

Greetings,

My name is Rachel McGrain and I am the Executive Director of [Arts Education in Maryland Schools \(AEMS\)](#). As a fellow public school champion, and a graduate and former teacher of Maryland public schools, I **thank you for your service** as your LEA's Blueprint Coordinator. We at AEMS acknowledge and appreciate the complexity and importance of the work you have been tasked with. I am writing to offer **suggestions and support from the arts education community** as you lead the crafting of your local implementation plan due March 15th.

**The arts are a critical part of a world-class education**, including but not limited to supporting children's academic development, social and emotional wellbeing, and sense of belonging. Both national and state law, ESSA and COMAR respectively, acknowledge the arts as a fundamental part of a well-rounded education. The Blueprint's Accountability and Implementation Board also acknowledged the importance of the arts by stating in Section 3.1.1(b) of their [final implementation plan](#) 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."

**To help ensure that the arts are also represented and uplifted in local implementation plans**, we have compiled a [list of recommendations](#) for your team to consider as you craft your LEA's Initial Implementation Plan. I encourage you to [reach out](#) to discuss any of these recommendations further. I also encourage you to consult the [Fine Arts Coordinators](#) and experts in your district for additional input as you craft your plans. You can find our recommendations [here](#) and listed below.

When not explicitly prioritized, the arts often take a back seat to other subjects and priorities despite their disproportionately positive impact on children. As you undertake the monumental task of overseeing implementation of the Blueprint in your school district, I implore you to consider the unintended consequences of de-investment in the arts if they are not explicitly uplifted and protected. **Education without the arts is NOT a world-class education!**

Thank you for your consideration and for the work you are doing to invest in Maryland's students and schools. The arts are an integral part of becoming a well rounded and healthy individual and we hope that you ensure that all students in your district have access to the arts.

In Partnership,

Rachel McGrain  
Arts Education in Maryland School

## Recommendations for LEA Initial Implementation Plans

The following [recommendations](#) correspond to the [Blueprint for Maryland's Future Initial Implementation Plan Template](#) published by the Accountability and Implementation Board and Maryland State Department of Education, due on March 15, 2023.

### Pillar 1

- **Overall note:** *Ensure that creative play is an integral part of PK and ECE curriculum and instruction because of its importance for our youngest learners' growth and development.*
- **Section 1.1.1-2.4 (Operationalizing the Expansion of PK):** Consider the impact of PK expansion on arts classes related to schedules, physical space and facilities, and resource allocation. The arts are especially affected by schedule and space changes; ensure that PK arts experiences have sufficient time/space and that expanded PK space/time doesn't take away from arts education in higher grades.
- **Section 1.27 (Stakeholder Engagement):** Include Fine Arts Education Advisory Panel & MSDE Director of Comprehensive Arts Education, district Fine Arts Coordinator as collaborators to support the school system and Blueprint team on ECE.

### Pillar 2

- **Overall note:** *In order to attract and retain more high-quality teachers in all required disciplines, there must be in-state degree programs and appropriate certification areas available. To make this a reality (especially for dance and theater), we recommend close collaboration with IHEs and MSDE to fill existing credential gaps.*
- **Section 2.2.2.33 (Partnerships with IHE and Ed Prep Programs):** Encourage MSDE to create an elementary school theater certification area so teachers of that subject are able to obtain the appropriate certification; work with IHEs to ensure that there are education degree programs in all core subjects, including dance and theater.
- **Section 2.2.2.34 (Diverse Learning Environments for Observations and Practica):** Include arts-rich as a quality of supportive school environments (aka multiple arts disciplines and teachers, dedicated time and resources during the school day for all grades to participate in arts courses, etc.)
- **Section 2.4.1.38 (National Board Certification Program):** Include in description how the National Board Certification coordinator will support educators whose subject areas are not represented in NBC certification areas (ex: dance, theater, media arts).
- **Section 2.4.1.42 (Supporting National Board Certified Teacher Candidates):** Include as a barrier to National Board Certification that not all subjects are represented, therefore the process and requirements are unclear for those subjects which include dance and theater.
- **Section 2.4.6.48 (Promotion of Advanced Degrees):** Provide resources and leverage partnerships to reduce costs for program participants; especially for disciplines without specific National Board Certification, ensure that pursuing a degree does not cost more than certification.

- **Section 2.4.6.49 (Collaboration with Institutions of Higher Education):** Include in plans for collaboration with IHEs a process to ensure that education degrees are offered in all COMAR-defined core subject areas, which includes all arts disciplines (dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual art).

### **Pillar 3**

- **Overall note:** *The arts are a core subject as defined by national and state regulations. Heightened emphasis on CCR in math and English language arts by 10th grade has the potential to derail arts programs that are critical to student development especially with regards to scheduling. As you develop CCR plans, we implore you to keep the arts in mind both as an integral part of CCR and as a collection of subject areas that require special attention to scheduling and mixed-grade groupings.*
- **Section 3.1.3.57 (Comprehensive Literacy Plan):** Include disciplinary literacy in the arts as part of high-quality curriculum frameworks for English language arts.
- **Section 3.1.3.62 (Types of Training Provided):** Include disciplinary literacy and arts integration professional development.
- **Section 3.2.1.ELA-72.Math-96 (Systems and Structures for Progress Monitoring):** Put protections in place for arts and other non-ELA and non-math core subjects to ensure that testing does not detract from these other important subjects. Historically, when testing requirements increase, arts and other non-tested subjects are de-invested in. Including specific protections for non-tested subjects can help prevent this from happening.
- **Section 3.1.3.58 (Comprehensive Plan for Mathematics):** Include disciplinary numeracy as part of high-quality curriculum frameworks for math.
- **Section 3.1.3.86 (Types of Training Provided):** Include disciplinary numeracy and arts integration professional development.
- **Section 3.3.1.109 (Services & Support):** Leverage arts courses to reinforce CCR skills.
- **Section 3.3.2.116 (Post-CCR Exploration Activities):** When introducing post-CCR opportunities to students, include cost benefit analysis of pursuing these opportunities with scheduling group classes and activities like the arts and sports: make sure students are aware of the full scope of participating in additional opportunities and any unintended consequences.
- **Section 3.3.2.117 (Career Counseling):** Ensure the arts are represented in career pathways presented by career counseling programs.
- **Section 3.3.2.123 (Dual enrollment program):** Consider if there are challenges to maintaining arts programs with students participating in dual enrollment (especially group-based performing arts).

AEMS has not identified specific recommendations for Pillars 4 & 5, but we implore you to keep the arts in mind, including the specific inclusion of arts programming as a wraparound service for community schools, and consider any unintended consequences while working through those sections.