We write to you in opposition to the guidance language the Maryland State Department of Education released in *Maryland Together: Recovery Plan for Education* regarding the use of arts, health, and physical education educators in schedule rotations. As it stands, the language found on pages 7 and 8 of the document could easily be misinterpreted to say arts educators could be assigned to other roles in order to maintain the student to teacher ratio. For the sake of our state’s children, we urge you to reverse course and change the language in this draft document immediately to indicate all arts educators will be teaching in their content area. Staffing, scheduling, and the continuation of programs are impacted by this language in ways that deprive Maryland students of art, music, theatre, dance, physical education, and health. The current health crisis also emphasizes that an “Arts Education is Essential” as our students learn to cope, empathize, and express themselves. Considering this, we want to remind you of the value and benefit that arts education brings to our students and our communities.

Beyond personal expression, the arts teach valuable creative and critical thinking, as well as academic skills essential for career and college readiness. Students who participate in the arts engage in authentic and meaningful opportunities to develop literacy skills in a contemporary world filled with media requiring “reading” more than just text. The Arts engage the highest levels of thinking by requiring students to synthesize concepts and skills – often across multiple academic disciplines – to create original works. Our world is filled with problems to solve and the arts provide students with the opportunity to take risks, think critically, and make choices when faced with problems with multiple solutions.
Additionally, arts education supports the social and emotional well-being of our students. In addition to the sense of community that an arts education fosters, students develop skills associated with social-emotional learning, including self-awareness, self-efficacy, self-management and perseverance, social awareness, and relationship skills. Following a period of extended social isolation, students will need to practice their social and relationship skills again in school. Arts classes lend themselves to this practice and community building. Any cuts to arts programs would remove students’ ability to experience these benefits, diminish their sense of community, and possibly remove a powerful source of comfort from their lives during an impossibly trying time. As such, we believe the “what” of the work arts educators engage in should not change. However, it is certainly reasonable to believe that the “how” would shift during this difficult time.

The arts have been an invaluable source of comfort for everyone dealing with stay-at-home orders and a way for our communities to connect with each other whilst staying apart. All students deserve equitable access and delivery of a high-quality arts education, many of the subjects deemed necessary in federal law for a well-rounded education. If arts educators were to be reassigned to teach other content areas, or if arts courses were to be eliminated completely, it would be a disservice and dereliction of the responsibility to create an educational environment conducive to the creativity needed to allow students to thrive. We implore you to put our students first and reconsider this guideline for public schools. It is our hope that students will experience a post-COVID world that celebrates their creativity and community through the arts, and not diminish it.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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