



Nov 11, 2022

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To: The Accountability & Implementation Board (AIB) for the Blueprint for Maryland's Future

Subject: November 2022 AIB Draft Implementation Plan

To the Members of the Accountability & Implementation Board:

Thank you for your efforts to provide a world-class education for every Maryland student. 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 a student in Howard County public schools, I enjoyed ample access to arts education that shaped my growth and development. Prioritization of the arts in middle school included an entire period dedicated to choice-based music courses. In high school I was able to participate in two band classes every year in addition to graduating with 29 college credits through AP courses. Consistent and sequential band class, as well as participating in a robust theater program, helped me develop self-confidence, make life-long friends, and sharpen my critical thinking skills.

My transformative experience in public schools inspired me to become an educator in Baltimore City. Throughout my teaching career, and now as Executive Director of Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS), I have discovered that all children in Maryland are not afforded the same opportunities that I was, despite being a part of the same school system. I have learned that, **when not explicitly prioritized, the arts 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, 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!**

The following suggestions to the draft plan are small shifts that have the potential for an outsized impact in ensuring that all children in the state of Maryland have access to the arts. If implemented, this feedback will strengthen the possibility of the state investing more fully in arts education in order to provide a truly world-class education system:

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Arts Education in Maryland Schools

Pillar 2: Training programs

- Suggested Addition to 2.2.2 or 2.2.4: “MSDE shall collaborate with MHEC and IHEs to create and implement educator degree programs/educator certification programs for, at a minimum, all subject areas enumerated in the Code of Maryland Regulations Subtitle 04 SPECIFIC SUBJECTS.” Rationale: Not all required subjects have higher ed programs in Maryland, for example theater education. There should be both traditional and alternate pathways for all required subject areas in state AND in state methods for all teachers to pursue graduate degrees.
- Suggested Addition to 2.3.1(a & b) Guidance: “the training program shall be...(bullet 5) evidence-based in accordance with guidelines for the federal Every Child Succeeds Act [SUGGESTED ADDITION] and Code of Maryland Annotated Regulations (COMAR).”

Pillar 2: Certification

- Question for 2.1.3(a): Why are early career teachers required to exceed rather than meet expectations in order to qualify for repayment assistance? Evaluations are subjective and often conducted by administrators who do not have content area expertise and/or are using rubrics rooted in ELA standards that may not apply to other subject areas (like fine arts).
- Question for 2.4.1 & 2.4.2: Will there be a financial incentive/reimbursement for graduate classes for areas where National Board Certification is not possible? For example, there is no National Board Certification for dance, theater or media arts, all listed among the required disciplines of fine arts.
Suggested Addition to 2.5.3(e): “...with maintenance of National Board Certification [SUGGESTED ADDITION] or similar credential.” Rationale: to account for subjects without a National Board Certification option.

Pillar 3: College & Career Readiness

- Question for 3.1.1(b): Why are only ELA and math specifically mentioned and not any of the other core subjects? Any time ELA and math are specified as core subjects, all of the core subjects should be included (science, social studies, arts, world languages).
- Suggested Addition to 3.1.3(a): “The curriculum resources shall include, for each core subject [SUGGESTED ADDITION] as identified by COMAR...” Rationale: the definition of core subjects should be explicitly stated to align with state law.

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Pillar 4: More Resources for Students

- Suggested addition to 4.4.2(b): Add arts programming to the list of wraparound services for community schools to establish.

Pillar 5: Governance & Accountability

- Suggestion for 5.2.1(a): ERTs should also have diversity of subject area expertise, with at least one arts representative

Thank you again for your hard work and dedication to ensuring that Maryland's public school students have access to unparalleled opportunities to ensure their future success. We respectfully request that you consider and incorporate this feedback into the final implementation plan.

Sincerely,

Rachel McGrain
Executive Director, AEMS

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