



March 1, 2023

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**Subject:** Key Issues Affecting Maryland Arts Educators

To The Maryland State Board of Education:

Each March, school systems across the United States celebrate National Arts In Our Schools Month. With individual celebrations for each of the nationally-recognized arts disciplines of dance, music, theatre, and visual art, the month celebrates the impact of arts education on the lives of our students. Each year AEMS highlights the accomplishments and triumphs of Maryland's arts educators with activities and programming throughout the month.

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. As part of our activities in March, AEMS is sending a letter to the State Superintendent of Schools, cosigned by the presidents of Maryland's arts educator professional associations (MAEA, MDEA, MMEA, and MTEA), asking that he promptly address the following concerns shared by Maryland's public school arts educator community. As the government body who works with the Superintendent, we hope that we can all work together in our shared goal of ensuring that Maryland's public school students have access to a high quality education.

**State Arts Education Leadership**

Since December 2021, the MSDE position supervising the content area of Fine Arts has been vacant. Both AEMS and Maryland's four statewide arts education professional associations (MAEA, MDEA, MMEA, MTEA) wrote to the Superintendent's office requesting action on this matter, as it has significant consequences for Maryland's arts educators and the quality of instruction Maryland's public school students receive, particularly with the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland Schools. We appreciate the initial response to this letter and the swift posting of the position in the fall of 2022. To date, however, the position remains vacant and there has been no transparency or communication around the timeline and progress of this hiring process.

An additional consequence of the extended delays in the process of hiring state-level leadership for the content area of fine arts is that the Fine Arts Education Advisory Panel, a state-mandated entity (COMAR 13A.04.16.02) has not been convened since the departure of the previous Coordinator of Fine Arts (December 2021). COMAR requires that "The State Superintendent of Schools shall maintain a Fine Arts Education Advisory Panel that shall advise the Superintendent on issues and best practices relevant to fine arts education for students in Maryland."

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Arts Education in Maryland Schools

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**Certification for Elementary Theatre Educators**

The Maryland Theatre Education Association (MTEA) delivered a letter to Superintendent Choudhury in December 2021 regarding the lack of P-6 Theatre certification in the state of Maryland, containing recommendations to rectify this lack and the interconnected issues in Maryland's infrastructure which perpetuate this. MTEA proposed a working partnership with MSDE in order to improve the state of Theatre education in Maryland, providing a timeline for resolution concluding in December 2022. We have heard nothing from MSDE since acknowledgment that the letter has been received.

**Transparency and Communication**

The policy changes and decisions made by the office of the Superintendent affect educators and students across the state. Prompt updates from this office on the pressing matters outlined above would be a step in establishing trust with educators and education advocates.

Lack of initiative and transparency in communication has caused confusion, concern, and avoidable complications for Maryland's arts education community. In the spring of 2022, MSDE undertook a reevaluation of their grants and granting procedures without communicating the change in process and timeline to school districts who apply for this funding every year. The significantly altered grant application was made available for school districts two months late, at which time fine arts supervisors were required to complete the new application in a challenging and condensed time period. For AEMS's grant to fund Maryland Centers for Creative Classrooms, a robust statewide professional development program, the application was shared three months late. At that time, we learned that the grant model had changed from a cash award to a reimbursement model, disrupting a dynamic established for decades and radically affecting our organizational cash flow. This change has brought into question the sustainability of this long-standing, high quality opportunity for educators.

AEMS encourages the office of the Superintendent to engage more frequently and transparently with the arts education community to better support our educators, administrators, and students. We look to the Maryland State Board of Education for support in encouraging the swift resolution of these issues and to more proactive communication in the future. We hope to celebrate as many victories for Maryland's arts educators as possible during March, and hope to include updates or positive developments from MSDE on these areas in the good news we share with the arts education community.

Sincerely,

**Rachel McGrain**  
**Executive Director, AEMS**