



January 11, 2020

Dr. Sonja Santelises, CEO  
Baltimore City Public School District  
200 E. North Ave  
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Dr. Santelises,

We continue to be grateful for your steadfast leadership during this unprecedented time of uncertainty. Thanks to your vision, 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 the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the state Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR). Through shared vision, strategic partnerships, and independent fundraising, this work continues to be supported by the Baltimore arts and cultural community.

According to School Year 2020-21 district course data, 90% of Baltimore City Schools now offer courses in Visual Arts and 68% of schools offer courses in Music. 61% of Baltimore City schools offer courses in both Visual Art and Music. This represents significant progress towards the district's goal of achieving equitable access to Visual Art and Music instruction by the year 2022.

A critically important goal for Fine Arts is to substantially increase equitable access in Theater and Dance. According to School Year 2020-21 district course data, 6% of Baltimore City Schools offer courses in Theater and 14% in Dance. With your guidance and leadership, we can significantly increase progress towards these two disciplines in the next phase of the Fine Arts Plan.

While we are thrilled by this progress, we know that Fine Arts teachers continue to struggle to provide students with adequate materials of instruction, musical instruments, and equipment across all disciplines. Annual investment in materials of instruction is crucial to the sustainability of the arts plan.

As you prepare for the 2021-22 budgeting process, we respectfully offer a few recommendations and perspectives to consider.

#### **Operations Budget**

- Maintain current Fine Arts school budget guidance;
- Dedicate \$35 per pupil in district funding for purchase of base level materials of

instruction for Fine Arts across all disciplines. This will allow the Fine Arts Office to:

- Sustain district investment in digital music tools (SmartMusic and Soundtrap) with educator training.
- Provide visual art educators with basic consumable classroom supply packages to be supplemented by school budgets.
- Support Dance and Theatre teachers with digital licensing.

### **Capital Budget and 21st Century Schools Planning**

- Dedicate annual district budget for school level investment in arts-related equipment, musical instruments, non-consumables;
- Conduct an audit of Fine Arts assets/infrastructure across all school buildings including auditoriums, sound system, lighting, kilns, and musical instruments.
- Coordinate with the Fine Arts Office to prioritize the conservation and stewardship of existing Fine Arts assets/infrastructure before surplus or renovating a school building.
- Assess the Fine Arts infrastructure functionality of 21st Century Schools built to date. Coordinate with the Fine Arts Office on planning for future 21st Century School buildings.

### **State Education Funding**

Several members of the Baltimore Arts Education Initiative continue to push State lawmakers to override the Governor's veto of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, align Blueprint language with COMAR regulations and provide districts with much needed resources to address pandemic-related learning loss. Arts education can help meet some of the objectives of the Blueprint and of the recovery. If State funding for the Baltimore City Public School district improves, we recommend prioritizing implementation of the 2018 Fine Arts Plan adopted by the district and the Instrumental Music Plan proposed by BAEI in 2020. While significant gains have been made in access to Visual Art and Music, the City continues to lag far behind other counties in providing Dance, Theatre, and Instrumental Music instruction. Working groups have already outlined a plan for expanding Instrumental Music and will be meeting throughout the Spring to develop a Theatre and Dance expansion plan.

### **Fine Arts and the Baltimore City Recovery Plan**

While the state, city, and district face significant financial challenges and unknowns, students need the arts now more than ever. We believe the arts represent an untapped potential for supporting school effectiveness that can play a significant role in your planned recovery—from enrollment and attendance to learning loss and pre-existing disparities exacerbated by months of virtual learning. The Baltimore Arts Education Initiative community partners represented in this letter stand ready to participate in planning and programming to support your efforts to reimagine schools. Here are a few ways the arts support education recovery:

- **Enrollment:** Parents want to enroll students in schools with arts programs. Members of the Baltimore City Parent Teacher Association, Parent Community Advisory Board, Special Education Advisory Board participated in the development of and advocacy for the Fine Arts Strategic Plan. Some of the most active parents in City Schools are the parents of the 800+ students in the To Work In Gaining Skills (T.W.I.G.S) program at the

Baltimore School for the Arts. School performances and exhibits at schools are often standing room only. A statement from the National PTA affirms:

“PTA believes all students deserve the opportunity to take part in the arts, both in school and in the community. The arts can positively affect the entire school culture—especially student motivation, attitudes, and attendance—which encourages students to stay in school, succeed in school, succeed in work, and succeed in life!”

- **Attendance:** In a 2017 White Paper for the National Dropout Prevention Network , “The Arts and Dropout Prevention”, investigator Dr. Kimberley Brown concluded “Arts education is a powerful tool that educators and policymakers can and should use more intentionally in the fight against school dropout.”
- **Student Engagement:** “In the past two decades, neuroscience has demonstrated that learners are highly variable in the ways they learn and that this variability is the norm, not the exception. We all operate across a spectrum of emotional, perceptual, and cognitive capacities and proclivities when we learn. Coupled with increasing cultural and linguistic diversity and varied contextual factors, this variability makes for increasingly complex teaching and learning situations. This challenge of practice calls for rethinking how we design curricula and educational environments. It also reminds us that providing multiple, accessible, and flexible pathways to learning may be a promising strategy to address this problem.” (Glass, Meyer, Rose, 2013)
- **Social and Emotional Health:** Mental health has never been more important than it is at THIS moment in time. In a study conducted during the pandemic of about 1,500 **teenagers**, 7 out of 10 kids reported that they were struggling with their **mental health** in some way. Over 50% of the **teens** said they struggled with anxiety, 43% dealt with **depression**, and 45% had felt more stress than usual. Studies show that an arts rich education helps students develop an improved understanding of social relationships and complex emotional issues as well as a greater capacity for positive self-expression, social tolerance, and self-confidence.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations. We look forward to continuing to work together to achieve excellence in City Schools.

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 City Arts Council
- Baltimore School for 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
- Visit Baltimore
- Young Audiences of Maryland

Cc: Baltimore City School Board of Commissioners