



July 21, 2020

Board of School Commissioners
Baltimore City School Public Schools
200 E. North Ave
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Board of School Commissioners,

Thank you all for your steadfast leadership during this unprecedented time of uncertainty. As you know, the Baltimore City Public School district adopted a Fine Arts Strategic Plan in 2018 with the bold goal of moving the district towards compliance with COMAR and achieving equitable access to the arts by the year 2022. The district has made great progress towards this goal thanks to the Offices of Fine Arts and Teaching and Learning, including the addition of a Fine Arts Specialist, adding a second position to the team for the first time since 2003.

When Governor Larry Hogan closed schools statewide on March 13, 2020, educators, school, and district leaders moved mountains to transform learning to a virtual model. Under the leadership of Fine Arts Coordinator, Chan'nel Howard, teachers created a comprehensive portal for Fine Arts lessons and resources including social emotional learning supports rooted in arts practices. Fine Arts teachers collaboratively experimented with new platforms and met on a weekly basis to discuss challenges, ideas, and new solutions. They pulled upon and added to the collaborative work MSDE and Arts Education in Maryland Schools spearheaded to share resources and best practices.

To better understand what instruction looked like from March-June 2020, Arts Every Day administered a survey to arts educators through the Fine Arts office and found the following data points particularly compelling:

- 85% of teacher respondents posted arts lessons online, 63% of respondents taught synchronous classes on a daily or weekly basis while 5% of respondents reported being re-assigned to teach other content.
- 61% of teacher respondents reported students receiving at least 30-45 minutes of arts instruction per week, however, overall student engagement with Fine Arts instruction was low.
- When it came to barriers, teachers reported competing instructional priorities, access to devices, and access to arts supplies and equipment were the most prevalent reasons for why students were not engaging with fine arts instruction.

- Fine Arts Teachers experienced significant challenges teaching remotely, including ‘knowing my students do not have access to supplies at home’, ‘knowing my students were not engaged’ and ‘I struggled with daily stress and anxiety’ as most significant.

The survey was completed by 96 Fine Arts teachers which represents approximately 45% of the Fine Arts teachers in the district. Based on the results of the survey, participation in weekly Fine Arts Office calls, conversations with teachers and partners, and your announcement of a virtual reopening for SY 2020-21, the Baltimore Art Education Initiative Advisory Committee respectfully submits the following recommendations for the continued implementation of the Fine Arts Strategic Plan:

District Level Recommendations

- Continue implementation of the Fine Arts Plan, with the goal of meeting COMAR regulations
- When in-person school resumes under the proposed A/B hybrid schedule, Fine Arts classes should take place virtually to ensure the health and safety of all arts teachers as it is not uncommon for them to teach the entire student population
- Implement consistent minutes/week of arts instruction across all schools
- Deliver communications to all families on importance of completing Fine Arts Classes
- Implement grading procedures that reflect the grading procedures of other content areas
- Allocate district budget/CARES Act funding for the purchase of base-level take home arts equipment and supplies (\$20 visual art/ \$12 music student for elementary and \$50 visual art/ \$15 music student for secondary for visual art and music)
- Ensure Fine Arts teachers have access to curriculum, professional development and technology to implement high quality instruction

Principal Level Recommendations

- Schedule Fine Arts classes to ensure all students have appropriate and equitable access
- Implement consistent minutes/week of instruction across all grade levels
- Communication to families on how to access Fine Arts classes
- In the event that Fine Arts courses are offered virtually on a day when neither A/B cohort groups meet, primary consideration is given at the school level to highlight the importance of Arts Education when scheduling irregularities are present
- Implement grading procedures that reflect the grading procedures of other content areas
- Allocate funding at the school level to supplement district-purchased arts supplies
- Ensure Fine Arts teachers have equal access to professional development, support and technology needed to implement high quality instruction

In conclusion, we ask that district-level and principal-level administrators have the same expectations of quality instruction, student participation, appropriate funding, and administrative support for Fine Arts classes as for other academic classes. Furthermore, we ask that the district dedicate per pupil funding, to be supplemented by schools, to ensure each student has access to take home arts supplies. We appreciate your consideration and look forward to working with you toward ensuring that our students and staff have what is needed for safe, high-quality educational experiences that include the benefits of arts education.

Respectfully,

- Arts Every Day
- Art with a Heart
- Arts Education in Maryland Schools
- The Baltimore Museum of Art
- Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts
- Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, OrchKids
- Coppin State University, Visual and Performing Arts Committee
- Everyman Theater
- FutureMakers
- Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance
- International Arts + Mind Lab, Johns Hopkins University
- Leaders of Tomorrow Youth Center
- Maryland Citizens for the Arts
- Maryland Institute College of Art
- MECU
- Modell Performing Arts Center at The Lyric
- The Reginald F. Lewis Museum
- T. Rowe Price Foundation
- The Walters Art Museum
- Young Audiences of Maryland

Cc: Dr. Sonja Santelises, CEO Baltimore City Public Schools