



March 11, 2024

Board of Trustees

Kristin Cox (Co-Chair)
Christen Cromwell
(Co-Chair)
Byron Brown (Treasurer)
Jane Coffey
Sheila Gibbs
Anita Lambert
Jessika Williams

Executive Director

Rachel McGrain

Director of Operations

Peter Dayton

Communications

Manager

Alissa Gittens

Operations & Policy

Assistant

Patrick O'Reilly

Board Emeritus

Karen Footner
Susan Magsamen
Mary Ann Mears
Brian Sullam
Danita Beck Wickwire
Lyn Frankel

Subject: Key Issues Affecting Maryland Arts Educators

To Interim Superintendent Dr. Carey Wright:

Across the country, schools are celebrating Dance in Your Schools Month, Theatre in Our Schools Month, Music in Our Schools Month, and Youth Arts Month, highlighting the arts achievements of students and arts programs. March is a time replete with county-wide and statewide competitions, spring musical performances, and art exhibitions. It was also in March of last year that AEMS and the leadership of the Maryland Dance Education Association, Maryland Music Educators Association, Maryland Art Education Association, and the Maryland Theatre Education Association wrote a [letter to the previous Superintendent](#) regarding key issues affecting arts educators in the state of Maryland and requesting action on these key issues. We are happy to provide a summary of these key issues and to report that each of them has been meaningfully addressed in the past 12 months!

- **State Arts Education Leadership (MSDE):** The MSDE position supervising the content area of Fine Arts was vacant from December 2021 until June 2023. We were overjoyed to welcome Lizzie Devereux to the newly-created Director-level position of Director of Comprehensive Arts Education and have deeply valued Lizzie's collaboration, partnership, and communication in addressing the needs and concerns of Maryland's arts educators. We are also grateful for additional MSDE Comprehensive Arts Education Office staffing that has further increased capacity.
- **State Arts Education Leadership:** An additional consequence of the extended delays in the process of hiring state-level leadership for the content area of fine arts was that the Fine Arts Education Advisory Panel, a state-mandated entity (COMAR 13A.04.16.02) had not been convened since December 2021. In response to AEMS' letter, MSDE staff worked with AEMS to empanel a new Fine Arts Education Advisory Panel, which has since met three times and will be producing recommendations this month.
- **Certification for Elementary Theatre Educators:** The Maryland Theatre Education Association (MTEA) delivered a letter to MSDE 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. Early in 2024, the approval of a P-12 Theatre educator certification was announced and we look forward to learning more details about the availability of this certification in the coming days and sharing with theatre educators in our network.
- **Transparency and Communication:** The extent to which you have made yourself available to meet with, listen to, and respond to advocates within the education sector is a refreshing contrast to the situation which prevailed a year ago. We are grateful for the openness of communication that has



Arts Education in Maryland Schools

Board of Trustees

Kristin Cox (Co-Chair)
Christen Cromwell
(Co-Chair)
Byron Brown (Treasurer)
Jane Coffey
Sheila Gibbs
Anita Lambert
Jessika Williams

Executive Director

Rachel McGrain

Director of Operations

Peter Dayton

Communications

Manager

Alissa Gittens

Operations & Policy

Assistant

Patrick O'Reilly

Board Emeritus

Karen Footner
Susan Magsamen
Mary Ann Mears
Brian Sullam
Danita Beck Wickwire
Lyn Frankel

characterized your short time at MSDE and we hope this set the precedent for years to come.

In addition to reporting on these outcomes, we are writing to inform you of the launch of an exciting tool for Maryland educators, administrators, and advocates: the Maryland Arts Education Data Project. Starting on April 2, 2024, AEMS' website will publicly display data from Maryland's Longitudinal Data Sets regarding Maryland arts enrollment, access, course offerings, staffing, and demographics from School Years 18/19 through 21/22. The process of bringing this project to fruition started a full decade ago with Recommendation B of the 2014 Governor's P-20 Leadership Task Force on Arts Education in Maryland Schools: "Establish a comprehensive, statewide data system that collects elementary, middle, and high school data on fine arts instruction."

With the assistance of the MSDE Data Office and the Comprehensive Arts Education Branch, we are proud to announce this project will finally be achieved! We are using the month of March and its celebration of the arts in our schools to build public awareness of the project, provide tools for navigating these dashboards, share key findings on arts education enrollment and access, and to provide key context and nuance that are necessary when facing such an abundance of information. This will be accomplished through daily and weekly content that engages and informs the public on the potentials of this platform and the state of arts education in Maryland's Schools. This entire project has been predicated upon an MOU between MSDE and Quadrant Research, the vendor of the Arts Education Data Project. While AEMS played a key role in facilitating that relationship, we are extremely grateful for the cooperation and collaboration of MSDE, without whom this project would have been impossible.

This is an exciting and transformational time for Maryland public education and for arts education in Maryland's schools. We look forward to further work together to advance access to quality arts education for Maryland's public school students.

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 \(Visual Art\)](#)

190 W. Ostend Street, Suite 200 Baltimore, Maryland 21230
410.779.1320 | www.aems-edu.org

@artsedmaryland