rep. Critical Evidence: How the Arts Benefit Student Achievement. National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2006. <https://www.aep-arts.org/topics/critical-evidence-how-the-arts-benefit-student-achievement/>

RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT

Undervalued and Unsupported Educators are Leaving, Few are Replaced

“My classroom is robust and is working well. But we do not have a chorus teacher at this time and have been without a full time vocal teacher for the 3rd year. Very disappointing not to be fully staffed.”

The aforementioned sections describe many Maryland arts educators’ work environments. It is little wonder that, as one educator informed AEMS, “anyone in our district anywhere near retirement is opting to leave.” The following statements from arts educators corroborate these observations:

- “I have noticed more transitions in terms of positions and periods of burn out for educators in the arts.”
- “We had a lot of staff turn over at my school from last year to this year”
- “We’ve seen a lot of people leaving the field of education in general.” “As a county we have more openings than ever.”
- “Across the board, myself included, teachers are tired and are pressed hard to do additional work, especially if pay is not commensurate with the work.”

The list of dire circumstances goes on, with educators pointing to their heavy workloads, lack of program support, and the exhaustion of COVID as key causes.

Even as educator resignations are at a high, it appears that new recruits entering the field are low. One educator expressed that “all music recruitments are at about half from what it was before.” While arts educators are committed to the children they serve and to their artistry, more effort and funding is needed to make the arts educator profession respected, attractive, and properly supported. Educators noted that “there is a school-to-teaching pipeline issue” and that “We need more young people to choose arts education at the university level.”

AEMS is committed to examining ways in which educator recruitment can be addressed including from the standpoint of the school-to-teaching pipeline (see Commitments).

CENTRAL THEMES

However, students can already see in the structure of their school schedule, in the vocabulary for talking about arts courses, in the lack of adequate facilities and equipment (“we need facilities to support dance and theatre programs”), that the arts are not considered legitimate or important as an area of study. Why should they seek to put themselves in the shoes of their teachers, whom they see “are stressed the hell out and it's reverberating? They need lots more support.”

THE ARTS PERSEVERE

The Arts Continue to Have Transformative Impact on Students

“I am currently implementing a studio format in my elementary art class/studio. Young artists are very receptive to exploring their own art practice, while still increasing their techniques/skills.”

However embattled, arts programs in Maryland’s public schools are worth fighting for. Maryland’s arts educators continue to share the transformative power of the arts with students. In addition to and despite the issues enumerated throughout the report, educators also declared “lots of amazing students doing amazing work.” A K-2nd grade music teacher shared that “my music room is joyful, loud, and messy most of the time...My ultimate goal for my kids is to find the different ways they enjoy music while exploring their own artistry.” This sort of exploratory learning modality offered by the arts and the chance for “students to be excited and find joy and satisfaction through their artistic learning” is vastly different from the teach-to-the-test mindset that dominates a school culture centered on standardized testing.

For students traumatized by the COVID-19 pandemic, the arts are an important part of healing; as humans and global citizens, arts learning modalities provide essential skills and mindsets⁴. Educators outlined these same benefits with one detailing that “Classes of 20-30 kids, multiple performance opportunities, getting students to learn how to interact in person again....the arts are a great vehicle for that!”

4. Catterall, J. S., Dumais, S. A., & Hampden-Thompson, G. The arts and achievement in at-risk youth: Findings from four longitudinal studies. Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2012.
<https://www.arts.gov/impact/research/publications/arts-and-achievement-risk-youth-findings-four-longitudinal-studies>

CALLS TO ACTION

Some educators reported meaningful, positive support for their programs. One joyfully shared that their school had “a new performing arts building!” Another contributed that “our community right now is rebuilding, we are coming back to a place we were before the pandemic in terms of programming, our programming is wide and varied.” AEMS applauds those schools and local education agencies that are investing in the personnel and facilities necessary to bring robust arts experiences to their public school students and will continue its advocacy work so that more schools, communities, and local education agencies can join them.

CALLS TO ACTION

The above report lays out a stark situation of undervalued and unsupported arts educators in understaffed programs. In addition to the tribulations of the COVID-19 pandemic, further changes and uncertainty are coming to Maryland schools as the landmark Blueprint for Maryland’s Future legislation is implemented and as the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) begins its second leadership transition since 2021. Responding to the community feedback and Maryland’s public education landscape, AEMS lays out the following recommendations for school system leadership including state and local Superintendents and Boards of Education. Please note as the situation of the arts has not radically improved since issuing our prior report, there is some overlap between recommendations. While we work to achieve balance in arts education policies, there are pragmatic approaches that schools and administrators can execute to strengthen the culture around arts education in their schools.

RECOMMENDATION #1

Make language changes from the top down that acknowledge the parity of arts courses with standardized tested courses.

In the summer of 2022, AEMS collected publicly-available information from each website for Maryland public schools as part of an outreach effort to research and identify arts educator staffing statewide. This collection process revealed the range of terminology used by school administrators which seemingly suggests the lesser importance of arts courses compared to standardized-tested subject areas. The terms used to describe arts programming included electives, specials, enrichments, and supplementals in contrast to referencing tested subjects as core classes or academics.

However, according to Code of Maryland Regulations ([COMAR](#)) and the Every Student Succeeds Act ([ESSA](#)), arts education is, in fact, a core subject. The use of this language over the years has created a gap in support from school districts around the state because they view the arts as a non-essential class for students. Language that separates the arts from other core subjects need to be removed from school culture as it incorrectly implies that arts content areas are less required than other subject areas. Legally, this is not true. As a first minimal effort step towards changing the culture around limiting perceptions and dismissive treatment of arts education, the arts must be classified equally as one among many required content areas.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Be aware of the potential opportunities to better fund and support the arts through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future promises to transform Maryland's public education system. Among the transformations promised are the implementation of a College and Career-Ready (CCR) pathways model and a more robustly built-out Career and Technical Education (CTE) infrastructure. Through monitoring meetings of the Maryland State Board of Education and the Blueprint's Accountability and Implementation Board, AEMS has seen the opportunities and possible pitfalls that the implementation of these changes could have for the arts and has successfully advocated for arts-inclusive language to be part of the text of the [Blueprint's Comprehensive Implementation Plan](#). This arts-inclusive language spells two significant points:

1. Base-Funding Formula funds can be used for the arts⁵.
2. The implementation of CCR and CTE must not negatively impact access to the arts⁶.

Additionally, the Blueprint calls for community schools to offer "support programs that address out-of-school learning barriers for students and families." Listed among the wraparound services that these support programs shall include is "arts programming."⁷ Blueprint presents multiple pathways to elevate the arts within schools and communities through new funding sources.

5. "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." (Blueprint Final Implementation Plan 3.1.1(b)) (emphasis AEMS)

6. "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 and meet the CCR standard." (Blueprint Final Implementation Plan 3.1.1(b)) (emphasis AEMS)

7. (Blueprint Final Implementation Plan 4.4.2(b))

RECOMMENDATION #3 Retention and Recruitment

By increasing arts and paraprofessional staffing to support teacher capacity, schools can retain arts educators and create appealing work environments for recruitment. Referring back to Recommendation 2, schools must increase the quality of the work environment for current arts educators as part of their effort to effectively promote arts education careers as desirable. Beyond aggressive recruiting to fill existing vacancies, school administrators can ensure that school counselors are informed of arts educator degree programs at Maryland's Institutes of Higher Education. Counselors and educators should also be made aware of teacher recruitment and retention opportunities offered through the Blueprint's directive to "expand Maryland's loan assistance repayment programs (LARP) for public school teachers."⁸

AEMS' COMMITMENTS

AEMS is committed to ensuring that all students in the state of Maryland have access to high quality arts education by mobilizing power to communities through advocacy programs, professional and leadership programs, and resource building and sharing. This report not only indicates the direction that schools and local education agencies should take to support their arts educators, but advises AEMS' future actions and programming that can directly address the issues Maryland's arts educators have raised.

COMMITMENT #1

Ensuring that the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future has a positive impact on arts education in Maryland's public schools

While AEMS' recommendations have highlighted the positive potential of the Blueprint for arts funding, challenges still exist for the arts in the statewide Blueprint implementation plan. The local implementation plans will also present unique challenges as local education agencies try to balance and meet the various Blueprint directives. AEMS is actively

8. "Public school teachers shall be eligible for State loan assistance repayment assistance if they have taught in Maryland for at least 2 years: in science, technology, engineering, fine arts, or math (STEAM);" in addition to other requirements (Blueprint Final Implementation Plan 2.1.3(a)) (emphasis AEMS)

monitoring the local implementation plan proposal and review process to ensure the arts are not left out or marginalized. Due to leadership transitions at MSDE, the continuing timeline for local implementation plans is nebulous. AEMS remains in touch with MSDE as they work on Blueprint implementation so that we can continue to effectively advocate as the implementation process resumes.

COMMITMENT #2

Working with institutions of higher education to develop resources to strengthen the student-to-arts-educator pipeline

AEMS is working with the Higher Education in the Arts Taskforce (HEATforce) to gather information about undergraduate and graduate degree programs for the arts in Maryland. Serving on the Baltimore Arts Education Initiative's Teacher Pipeline Working Group and as co-chairs for Maryland's Fine Arts Education Advisory Panel, AEMS is working collaboratively to discuss and compile recommendations for teacher recruitment and retention. Furthermore, AEMS is working to create accessible resources to assist in educating school counselors about these opportunities.

COMMITMENT #3

Leverage Maryland arts education data to target support

AEMS is making data about arts education in every Maryland public school available to the general public through its work with the Maryland Arts Education Data Project, run by Quadrant Research, and in collaboration with the Maryland State Department of Education. Visible through a website that hosts a series of navigable dashboards the data from the state, county, and school levels include:

- How many students have the choice to take an arts class (access)
- How many students are currently enrolled in arts classes
- Which arts disciplines students have access to and are enrolled
- The number of certified arts educators
- How the above numbers have changed over time

This information will help decision-makers and advocates more clearly identify and address trends in enrollment and teacher shortages to provide greater support to teachers and students.

CONCLUSION

Every Maryland public school student deserves equitable access to robust arts education so that they can learn and thrive in a healthy society. While the obstacles that public school arts educators and arts programs face are immense, so is the promise of the benefits of the arts for Maryland public school students as long as educators and programs are elevated, respected, supported, and funded. Once there is a shift in the administrative mindset and test-centric culture within educational policy, recognition for the arts and its value to human development can significantly be harnessed for the benefit of students.

Through current funding sources and new opportunities made accessible by the Blueprint, the arts educator profession can be rejuvenated and its declining recruitment reversed. With more education regarding the pathways for the teaching profession, the cycle of future educator recruitment can be made sustainable. AEMS will continue to work for the achievement of these goals and hopes that school leaders and local education agencies will rise to the challenge before them. Education without the arts is NOT a world-class education.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- [Arts Education Overview Resource: Speak Up for Arts Education!](#)
- [Arts Education in COMAR Resource](#)
- [Top 3 Resources to Share with your Arts Teachers](#)
- [Arts Education in the Blueprint for Maryland's Future](#)
- [Listen to the report: BEGIN](#)

Appendix - Responses Grouped Thematically

THEME	RESPONSES
<p>NEED FOR TEACHER SUPPORT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts subs! I wonder if we can try to bring college arts education students in as substitutes • Agreed -coverage is what is very tiring to teachers since we cannot get subs! • We need more young people to choose arts education at the university level. We need facilities to support dance and theatre programs. • Paraprofessionals' time during “special area” classes (aka arts) are treated as more of a break time leaving students who need those professionals without them. If teachers bring up this issue then it is the teachers who get in trouble with the administration. Something needs to be done at the state level. • They often feel they are the last thought about in a building. In some places teachers are being asked to teach classes outside of their discipline like PE. In some schools they are not asked what they need for their classes.

Appendix - Responses Grouped Thematically

THEME	RESPONSES
<p style="text-align: center;">STANDARDIZED-TESTED SUBJECTS PRIORITIZED</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our numbers are down across the board (band, choir, dance, and theatre) since Covid - recruiting and retention are difficult when students got a taste of online courses and were able to essentially graduate. • Less time in school spent testing so students can have more time for the arts • As always, it's a question of value, and the greater population seeing the value in arts education and investing in it. There is so much creative problem solving and thinking that occurs within arts education. • We need teachers to stop referring to arts as "specials" • Arts classes are not treated as a core content area because it is not tested so it does not matter for whether or not you are held back. The implicit message is that arts classes are less important. • The fact that parents have to pay for summer school encourages parents to only care about the tested courses to avoid summer school costs. • Students feeling discontented and as though they can use art classes as a break. Feeling like classes don't matter. The system is set up to make students feel like they have to pass content classes to avoid summer school.

Appendix - Responses Grouped Thematically

THEME	RESPONSES
<p>FUNDING ISSUES AND RESOURCES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for conferences and professional development • Master Class opportunities, visiting artist programs, more money (to cover field trips, pay for additional arts educators, allow for the purchase of resources). Opportunities to visit other arts teachers. • I would also like an auditorium since we have to perform in the gym • We need more young people to choose arts education at the university level. We need facilities to support dance and theatre programs. • Sometimes these grants are hard for small schools to get. Applied for a grant for a mural and received it. I filled out one of the education foundation grants it took forever to do and we didn't get it.
<p>TEACHER RETENTION/ LEVELS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My classroom is robust and is working well. BUT we do not have a chorus teacher at this time and have been without a full time vocal teacher for this is the 3rd year. Very disappointing not to be fully staffed • We had a lot of staff turn over at my school from last year to this year. • As a county, we are hiring more “provisional” teachers than ever before, including in the arts, and those people are not getting the support that they need to feel valued or succeed • People are tired and as I said in the answer to the first question, we are having a hard time staffing our music classing. I am seeing fewer student teachers as well. • We’ve seen a lot of people leaving the field of education in general. For me personally, trying to plan concerts “as normal: in the post covid time has been very stressful and challenging.

Appendix - Responses Grouped Thematically

THEME	RESPONSES
<p>IMPACTS OF COVID-19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel like the 6th graders are much healthier mentally and seem to be more on track with abilities. Our 7th graders are still damaged and those instrumental groups are small, attitude and behavior not conducive • Evening performances are still a challenge • Students are still more interested in signing up for computer based arts classes (digital music, digital art) then classes where they will have to perform like dance and theatre. • Our numbers are down across the board (band, choir, dance, and theatre) since Covid - recruiting and retention are difficult when students got a taste of online courses and were able to essentially graduate. • Still many student absences • At my school we are still seeing many of the social and emotional ramifications of COVID. This year I've had to take a lot of time to coregulate with my kids. • Something more robust! Classes of 20-30 kids, multiple performance opportunities, getting students to learn how to interact in person again....the arts are a great vehicle for that! • Dealing with student apathy. Really disheartening • Engagement is more difficult - students on phones or devices and harder to hold attention. 1:1 devices has made this more difficult than ever • Student engagement is a bit more difficult this year - I feel due to the "virtual learning" from last year • Double impact on students - 1/2 are craving more personal interactions and the other 1/2 don't want any in person interactions

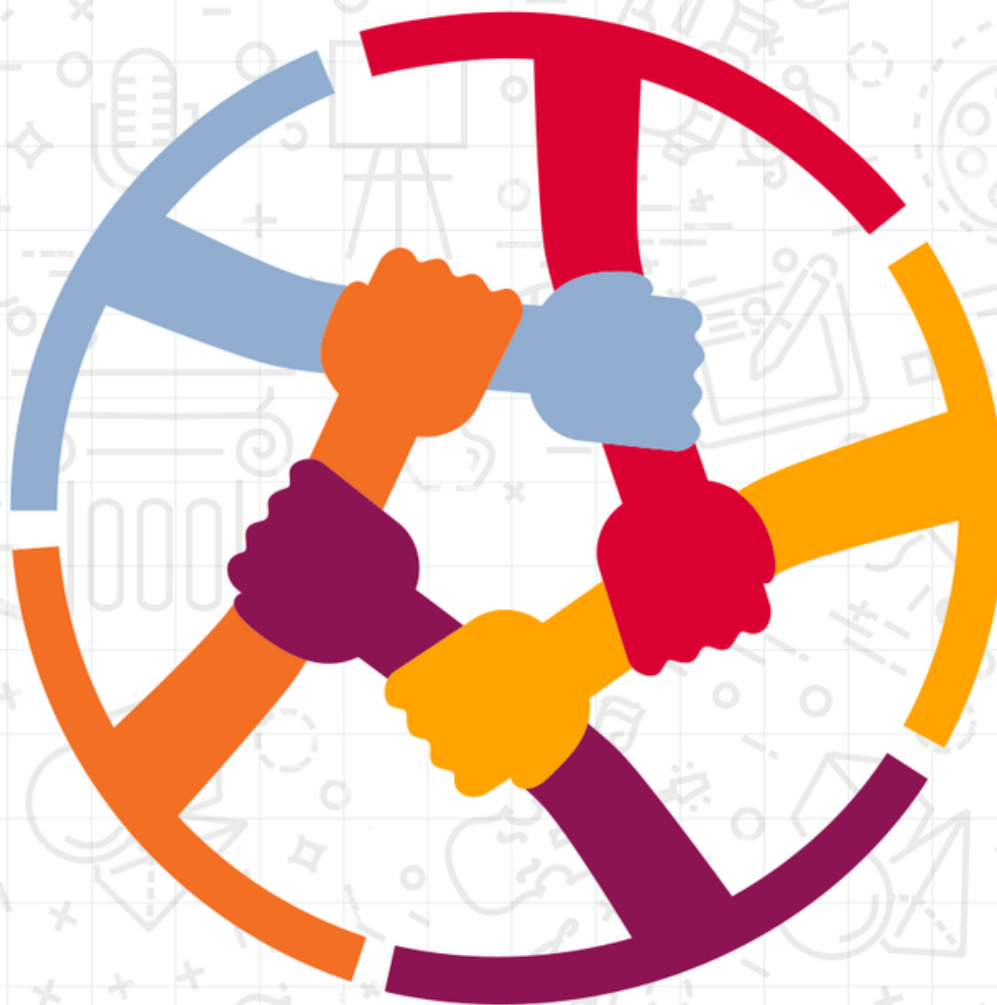
THEME	RESPONSES
<p>IMPACTS OF COVID-19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 has allowed us accessibility in many classrooms with technology and also posed challenges in terms of engagement with youth students. Overall as we move into a period of more in person engagement it
<p>UPLIFTING QUOTES & ANECDOTES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new performing arts building! Yay! • Great space, informative material around the room, students actively engaged - just less students than usual • My music room is joyful, loud, and messy most of the time. I teach K-2 music my ultimate goal for my kids is to find the different ways they enjoy music while exploring their own artistry. • I am currently implementing a studio format in my elementary art class/studio. Young artists are very receptive to exploring their own art practice, while still increasing their techniques/skills • Lots of amazing students doing amazing work • In my particular school we are not seeing much of an impact [from COVID] with visual arts. • AEMS can advocate for arts programs in my school district when I legally can't! They saved my dance program several years ago by presenting data and rallying the troops to provide advocacy for arts education! • Our community right now is rebuilding, we are coming back to a place we were before the pandemic in terms of programming, or programming is wide and varied but overall our community environment is • I want students to be excited and find joy and satisfaction through their artistic learning



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