



To Whom It May Concern:

June 25, 2020

The challenges facing the spirit and resolve of Maryland's education professionals, students, and families over these past months have been enormous. Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS) thanks you for working tirelessly to continue learning experiences for your students in your district with the abrupt shift from in-person to distance learning. We understand how difficult this transition has been and still is, and we are grateful for your perseverance and leadership.

As we all collectively continue to find our footing in this uncharted territory, the arts provide essential opportunities for students to learn, find meaning, and express themselves in a time of crisis. We urge you to lean into the transformative power of the arts in education and ensure that any staffing, programmatic, funding, or other decisions made by the district maintain or increase the existing opportunities for arts education in your district. These COMAR-designated core subject areas of dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts (13A.04.16), so often misleadingly labeled "specials" or "enrichments," are essential for developing 21st century skills, fostering student motivation and participation, and building community in a time of turmoil. Sustained access to quality arts programs also increases student performance and engagement in the other core subject areas, making consistent investment in arts education an important part of a full, comprehensive learning experience for children. The logistical challenges of continuing distance learning and/or re-opening schools safely and in compliance with health protocols loom large for all subject areas, but if the goal is providing the best chances for students' learning and wellness, the core arts subjects must be fully considered and planned for within your district. The creative core subject areas deserve creative solutions. AEMS worked with MSDE's Fine Arts Office and fine arts supervisors from around the state to develop and publish reopening guidance for arts educators and district leaders. We encourage you to read "Arts Together" to support decision making that is in the best interest of students and maintains high-quality Fine Arts programs.

These creative solutions should honor our educator's training and expertise. Maryland's certified arts instructors deliver important learning and development for students in the areas of complex reasoning and social-emotional learning (SEL). Earlier this month, the Maryland State Department of Education's Fine Arts Office released the "SEL through the Arts" report to discuss the intersection between the fine arts and the SEL competencies and how it enhances student learning. The arts provide important tools for socialization, even in times where in-person environments remain inaccessible. Fostering empathy, cultural understanding, and emotional expression, the arts are an essential resource for students. The COVID-19 pandemic has created new traumas and is exacerbating existing traumas for our students. We

recommend more investment in professional learning to encourage collaboration between arts educators and qualified professionals in the fields of mental health and adolescent psychology to utilize the healing and therapeutic power of the arts to support our students' mental health.

To help ensure that arts educators are able to serve their students to the best of their ability at this moment in time, additional professional learning opportunities and resources in technology and digital instruction, SEL, trauma-informed teaching, and anti-racism, as well as continued professional learning in curriculum development and instructional strategies. Our dedicated educators' persistence is not a sustainable substitute for professional development. Administrators also need training in effective scheduling that allows time for the core arts subjects. And members of the education infrastructure at every level need access to mental health and wellness resources right now. AEMS has been working with the Fine Arts Office of MSDE to provide health- and wellness-based professional development opportunities for Maryland's creative teaching force through eight weeks of workshops called the "M:BRACE Series," but the sustaining the vitality of our students' learning during this time rests in your leadership and vision.

None of us were ready for the future of digital learning to arrive so quickly. The arts educators in your district are experts in their work and were able to adapt quickly in this time of change. Utilizing their expertise and including their voices in decision-making would be a true investment in a holistic, world-class education for your students.

Lastly, AEMS is here and ready to support you in finding ways to maintain and improve systemic and sequential arts instruction, create cross-sector collaborations to more fully support student wellness and mental health, and deliver holistic professional development to our education professionals. Working together, we can make sure that students have access to the arts-rich education that they deserve and need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Q. Floyd', written in a cursive style.

Quanice G. Floyd
Executive Director Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS)