

Baltimore Arts Education Initiative  
Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: **Ashley Esposito**

Candidate Website/Email: [www.ashleyesposito.com](http://www.ashleyesposito.com) espositoforboard@gmail.com

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**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?**

I am running for Baltimore City Board of Education because I made a promise to my community to carry on the work, I've done in our neighborhood to help improve our school system. Part of the reason we bought our home in Violetville, is 1. We have the best Halloweens and 2. We wanted to start a family and loved that the community had a school a block away. My son is a future Baltimore City Public School (BCPSS) student so I feel a sense of urgency to make policy changes that will allow more community voice on the board. I can relate to some of the more challenging issues at BCPSS. I am a former foster care youth and I have an adverse childhood experience score of 7 out of 10. I deeply understand that these life issues are barrier to the participation of students in the classroom. I am also someone who has learning differences. I know that if we don't give our students in need wrap around services, we impact their trajectory in life and we set them up for the school-to-prison pipeline. What motivates me is the fact that in academia and education spaces we don't allow enough community participation and allow student to voice their lived experiences. My main platform priorities are free school based wellness centers, safe school buildings, and improving community engagement/morale. I have a larger platform on my website [www.ashleyesposito.com/vision](http://www.ashleyesposito.com/vision) This platform was created by conversations that I had with community members.

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

For me the arts provided consistency, encouraged my imagination and built my confidence. Without arts, music and dance classes that I loved I probably would not have graduated at all because whenever things got tough in classes where I struggled due to learning differences, art, music, and dance helped me keep going. My classes weren't just extra-curricular activities, arts was an active part of the curriculum in schools that I attended. Even if students do not plan on going to an art college or doing an artistic career I believe that as human beings we have a need to express ourselves through art as part of our overall development. I was dealing with some serious trauma as a child and art was a way for me to express myself when I couldn't speak or when I was struggling. My art teacher gave me the opportunity to really express myself through my art and even encouraged me to apply to art school. I am a local artist in Baltimore City and still use my art to heal and practice visual storytelling. As an artist and board member, I will make sure that art education isn't just optional and help other board members see the connection between art and healing trauma.

**3. 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?

As a board member, I will be a consistent voice explaining that arts are not just an extra-curricular activity. Art is necessary for the overall wellness of the students. Having arts as a normalized part of the education ecosystem also fosters collaboration. We have students that are amazing artists! We have students who are getting scholarships to art colleges and we need to expand access so that more students have those same opportunities.

- 4. 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 regard to access to arts education. If elected, how will you address inequities across the district?**

Right now, I see a top-heavy approach where there are decisions being made that are 1. not created collaboratively with stakeholders 2. capacity of each principal is not checked (this is important because we know some principals are stressing about enrollment, permanent closures, etc. while other principals can focus more on staff development) 3. There is not enough follow-up and tracking to see whether decisions at the top are effective and beneficial to ALL students. I think if we believe in equity, we must be sure that we have the same opportunities at every school, that includes arts programming. I believe the best way to get there is for principals to have consistent school funding, more time to build relationships and develop their staff, and get support from the administration. I would also like new projects to include implementation support.

- 5. 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?**

I fully support equitable access to college and career pathways in the arts. Many industries all skillsets, including artists, to thrive. I work full-time as a tech professional, and we need

artistic people do help with front end development, accessible design, graphic design and marketing. I think by ensuring there is funding for arts programs, we will change the stigma around art careers.

**6. What is the connection between the arts and social and emotional learning.**

Art therapy should be a tool for trauma informed care initiatives in our public schools. Even if a student does not want or plan to go into a career in the arts, there are benefits for every student to have exposure to different ways of self-expression. When I was going through one of the most difficult times in my life, art really helped me heal.

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

Absolutely!