

Baltimore Arts Education Initiative
Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: **April Christina Curley**

Candidate Website/Email: <https://www.electapril.com>

1. Why are you running for the Board of Education? If elected, what will be your priorities? Is there a particular issue that motivates you to serve?

When I began my career 13 years ago as a high school social studies teacher in West Baltimore, I experienced one of the worst moments of my life. The life of a beloved 9th grader in my American Government class was taken too soon by the violence that plagues our city. That moment drastically changed the way I thought about my role as a civic servant for the children and families of Baltimore.

Growing up seeing poverty, domestic violence, and drug abuse- I unfortunately have the lived experience of so many families in Baltimore. My mom, a single mom of 6, worked 2 jobs to keep a roof over our head and food on the table, often with no reliable transportation. My siblings and I went to school in thrift clothing and I didn't see a dentist for the first time until age 18. Early on, my mom made a decision to raise my siblings and I in Howard County where she knew we would be afforded an amazing public school experience. Because of that decision, I beat the odds earning a Master's degree from Johns Hopkins and landing a job at Google.

I know that there are so many parents who can't just up and move to another city just so that their kids have a fair shot in life- and they shouldn't have to. Every kid in Baltimore City should have equal access to safe, engaging, and innovative schools that equip them to be the change-agents and leaders of the future. I am running for school board to ensure that happens.

The core issues that I will prioritize to if elected include:

DIGITAL EQUITY FOR ALL STUDENTS

- Demand that all students in Baltimore City have access to quality wi-fi, new laptops, and other smart devices.
- Make computer science a requirement to graduate in preparation for a workforce that will require a technical skill set no matter the industry or field.
- Restructure the computer science curriculum to include rigorous courses such as programming basics, artificial intelligence and cybersecurity.

By bridging the digital divide, I will ensure that no student in Baltimore City is left behind in the fast-paced, ever-changing digital age and ensure every student remains competitive for the high-paying jobs of the future.

INNOVATIVE TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS

- Increase funding to implement more reliable and efficient transportation routes.
- Leverage technology to create innovative and safe public transportation services.
- Ensure equitable and quality mobility services for students with disabilities.

As a proud Baltimorean who relies on public transportation, I will work to ensure that every student in Baltimore City has a seamless, safe journey to and from school which will decrease tardiness and increase overall attendance.

INCREASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

- Equip every school with a quality counseling services center with staffing that meets the needs of each individual school.
- Connect students and families to existing mental health resources and leverage community partnerships to expand services.
- Embed mental health education into the k-12 curriculum to empower students and teachers to advocate for themselves and reach out for support when needed.

As someone who deeply understands the barriers that mental health issues can pose for both teachers and students, I will work to remove police officers from schools and instead allocate that funding to recruit and retain qualified mental health professionals to meet the needs of every school in Baltimore City.

2. When you were a student, what was your experience with the arts? How does that experience inform your vision for board service?

As a student brought up in Howard County Public Schools, despite my family living well below poverty, I had the privilege of exploring many pathways in arts education because of the amazing resources afforded to students and families in one of the wealthiest zip codes in the country. In third grade, I fell in love with music. I explored everything from my elementary school choir to trying out many instruments. While my heart wanted to play the trumpet, my amazing band teacher noticed more of a natural talent for the clarinet, and thus began my musical journey. I played the clarinet throughout my entire middle and high school career and dabbled in other arts in high school including dance, theater and choir which I stuck with for 3 years. In addition, I was closely involved in multiple extracurriculars that continued to foster my love for creative arts including poetic writing and photography.

My exposure to multiple arts pathways throughout my k12 schooling allowed me to tap into pieces of my identity that would eventually become the foundation of my innovative critical thinking and problem solving skills. This experience informs my vision as a school board candidate in that it underscores the importance of having arts education available to every student in every school throughout Baltimore City.

As a former Baltimore City teacher, I know all too well that our students are being left behind by not having equal access to arts education pathways. Opportunities to explore the amazing world of art- in all its forms- is essential to the overall wellbeing of us as humans. Our students are tiktok creators, app developers, and self-made photographers. They are actors, writers, rappers, trumpeters, crafters, dancers, gamers, illuminators, idea generators, sculptors, painters, makeup artists, jewelry crafters, fashion designers, poets, comedians- sometimes all at the same time...

They are the prototype.

Whether literary, musical, visual, or digital– we are better, **more whole** human beings because of the arts and our children deserve every opportunity possible to be made whole.

In 1994 the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR 13A. 04.16) established requirements for fine arts education (dance, music, theater and visual arts) every year for students K-8 and one credit of a fine arts discipline for graduation from high school. In 2017 the Maryland State Board of

Education, following a review that included opportunities for public comment at locations throughout Maryland, reaffirmed the COMAR Arts regulations, adding media arts as a discipline, and strengthening requirements for sequential study at all levels. You can read the regulations here: <http://mdrules.elaws.us/comar/13a.04.16.01> Baltimore City Public Schools adopted the [2017 Fine Arts Strategic Plan](#) to move towards compliance with COMAR. How will you support the Fine Arts Plan, if elected?

If elected as a School Board Commissioner, I will absolutely commit to pushing Baltimore City Schools to adopt all of the COMAR Arts regulations by ensuring budget allocations reflect this as a priority line item and that funds are being used in the most effective, transparent ways possible. I will work to ensure that Baltimore City schools have the right structures in place to support hiring qualified teachers across various art disciplines, strengthen the k12 curriculum to reflect the endless possibilities of art inclusion across subjects, and saturate city schools with relevant and useful resources to support arts education.

- 3. In an effort to provide principals flexibility to meet school and community needs, the Baltimore City Public School district adopted a site-based management model giving major budget and scheduling decision-making to principals. While there are benefits to this structure, when there is a lack of oversight site-based management results in great inequities, especially in regards to access to arts education. If elected, how will you address inequities across the district?**

If elected to the school board I will introduce new and innovative practices to help fairly manage arts education budget allocations across city schools that will help mitigate inequities from school to school such as leveraging technology to serve as an intermediary fiscal management system that will only disburse funds for school principals to use as approved by an arts education general manager.

- 4. According to Maryland Citizens for the Arts, the arts and cultural economy has an annual economic impact of \$828.7 million statewide and provides a multitude of viable career opportunities. As of School Year 2020-21, less than half of the district's high schools offered a sequential college and career learning pathway in any arts discipline. Not only does this hamper a student's ability to learn an art form and pursue the arts after high school, it also denies students the opportunity for arts-related scholarships and opportunities. If elected, how will you support equitable access to college and career pathways in the arts?**

If elected as a school board commissioner, I will absolutely make it a priority to influence legislation in the MD State House of Delegates that will audit and constantly revise the current k12 curriculum to include modern arts education standards across disciplines. I will also push to ensure that every student who graduates from city schools has a feasible number of cumulative hours spent in their k12 journey in their chosen art discipline.

- 5. What is the connection between the arts and social and emotional learning?**

There is a plethora of data that illustrates just how important arts education has on a student's social and emotional learning. We know that when students are exposed to multiple art pathways, we see an increase in student engagement and individual self expression. Research also affirms that communities benefit when students have opportunities to explore art pathways by improving parent and community engagement which has an overall positive impact on the social and emotional learning of a student.

- 6. Would you support a school system policy designed to set standards and procedures for the development of an arts education program in BCPSS that would provide for more equitable arts education access?**

Absolutely, yes!