

2020-2021

**Community
Feedback**

**An
Accountability
Report**

by



Arts Education in Maryland Schools

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Executive Summary

This report compiles information from meetings, focus groups, and surveys that AEMS conducted and administered throughout our 2020 and 2021 fiscal years (July 2019 to June 2020, July 2020 to June 2021). Starting in FY20, AEMS introduced formal methods of collecting community feedback. These forms included community meetings/listening sessions (see our separate report on these sessions), vision sessions (see our separate report on these sessions), brainstorm sessions, town halls, and different surveys and feedback forms.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to compile the sources of community feedback that AEMS currently has access to, identify common themes, and use these voices to

- 1.inform our programming priorities in FY22;
- 2.better understand and therefore ultimately better serve our beneficiaries and;
- 3.Hold ourselves accountable so that we can support the arts education ecosystem in Maryland

Methodology

AEMS collected information through numerous formats that would allow for different forms of participation, allow us to ask different kinds of questions, and prompt different responses from our surveyed communities. These formats can be divided into 3 categories:

Executive Summary

1. AEMS-convened focus groups to review AEMS's operations and programming to ensure community alignment: the AEMS Ambassadors, Educator Council Programs, and Arts Education Data Vision Sessions.
2. Surveys, both surveys sent to key stakeholders and surveys that are publicly accessible: our School Reopening Survey for Fine Arts Supervisors and our Arts Education Access Awareness Form.
3. Townhall and listening-session meetings: Arts Education Community Meetings, participation in the Arts Every Day Townhall with Baltimore City Public Schools Arts Educators.

Results of the feedback gathered from the Arts Education Community Meetings and from the Arts Education Data Vision Sessions are elaborated upon in their respective reports.

AEMS staff reviewed all the original sources of feedback, processed and identified recurring themes (see Processing Feedback section), and then sorted the feedback into two main categories:

1. What do community members want? (from AEMS or more generally) and
2. What are “pains” that community members are currently experiencing? (i.e. what are obstacles standing in the way of their work or what they are trying to do?)

Central Themes

Processing the data of these reports have produced the following summarized responses to our categories of feedback (AEMS has disaggregated from this report the findings from the Community Meetings Report and our future Arts Education Data Vision Sessions Report).

What do community members want? (from AEMS or more generally)

From AEMS

- Leverage statewide role to facilitate connections across districts (for comparison & learning)
- Advocacy 101 trainings & appropriate materials/resources/toolkits
- Leverage non-government position to speak up/fight publicly
- Cross-Sector Support: Organizing efforts (recruit, organize, rally support)
- Connect the Arts Ed Ecosystem: build community/network among different sectors of arts ed ecosystem
- Provide clearly-defined volunteer/engagement opportunities

General Wants

- Scheduling support
- Casemaking support (why does arts ed matter?)
- Adequate materials/resources/space/supplies/funds
- Some sort of mandate or guarantee that programs and positions won't be cut/reassigned

What are “pains” that community members are currently experiencing?

- Dismissive attitudes & policies towards the arts/arts not being treated like other core subjects
- Funding: not enough funding, unclear/not uniform budgets, teachers paying out of pocket, programs and positions are always at risk of being cut
- Not prepared to advocate: members of the arts ed ecosystem are unclear how to actually be involved in advocacy (who do they talk to? What should they say? Who should they turn to for support? What policy/decisions should they be involved with?)
- Scheduling
- Lack of connection and support in arts ed ecosystem

Feedback Sources

AEMS Ambassadors

The FY20 AEMS Ambassadors pilot program was a group of mostly under-40 volunteers supporting AEMS’s communications, advocacy, and anti-racism and equity work. In 2021, the anti-racism and equity review committee reviewed AEMS’s board bylaws through the lens of anti-racism and critiquing the nonprofit industrial complex in order to assist us in moving the organization in the direction of anti-racism. An additional goal of the Ambassador program was to produce a definition of “high quality” education that would be approved and published by staff and board

Report: Feedback Sources

AEMS Educator Council

The FY20 AEMS Educator Council Program Council members were retired and current arts education professionals tasked with providing feedback on AEMS professional development & curriculum in order to help ensure that our programs and initiatives effectively respond to constituent needs.

AEMS Fine Arts Supervisors Survey

In March 2021, in anticipation of changes to instruction that would result from the impending widespread distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, AEMS distributed to Maryland's Fine Arts Supervisors about the impact of COVID-19 upon arts education in their local school systems and the extended to which hybrid instruction was happening versus virtual instruction.

Arts Education Access Awareness Form

First introduced in FY20 (previously named the Arts Education Incident Report Form), the Arts Education Access Awareness Form is a publicly available Google Form that gives arts educators a structured method for contacting AEMS in order to inform us of local instances where arts education access is being curtailed or denied through funding, staffing, or program cuts. AEMS advertises the Access Awareness Form weekly through social media. Executive Director Quanice Floyd personally follows up with all submitted reports.

Report: Feedback Sources

Arts Every Day Townhall with Baltimore City Public Schools Arts Educators

In the summer of 2021, Baltimore City Public Schools announced a budget that included cuts to fine arts funding. The cuts would have resulted in the ‘surplus’ (laying off select educators and placing them in a pool for rehire should more money become available) of 13 arts educators from Baltimore City Public Schools, effectively removing the only arts education access students had at those 13 schools. With vigorous advocacy support from Arts Every Day and community outcry, these cuts were reversed. As part of the activities involved in mobilizing the community to save these positions and programs, AEMS and Arts Every Day held a Townhall where we collected anecdotes and feedback from Baltimore City Arts Educators.

Source 1

Semi-structured focus groups to review AEMS's operations and programming to ensure community alignment

AEMS Ambassadors

PAINS

(specific to the AEMS Ambassador Program Pilot)

- Unclear expectations, unclear objectives, “what is the purpose of AEMS ambassadors?”
- Unclear where ambassadors fit within the AEMS network and broader arts ed ecosystem.

WANTS

- To share stories with stakeholders.
- Advocacy and lobbying training.
- To connect with boots on ground members of arts education ecosystem (arts teachers, individuals in school system, etc).
- To connect arts education to activism, to community groups, etc. (Cross-sector arts and work).
- To help spread the word about the importance of AEMS and the values of arts education.
- Arts education advocacy toolkits.

Report: Feedback Responses by Source

AEMS Educator Council

PAINS

(specific to the AEMS Educator Council Pilot)

- Unclear expectations, unclear objectives.
- Insufficient action alerts or clarity around how educator council members are actually being used or helping.

WANTS

- A mandate that protects arts teachers' programs and school positions.
- To install more arts educators as school administrators.
- To talk to principals and for AEMS to help Educator Council members talk to principals.
- To provide scheduling recommendations and scheduling support to arts educators and schools.
- To connect, network, and build community among arts educators.
- Implementation of more uniform standards for arts curriculum (possibly national standards for arts curriculum).
- Support with fundraising, possibly leveraging external arts groups, PDs, celebrities.
- To create helpful and accessible arts education advocacy content that is shareable on a number of different mediums.

Report: Feedback Responses by Source

AEMS Educator Council

(WANTS)

- An arts education lobby day.
- For AEMS to equip people to advocate:
 - Host advocacy trainings and community gatherings where folks can practice pitches, casemaking.
 - Send templates for pitches, policy, language ready for people to send to legislators or decision makers.
 - Casemaking one pagers that people can use.
 - Plan ahead so folks can effectively participate in advocacy (send important dates and action items well in advance).
 - Give people specific calls to actions: “put us on the chessboard!”
- To make a greater network of connections to enhance advocacy efforts.
 - Intra-sector Connections:
 - Connect boots-on-the-ground members of arts education ecosystem (arts teachers, folks in school system etc)
 - Connect arts education professional groups and different segments of the arts education
 - Cross-sector Connections:
 - Connect arts education to activism, to community groups, etc.
(Cross Sector arts and work)

Source 2

Surveys, both surveys sent to key stakeholders and surveys that are publicly accessible

AEMS Fine Arts Supervisors Survey

PAINS

- Arts educators are being assigned to non-arts roles & lunchtime monitor duties.
- Constantly worried about lack of materials, supplies, equipment, space.
- Arts program cuts, especially to music programs.
- Options for students to enroll in technical high school or double up on other subjects (math) affects arts enrollment and scheduling.
- Staff layoffs and short-staffed programs.
- Insufficient funds to support programs or to grow programs in the future.
- Low enrollment in School Year 2020-2021 due to COVID-19. This will result in cuts/affect future programming.
- Instrumental music COVID-19 concerns: "not being able to perform just completely defeats purpose of discipline."
- District-wide administration does not care about arts education.
- Scheduling challenges, especially with itinerant teachers.
 - Challenges related to itinerant teachers existed pre-COVID and have only worsened throughout the pandemic

AEMS Fine Arts Supervisors Survey

(PAINS)

- The impossibility of hybrid instruction. This is an equity issue for students and impossible working conditions for educators.
- Arts are referred to as “specials.”
 - As a cultural matter, “specials” are not prioritized to accommodate for other courses in scheduling.
 - “Specials” have different standards than other courses (students are not allowed to receive below 75%, demeaning the importance of work).
 - “Specials” synchronous virtual attendance is not counted as part of counting a full day’s attendance.
- During COVID-19 (virtual learning) arts classes were not mandatory.
 - This reinforces culture that arts are optional (for both students and administrators).
 - There are concerns for how this will affect future funding and scheduling.

WANTS

- “We need someone to fight for us” in the face of indifferent administrators.

Report: Feedback Responses by Source

Arts Education Access Awareness Forms

PAINS

- Arts being referred to as enrichment/extra curricular (not being valued as much as other subjects).
- Positions are being cut from school budgets and teacher surplus is taking place.
- Schools are short-staffed.
- Teachers lack adequate space to rehearse and perform.
- Arts class time is being cut from scheduling.
- Principals have cut corners with the arts budget, hiring non-certified arts teachers.
- Arts teachers are being reassigned as para-educators, classroom monitors, etc., reassigned away from arts education duties.
- Arts educators who advocate for their own needs are pushed out or retaliated against.
- Concerns about post-COVID arts education conditions.
 - Hybrid education is inequitable.
 - COVID-19 may be used as an excuse to cut more staffing, scheduling, funding, etc. from arts education.

WANTS

- More communication with and advocacy from district arts discipline supervisors.

Arts Education Access Awareness Forms

(WANTS)

- Change middle school arts education model: implement sequential arts learning.

Source 3

Townhall and listening-session meetings

Arts Every Day Townhall with Baltimore City Fine Arts Educators

PAINS

- Deterioration of leadership, poor leadership.
- Lack of funding or no budget for arts education.
- Lack of resources and supplies necessary for arts education.
- Lack of basic school infrastructure.
- Scheduling challenges.
- Lack of clarity in standards and expectations of arts instruction .
- Arts are considered unimportant are deprioritized.
- Lack of engagement or support from parents and families.

WANTS

- To highlight and model successful arts leadership.
- Arts scheduling and support with making schedules.
- Sequential arts learning or an arts pipeline: more programs in more grades so kids can advance in artistic learning.

Report: Feedback Responses by Source

Arts Every Day Townhall with Baltimore City Fine Arts Educators

(WANTS)

- Funding & supplies funds from outside orgs:
 - School budgets for arts programs.
 - Supplies funds from outside organizations.
- Building community among arts educators:
 - Mentorship opportunities for arts educators.
 - Building networks among arts educators.
 - Creating safe spaces for arts educators to share and to strategize.
- Organizing & rallying support:
 - Support with building relationships with parents, the Parent Community Advisory Board (PCAB), and principals.
 - Support with generating cross-sector outcry and mobilization.
 - Support with facilitating connection between school district leaders.

Report: Conclusion

As a state-wide organization, AEMS is dedicated to assisting arts educators and members of the arts education ecosystem throughout the state in order to achieve our objective of providing a high-quality arts education to all 900,000 kids enrolled in Maryland's public school system. It is clear that we have a long way to go in order to ensure that Maryland's arts education infrastructure is stronger and more stable.

AEMS has worked hard over the past few years to maintain a flexible structure, responding to the requirements of stakeholder groups within the arts education ecosystem in order to provide the best possible support. In order to make systemic changes in educational policy and to provide the greatest possible assistance for our schools and school communities, we must first and foremost consider the needs of the community, which is one of our core values. In order for AEMS to continue moving toward a more responsive strategy, we will continue to solicit feedback from our stakeholders and those who are most affected by our decisions. We will continue to use your feedback to improve our programs and services and to better meet the needs of our constituency.

The strategies listed below will be implemented during the current fiscal year to ensure that AEMS is held accountable and responsive to our constituents and stakeholders. We developed these strategies in response to the issues and desires raised by stakeholders in the arts education field during our data collection, which was detailed earlier.

Report: Conclusion

FY22 Strategies

Advocacy

Stakeholders stated that their most important want is for “someone to fight for them”. It is AEMS’s job to ensure that members of the arts education ecosystem feel supported when it comes to building and sustaining arts programs around the state. AEMS will continue to serve as advocates and will be refreshing our strategies so that we are as responsive to the needs of supervisors, educators, and other arts education stakeholders. There was also shared interest in an arts education advocacy day. AEMS will begin planning this fiscal year for a statewide advocacy event to be held in our next fiscal year which begins on July 1, 2022.

To address the concerns around stakeholders wanting to learn how to advocate, we will be implementing Advocacy 101 workshops in order to support and equip volunteers to advocate for arts education on both a hyperlocal and statewide level.

Professional and Leadership Development

There was also shared interest in ensuring that principals receive professional development about arts education, including the importance of arts education and support with school scheduling as it pertains to the arts. AEMS will collaborate with the Fine Arts Office of the Maryland State Department of Education to develop strategies for facilitating professional development for principals and assistant principals.

As part of our commitment to being reflective and responsive to stakeholder needs, AEMS will make certain that this feedback is

Report: Conclusion

incorporated into our staple programs, such as the Arts Education Symposium on Anti-Racism, the Anti-Racial Education in the Arts Learning Lab (A-REALL), and the Arts Educator and Artist Campaign School.

Resource Building and Sharing

AEMS is seeking to position itself as Maryland's arts education advocacy hub. The result will be a continuous revamping of our website and advocacy resources, with the goal of assisting volunteers in their advocacy efforts by providing data, research, and stories about the positive impact of arts education that is occurring throughout the state.

Stakeholders also expressed a desire to network with others in the arts education community, so AEMS will host and facilitate a number of events throughout the year to help members of the arts education ecosystem continue to build a sense of community.

Stay Connected with AEMS

As AEMS continues to use our stakeholder feedback to revise our programs, we want to make sure that arts education stakeholders stay connected to us in the following ways:

- Email AEMS Executive Director Quanice Floyd at qfloyd@aems-edu.org
- Set up a time to chat during AEMS's **Office Hours**.
- If there are issues of arts education access, please fill out our

Awareness & Incident Report Form

- Become an **AEMS Ambassador** or **AEMS Ed-Visor**



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