



Arts Education in Maryland Schools

AEMS Mission: 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.

AEMS Vision: We envision a public education system in Maryland that supports, cultivates, nurtures, and uplifts ALL students' creativity through a robust arts education experience so that they can thrive in a healthy society.

AEMS' Core Values:

- **Community** - We believe that the community is the most important part of our advocacy efforts. We want to illuminate and highlight the power communities have to make systemic changes.
- **Creativity** - We believe that creativity is critical for humans to thrive. It is what makes humans human.
- **Racial Equity** - We understand the history and impact of educational policies on our most historically resilient communities and we commit to addressing this through our work. Our work is rooted in anti-racism and we believe that arts education can be a tool to create systemic change within education.
- **Growth** - We believe that growth is the most important aspect of learning. We are invested in the growth of our constituents, board, and staff through professional and leadership development.

How do we define equity?

Equity and equality are not the same. Equality is the outcome and what we strive to achieve one day, meanwhile, equity is the strategy. Equity does not mean ALL. Equity means investing (financially, in kind, and/or resources) and supporting communities in which we know have had less access to arts education which have historically been Black, Indigenous, Latinx, immigrant, and Asian Communities (BIPOC). AEMS believes in using equitable strategies to strengthen arts education access and quality.

Our Foundation:

AEMS is striving to be an anti-racist organization and is currently shifting our mindsets from blame, shame, guilt, and grievance to causes, effects, systems, and solutions. We realize once harm is done there is nothing that can immediately fix the situation but there can be continuous work towards regaining trust and collaborating with the communities in which we serve - specifically BIPOC communities. We also acknowledge that this position statement is within itself a characteristic of white supremacy ([worship of the written word](#)) and with this statement, we aim to not only write about our position but be transparent about our direction by our actions.

Arts education is a civil rights issue. Due to the white supremacy culture that is embedded in this country, Jim Crow policies have created intentional racial disparities in our health, finance, employment, housing, justice, and education systems. Specifically, redlining and boundary



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creation policies placed BIPOC and low income communities into specific neighborhoods to not mix with white communities. Along with denial of generational wealth and property through these policies, the implications of this directly align with what is going on in education today. Public education is immediately tied to local and property taxes for each district. Therefore if one lives in a low-income district, the funding for public education is less than one who might be in a more affluent district. With the underfunding of public education in certain communities, specifically BIPOC communities, the arts are typically not accessible and the lack of access violates the civil rights of our students due [to the arts being a core subject as recognized by COMAR](#). If school districts are not providing an arts education in their schools they are breaking Maryland law.

Arts education has continuously proven that it significantly contributes to a holistic education by supporting critical thinking, mental, and emotional health of our students and [prepares our students for the 21st century workforce](#). The lack of arts education in specific communities, predominantly BIPOC and low-income communities, is an effect of policies and laws that have continued to foundationally be racist.

AEMS believes that white supremacy culture must be dismantled and that innovative, collective structures need to be created in its place, both globally and within the arts education field. For so long, white supremacy culture has contributed to the oppression and harm of our BIPOC and low income communities, including our students, and we will continue to work towards this dismantlement.

Anti-Racism Acknowledgement

Internal: Since its inception, AEMS has historically been a white-led organization sustained by well-intentioned people. The organization grew out of issues of lack of arts education access for Baltimore City Public School students. We acknowledge the best of intentions can codify harms; harms that include white saviorism and the perpetuation of deficit based thinking which undermined AEMS' mission and worse, continued to oppress marginalized communities throughout Maryland. We recognize good intentions do not excuse any hurtful outcomes AEMS may have caused for its constituents. We apologize to communities for the harm and perpetuation of oppression that we caused.

External: Within the arts education field, we also acknowledge that:

- Arts education curriculum and pedagogy has only supported arts from the western classical canon thus excluding the histories and cultures of BIPOC and low-income communities -- causing lack of connection between the field and students from those communities
- Recruitment pathways for arts educators in Maryland have excluded students from BIPOC communities



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- The funding for arts education in schools is inequitable due to the inconsistencies of property taxes, primarily in low income areas and/or BIPOC communities, around the state, and historical policies that have affected specific communities (ex. redlining and rezoning)
- Access to arts education in schools around the state has fluctuated due to budget cuts. Specifically in Baltimore City Public schools where funding is decentralized.
- Arts are often taken out of schools in BIPOC and low-income communities due to “low achievement scores”
- A culture of high-stakes assessments have also contributed to a lack of arts education around the state
- In certain communities, the arts (and arts educators) are not viewed as equal to math, science, reading, writing but, in fact, are just as important as these subjects ([see: COMAR](#))
- [Exceptionalism](#) and [perfectionism](#) within arts has caused harm to students from BIPOC and-low income communities
- [White communities are also harmed](#) by white supremacy culture

Anti-Racism Analysis

Internal: As an institution, AEMS strives to dismantle the mindsets, and policies that perpetuate white supremacy culture within our own organization. We are only one organization within the nonprofit industrial complex and know that the stakes are held against us in creating systemic change. We are determined to forgo the traditional gatekeeping of nonprofit structures to be more collaborative, collective with our communities within the nonprofit ecosystem. We recognize that we are an organization representative of the entire state of Maryland and have failed to do that by maintaining a majority white affluent board. This has caused decisionmaking to be flawed and has put us into a gatekeeping bubble. As a result, we had connected to only organizations, people, and politicians that were only within our own personal networks and did not actively seek voices that were not represented. Because of the lack of racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity, we had a skewed lens of the arts education ecosystem around the state which caused our advocacy efforts to push for educational policies that may have harmed BIPOC communities. We are increasingly working towards ensuring that our board members and staff members represent the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of our state.

External: AEMS is striving to dismantle racism within arts education and seeks to bring liberation within the field of arts education. AEMS believes that in order to reach full liberation within arts education, stakeholders of arts education have to reimagine the entire ecosystem.

- Reimagining of teacher recruitment - When discussing school recruitment, we often think about the school systems’ human resources departments and higher education programs that are putting out arts educators. Questions we are considering:
 - Why aren’t there more certified arts educators that identify as BIPOC?
 - How is recruitment handled from the local districts?



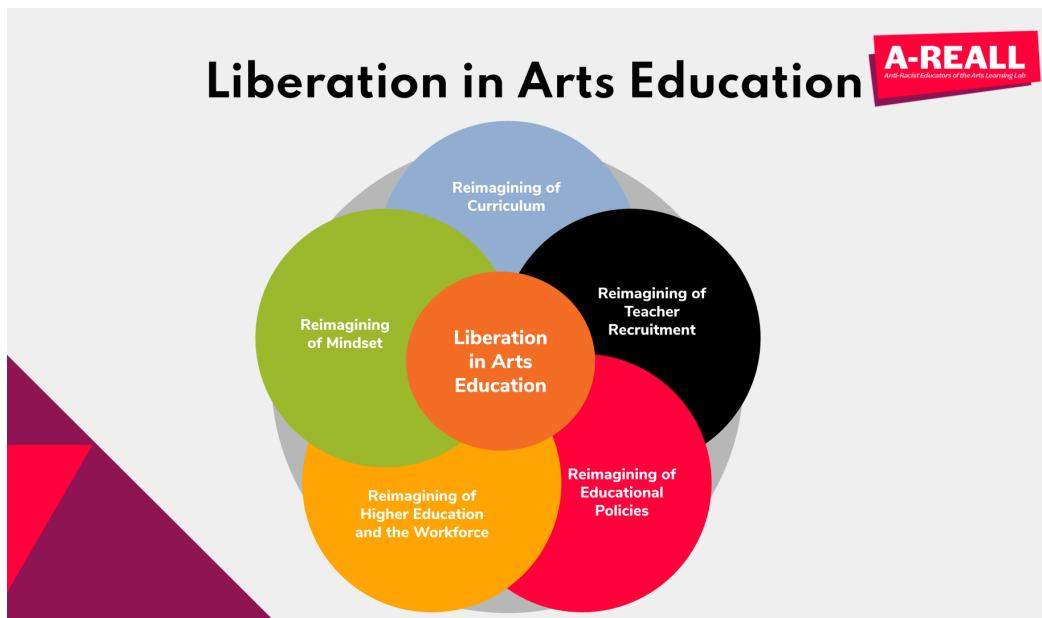
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- How can we collaborate with Maryland HBCUs to recruit arts educators?
- Where are they recruiting pre-service teachers from?
- How can we recruit more Black, Indigenous, Latinx, or Asian arts educators?
- How can we invest more into the K-12 pathway to encourage Black, Indigenous, Latinx, or Asian students to become arts educators?
- How can we connect the K-12 experience to the higher education arts education programs to build the pipeline?
- What supports can we put into place for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, or Asian arts educators to retain them?
- Reimagining of educational policies - AEMS believes that the key to systemic change is through policy. Within the arts education ecosystem, the advocates, school boards, and policymakers are within proximity of the change. Questions we are considering:
 - What implications are around the policy and how do they affect marginalized communities around the state?
 - What is the current per pupil funding formula? How is it spent? How are the arts accounted for it?
 - Since the arts are a core subject by COMAR, how can we ensure that all students around the state, regardless of their zip code, have access to arts education?
 - How can we ensure that all students have access to all 5 arts education disciplines through policy?
 - How are school districts ensuring that arts education is readily available and accessible to all students on a local level?
 - What other policies outside of education (ex. Juvenile justice, mental health in schools, etc) affect our marginalized communities and how can we effectively advocate for them?
 - Who are in these positions of power and how can we make sure voices that haven't normally been heard are considered for these positions?
 - Who are out political accomplices (lawmakers)?
- Reimagining of higher education and the workforce - AEMS believes that there needs to be collaborative efforts between K12 arts leaders, arts leaders within higher education, and business leaders around the state. There's [proven studies that discuss](#) the arts provide skills needed for the next generation of American leaders. Questions we are considering:
 - How are we investing into arts education from a pathways (K-12 to higher ed to workforce) perspective? What can this look like in BIPOC and low-income communities?
 - What is the importance of arts education to our society and our workforce?
 - How can we ensure that access to arts education is prevalent so that future generations are invested in?



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- How can members of these communities advocate to ensure that access to arts education is happening in all schools in Maryland, especially our Black, Indigenous, Latinx, immigrant, and low-income communities?
- Reimagining of curriculum - This is within proximity to school boards and systems, higher education, arts educators, teaching artists, and fine arts supervisors.
 - How are we defining the arts and what does it look like in our schools?
 - How can we incorporate anti-racist strategies and pedagogy in the arts?
 - Who are we leaving out in the arts curriculum? How can we include and embrace our schools' communities and cultures into the arts curriculum?
 - What effect can mindsets from anti-racist arts pedagogy and creative mentalities have on transforming pedagogy in non-arts subjects or educational structures at large?
- Reimagining of mindset - AEMS believes that there needs to be a mindset shift about the arts. We question the mindsets of stakeholders in the arts education ecosystem? The questions we are considering:
 - How are we defining arts education? How does our definition exclude various types of arts education?
 - Moving from deficit-based thinking (What don't we have?) to asset-based thinking (what do we have?) What are the strengths of our community? How can we do more?
 - If the arts are considered a core subject, why are we not treating them as such?
 - How can we get school leaders to understand, believe, and invest in the power of arts education for their school communities?
 - How can we get students to feel comfortable in the arts classrooms?
 - How do we reimagine student behavior within the arts classroom?
 - How can parents support and believe in the power of arts education for the well being and development of their children?



Our work:

AEMS has recently started our anti-racism journey and we plan to deconstruct our policies, behaviors, and procedures through a critical lens. We recognize that there is a lot more work to do and we can not do this work alone. This broad list is a living document of things we are working on and hope to achieve:

- Internal:
 - Recruitment of Black and Brown board members
 - Investing in more programming that focus on anti-racism including the Anti-Racist Educators in the Arts Learning Lab (A-REALL) and the Arts Education Symposium on Anti-Racism
 - Hiring of an anti-racism facilitator to work on internal structures and mindsets with board and staff
 - Review and overhaul of all policies including compensation
 - Reorganization of our staff structure to best create impact
- External:
 - Collaborating and joining coalitions that focus on racial equity to create collective impact
 - Building relationships with grassroots organizations and communities
 - HEATForce - establishing collaboration and pathways between higher education and K12 and school system recruitment
 - Community meetings to respond to needs of community and implement our programs in partnership with community groups