

Task Force on Arts Education in Maryland Schools Meeting Notes

Maryland State Department of Education

200 West Baltimore Street
Conference Room 1, 8th Floor

May 9, 2014, 9:30am – 1:00pm

Attendees: Mary Ann Mears (co-chair), Jack Smith (co-chair), Mark Coates, Theresa Colvin, Eleni Dykstra, Nancy Highsmith, Judy Jenkins, Martin Knott, Kwame Kwei-Armah, Anita Lambert, Stephen Miles, Chris Nunzio, Rick Penix, Lisa Stuart, Sonia Synkowski, Carol Trawick, Jay Tucker, Mary Cary (staff), Alexa Milroy (staff)

Welcome and Introductions – Dr. Jack Smith and Mary Ann Mears

Mary Ann introduced Dr. Freeman Hrabowski, President of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She highlighted his arts education advocacy over the years and his appreciation of the arts. She also commented on the new facility at UMBC and their integration of the arts. He has been a terrific partner for AEMS over the years, and his leadership has been an inspiration to all of us.

The Importance of the Arts in Students' Education – Dr. Freeman Hrabowski

Dr. Hrabowski opened by commenting on Mary Ann's passion and authenticity when it comes to the arts. He said that too few people understand how important the arts are to our lives as human beings. He quoted Monet and related it to how we look at ourselves and our world and that we never finish that search.

He talked about playing the piano for years and his love for mathematics. He said that too many people think that arts and mathematics do not go together. We have to look at the message we are sending to people – that they can't be good at both math and art or dance. We should want them to delve deeply into the experience of living and that can be done through the arts. He said he was in his thirties before he realized how much he enjoyed his experiences with the arts as a child. Then he understood what his mother was trying to teach – the importance of the many layers in his life in order to be a well-rounded person.

Dr. Hrabowski said that neuroscience shows that we can rewire the way we think. The neuroscientists are telling us that we can change people through the arts – change their capacity to think differently, be persistent, and see connections with other subjects. Many of his students felt something was missing in their lives – something was incomplete. It became apparent that it was because they were once immersed in the arts and when they didn't have the arts, they missed

them. “That’s why I go home at night and play the piano and listen to the birds. I am not good, but I know who and what is good. I know how hard it is to be good.”

Dr. Hrabowski expressed reservations about STEAM. He believes the arts are not in-between something else, but stand alone on their own worth. He said the arts make us human and STEAM doesn’t go far enough. It is useful as a conversation starter, but the arts deserve more than that.

Martin Knott asked how we go about delivering those messages.

Dr. Hrabowski suggested that neuroscience research shows that acting, for example, has an impact on the brain and on achievement; reasonable people will be impressed with these kinds of findings. He talked about the “collaboratory” – an emerging term that suggests work in the future will be in teams. He talked about a company in Montgomery County that has all kinds of different colors on the walls when you walk in the front door. Why? It turns out that when people are in the midst of colors, creativity is enhanced dramatically. He said we can document the impact of studying the brain, and so we need to find the language that delivers the message to the general public because the public does not understand the importance of the arts.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Hrabowski said that life is complicated, but art can help us find our way. Everyone has a song. “We need to teach our students to build a sense of self and that they all have their own song. This is not about frill; it is at the very core of human existence.”

Teacher Preparation

Jack Smith mentioned how Freeman’s remarks reminded us that we do not have to live in an either/or society. It just doesn’t have to be that way. We need to break down barriers that prevent us from thinking in an integrated way. He then discussed the work of the P20 Task Force on Teacher Preparation. He spoke about the alignment of the work of that task force and the alignment with efforts and implications for the work of this task force. The recommendations from that task force focused on four areas: pre-service preparation; pre-tenure induction; professional development for current teachers; and accountability (See attached PowerPoint).

Mary Ann asked for the approval of this task force to cite the work of the Teacher Preparation Task Force in the final report of this task force and to allow us to include it in the appendix of this report as appropriate.

Informational Items

Corporate Breakfast

Mary Ann spoke about outreach held to engage the business community in the Task Force process. Martin Knott had arranged for Mary and Jack to have a discussion with the Governor’s Workforce Investment Board (GWIB). In addition, Mary Ann and Laura Gamble from PNC Bankco-hosted a corporate breakfast on April 22 in the Ober/Kaler board room in the TransAmerica building for business leaders in central MD, drawing primarily from the Baltimore area. She provided a brief overview of the agenda. (See the attached summary of the responses to the questions posed to the audience during the breakfast.)

Trends and Themes from Surveys

Jack talked about the qualitative results from the survey information received from the forums and the website. He spoke about the various roles of stakeholders. The subcommittee is still working on this information. The survey results are in the Drop Box. Task force members are encouraged to review the results of the surveys. Information will be included in the appendix of the final report.

STEAM

Jack thank members for sending in comments on STEAM and let them know that the comments were in keeping with the discussion that was held on STEAM at the last task force meeting. He referred to Dr. Hrabowski's comments and how they matched the sentiment of the subcommittee.

COMAR

Mary Ann pointed out the draft in their folders of the COMAR policy. It is an amended version from the last meeting.

Draft Structure for Final Report

Mary Ann referred the task force to the structure of the final report which was in their folders. There still is a lot of work to do to complete the report, but today the task force was going to focus on the recommendations and strategies.

Data Collection

Jack discussed how the quantitative results have been more problematic. The Central Office data is still being worked on to ensure that it is clean. Because of the self-reporting process, there are some obvious errors, such as doubled information. Therefore, Mary Cary is talking with each school system to verify and correct any errors.

The school-by-school data was incomplete and in some instances multiple people reported particular school data differently. Self-reported data can be problematic and making decisions based on questionable data is not beneficial. Jack proposed that we come at data collection in a more comprehensive, systematic way. Martin Knott asked if we could align the data with the recommendations and then conduct a gap analysis.

Jack suggested that the task force should make an additional recommendation – that MSDE should systematically gather these data in the future for arts education at the elementary, middle, and high school levels for our state. MSDE could be able to do this within the next 18 months. The collection of data would be fully described in the narrative of the report, including this new approach. Mary Ann asked for approval from the task force for this additional recommendation. The task force approved.

Break -- The Task Force took a short break.

Review and Discussion of Draft Recommendations and Strategies

Mary Ann facilitated the discussion of the draft recommendations that were in the packets. She shared that a small committee synthesized the recommendations and strategies to remove overlap while at the same time trying to maintain the ideas that had surfaced during previous discussions. NOTE: Revisions will be made according to the conversation and will be sent to task force members in a separate email for comments from members who are willing to extend their work.

In addition to the revisions, there was agreement on the following: the SEADAE white paper will be included in the report appendix; the COMAR draft proposal will be revised in accordance with the new recommendation on an MSDE data collection system; the arts should be part of the Thornton Commission (Bridge to Excellence) legislative review process; and equity and access will be emphasized in the Executive Summary of the task force report.

Jack and Mary Ann thanked everyone for their participation. They asked task force members to please respond to one or two draft reports that will be sent to them prior to being printed. It was also noted that perhaps there could be a meeting prior to the September 16 presentation.