



Arts Education in Maryland Schools Alliance

Testimony

Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education

October 12, 2017

Mary Ann Mears:

Chairman Kirwan and members of the Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education in Maryland, I am a sculptor and arts education advocate. I am the founder of the Arts education in Maryland Schools (AEMS) Alliance -initiated as partnership of MSDE and /MSAC almost 30 years ago.

All Maryland students deserve access to a world class education. Arts education – dance, media arts, music, theatre and visual arts--is an essential element of a well-rounded world class education.

Our Educational funding formula should reflect and support what the State Board of Education, Maryland Department of Education (MSDE), and the legislature through COMAR recognize as part of that well-rounded education for every student.

In 2014, I co-chaired the Governor’s P20 Leadership Council Task Force on Arts Education in Maryland Schools with Dr. Jack Smith. Chairman Brit was a member of the Task Force—thank you, Brit.

During the Task Force process, we reviewed research on arts education including its unique contributions to the education of the whole child including capacities in creativity, communication, critical thinking, and collaboration. We also held hearings around the state and examined data about school programs that confirmed our worst fears. While some school systems and individual schools delivered excellent arts instructional programs and even went beyond by providing arts enrichment experiences and arts integration across the curriculum—what we call arts rich schools, others provided no arts instruction whatsoever in the arts. As you expect, the students being systematically deprived of arts education and cultural literacy are those from the lowest socio economic levels and are often members of racial minorities. Further, special needs students are often pulled out from existing arts classes in their schools for remediation. All of this is in spite of abundant evidence that the arts yield even higher gains for low income, minority and special needs students than for more privileged students.

When you look at the disparities you hear certain themes: “these kids need tough love—we will worry about arts education once they learn to read and compute,” “we can deal



with the arts in after school programs” and “the arts community can provide some free programs until we can afford arts teachers—something is better than nothing.”

The state board is in the process of amending COMAR Fine Arts regulations to update standards and specify state requirements more clearly. Adequate funding needs to provide the program inputs that enable schools to comply with the regulations. Viewing the graphic on the screen/attached, you can see the components of a strong arts education program. Note that by far the single most important part is instruction that is sequential, standards based and delivered by highly qualified teachers, usually with certification in their art discipline.

Turning to including the arts in the funding formula:

Since 1997, when the State Board approved Maryland’s Goal for arts education *that all students should have the opportunity to participate in fine arts programs that enable them to meet state fine arts standards*, having already defined the arts as core, I have been hearing the same refrain over and over, **arts education is an unfunded mandate**.

The Thornton – Bridge to Excellence Funding formula did not acknowledge the need for funding arts education as a part of an adequate education. And the refrain of unfunded mandate continued. There is deep injustice in our country – arts education is one of the places where it plays out most painfully. Think about it—the arts are central to our humanity—and our most awesome capacities.

Sixteen years ago, federal policy reduced the measure of success in education to the three R’s. Happily, leadership in many parts of our country and especially here in Maryland has moved on to recognition of the full range of opportunities our students need and deserve.

We are so glad to see that this Commission understands that 21st century capacities-creativity, communication, critical thinking, and collaboration, as well as overall education of the whole child are vital to achieve the goals to which this Commission is dedicated.

Fine arts—dance, media arts, music, theatre and visual arts -- are germane to your goals of innovation and excellence. Arguably, the arts are uniquely suited to deliver 21st century capacities along with such personal traits of perseverance, resilience, self-reflection, and empathy. And I haven’t even mentioned the arts as intellectual disciplines which afford overall cultural literacy as well as honing multiple lifelong skills in each art form.

The Report of the Task Force on Arts Education in Maryland Schools includes an extensive literature review which outlines the most significant research done around arts



education impacts, best practices and so on. I am going to share just a few interesting data points culled from multiple studies.

- 1) A student involved in the arts is four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement.
- 2) *Students with high arts participation and low socioeconomic status have a 4 percent dropout rate—five times lower than their low socioeconomic status peers.*
- 3) Students who take four years of arts and music classes average almost 100 points higher on their SAT scores than students who take only one-half year or less.
- 4) Low-income students who are highly engaged in the arts are twice as likely to **graduate college** as their peers with no arts education.
- 5) 72 percent of business leaders say that **creativity** is the number one skill they are seeking when hiring.
- 6) *93 percent of Americans believe that the arts are vital to providing a well-rounded education.*
- 7) The arts are recognized as a core academic subject under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and 48 states have adopted standards for learning in the arts.
- 8) Two-thirds of public school teachers believe that the arts are getting crowded out of the school day.
- 9) In 2008, African-American and Hispanic students had less than half of the access to arts education as their White peers.

This is an incredibly important moment for arts education policy:

There is alignment between Federal policy (ESSA) and our state policy. The state board and ESSA define student success in terms of all of core subject areas including the arts, music, science, social studies, **and** foreign language among others.

Per our Task Force recommendation, the State Board will shortly vote to amend COMAR to update it and make it more specific. The amendments include revising the state standards to align with national standards including Media Arts as a fifth discipline, adding Pre-K to the regulation, and ensuring that all children will have access to instruction in all five arts disciplines during their elementary years, and the opportunity to focus more deeply on one or more arts disciplines during middle and high school.

Also per our Task Force Report, the state is reporting school by school program data in the arts. The COMAR Fine Arts amended language includes provision for the MSDE Fine Arts Education Advisory Panel to monitor that data and report to the



Superintendent. In addition, in partnership with MSDE, AEMS is developing an online mapping tool that will make that information readily available to the public in a user-friendly way. We are currently working under a National Endowment for the Arts grant to create the model with Baltimore City Schools. The map is initially focused on sharing inputs with some indications of program quality, but we hope to include data from the arts community as well, and whether or not the school uses arts integration as an instructional strategy. In a related part of our work, we look forward to partnering with MSDE and local systems on a framework for looking at student outcomes assessed by quantitative and qualitative means.

Equity of access must be accompanied by high quality arts instruction for all students.

The Commission needs to align adequate funding with what is required in COMAR for the Fine Arts. The goal should be to provide equity of access for students to an adequate education in the arts at a minimum. Indeed, it is our hope that the Commission will aspire to provide access for students to education that goes beyond adequate to building students' capacity for excellence and innovation through innovative and excellent teaching. The arts are vital to meeting those goals.

We have prepared a brief set of responses to the Adequacy study report. Our points may be summarized as follows:

- The Adequacy Study cites staffing ratios for the arts that are presumably based on the approach used 15 years ago. The ratios are in large part driven by provision of planning time for classroom teachers (a nice byproduct of having arts teachers). They are not aligned with the provision of instruction that will enable students to meet state standards in the fine arts per COMAR.
- Further in this report, the arts are lumped into a category called "specials" or "electives" which include a long list which varies and is modified by the phrase "such as." Staffing for the total number of specialist teachers is arrived at arbitrarily and in some cases referenced as "REQ," or "4" (note that there are 5 arts disciplines, never mind Educational Technology, World Languages, PE etc.) or a percentage of the number of classroom teachers. All of these methods ignore the State's policy that the arts are a core subject area and that there are standards in four disciplines (now being expanded to five to include media arts) for which schools are required to provide instructional programs that enable students to meet those state standards.

One of our suggestions is to refer to the arts and other electives as "Core Electives" taught by "Core Elective teachers."



To have the document which underpins adequate funding conflict with expectations that students meet state standards in all those subjects as codified in COMAR, sets up a legal conflict that threatens equity of access. COMAR as regulatory is trumped by statutory law (any legislation based on this study or ensuing budget bills).

Martin Knott

I am a businessman.

I was a member of the Governor's P20 Leadership Council Task Force on Arts Education in Maryland Schools. Further in my role as Chair of GWIB, I engaged business and institutional leaders in the Task Force outreach and deliberations.

Currently, I chair the 21st Century Schools Facilities Commission, which in parallel with this commission, is addressing the school facilities necessary to deliver the world class education to which this commission is dedicated.

My commitment to arts education is based on my sense of urgency about the capacities of our workforce. For Maryland to be competitive in a rapidly changing economy, we need the agility and creativity of people educated in the arts. I see in my own business as well as hearing from others that arts skills and capacities including the ability to work well with others are in high demand.

- When we talk about college and career readiness, the arts play a key role.
- The arts are vital to innovation at all levels.
- Another perspective I bring is understanding the role of the arts in making great schools, schools of choice, which are essential to attracting businesses, innovative individuals, and their families.

Our overall point is that adequate education funding should provide enough dollars to enable schools to be in full compliance with COMAR no matter whether the students are minority or from low income families. This should be the base.

We support compensatory funding, Pre-K expansion, community schools and other important initiatives layered over a base level of funding that provides access to high quality arts education for all students.

We will now take any questions or comments.