



March 1, 2023

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Subject: Key Issues Affecting Maryland Arts Educators

To Governor Wes Moore:

On behalf of Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS), congratulations on your election and the start of your Governorship of the state of Maryland! AEMS is a statewide nonprofit committed to ensuring that all of Maryland's public school students have equitable access to arts education. As advocates with a stake in Maryland's public education system, we are incredibly grateful for your demonstrated commitment to public education by fully funding the Blueprint for Maryland's Future through 2026.

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. AEMS looks forward to communicating and collaborating with you to create a supportive environment for arts education. Here are some ways the Moore administration can be supportive:

- **Ensuring that Blueprint implementation does not supersede the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR).**
- **Investing in teacher recruitment and grow-your-own educator pipelines.**
- **Investing in tracking arts education access.**

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 elevates 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.

As part of our activities this March, AEMS, along with the Maryland Art Education Association, Maryland Dance Education Association, Maryland Music Educators Association, and Maryland Theatre Education Association, has sent a letter to the State Superintendent of Schools asking that he promptly address the following concerns shared by Maryland's public school arts education community. While the above bullet points outline some big-picture areas that we hope to improve with your help, the following list represents urgent and immediate needs of the arts education community:

Statewide 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



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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."

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.



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With this recent history, trust and effective collaboration is currently lacking. 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 Governor 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 we hope to include updates or positive developments from MSDE on these areas in the good news we share with the arts education community.

We also look forward to working with your administration through the Blueprint implementation process and beyond to ensure that the arts are included in this transformation of Maryland's education system. Education without the arts is not a world-class education!

Sincerely,

Rachel McGrain
Executive Director, AEMS

For more information on national celebrations of the arts in each discipline, see the following links:

- [Dance in Our Schools Month](#)
- [Music in Our Schools Month](#)
- [Theatre in Our Schools Month](#)
- [Youth Art Month \(Visual Art\)](#)