

Baltimore Arts Education Initiative
Candidate Questionnaire

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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 the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners because I believe in the power of communities — especially students — to design systems that work for them. I want to ensure these voices are heard when decisions are made by the School Board. I am particularly motivated to serve because, as someone with special education expertise and with lived experience of being an immigrant to this country, I can provide a key perspective that is currently missing from the Board.

If elected, these would be my priorities:

- (1) Ensure that ALL our students, including students with disabilities and English learners, have access to opportunities that enable them to thrive. (This includes opportunities to participate in the arts, which I write more about below.)
- (2) End the school-to-prison pipeline by shifting the way we address behavior and mental health needs.
- (3) Ensure implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future with fidelity alongside the effective use of funds to improve student outcomes.

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

When I was a student, my arts classes and clubs were the places where I felt most at home. Especially as a teenager, it was tremendously helpful to my mental and emotional well-being to have spaces where I was able to express myself through the arts. Then, when I was a high school teacher, I noticed my students' having similar experiences through the arts. I have taught incredibly talented rappers, painters, graphic designers, dancers - you name it - and I always incorporated those talents into my lesson plans as an English teacher. Unfortunately, my students did not always have access to systemic arts education to give them the outlet and opportunities they needed. Most of their experiences occurred because specific teachers incorporated arts into their lesson planning and not through arts programming at the school level. Thus, my vision for board service is one in which all students in the City have access to arts programming and resources, and that the distribution of those resources is equitable.

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?

The Fine Arts Strategic Plan is a great step towards arts equity in our schools. As with any plan, the key to its success will be the effectiveness of its implementation. To ensure implementation success of the Fine Arts Plan, I would: (1) provide all City Schools teachers with information about the Plan and its importance to build buy-in at the classroom level; (2) make providing updates on the plan a regularly occurring agenda item at Board meetings so that the Board is held accountable to the public for implementation of the plan; (3) conduct an analysis of partner arts organizations and which schools they have partnered with in order to determine which of our schools and students may have the least access to arts programming; and (4) push for scheduling decisions that prioritize participation in arts education for all students, including students with disabilities, instead of frequently removing them from non-tested subjects in order to provide services.

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 regards to access to arts education. If elected, how will you address inequities across the district?

I would recommend incorporating into principal professional development a regular data analysis and root cause analysis on a number of inequitable areas in the district, including arts education. Additionally, I believe that we can maintain the site-based management model and give principals autonomy, while also establishing “must haves” when it comes to scheduling and budget, just like we do for other academic areas. In order to be compliant with the arts-related COMAR regulations, the district will need to have certain requirements that apply to all schools, and I would push for a collaborative model where those requirements are determined in partnership with administrators to make sure they are still able to make decisions that meet the unique needs of their schools.

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?

In order to address this issue of inequitable access, one strategy I'd recommend would be coaching principals on creative scheduling solutions in order to add a variety of sequential arts courses as an option for high school students. I would also be interested in examining the possibility of schools that are close to each other teaming up together to expand the total number of course options available to students. Finally, I know that one challenge related to arts education in City Schools is that we are short staffed as a district. This is a longer term solution, but I believe it is important to attract and recruit arts educators to work in the City, and one way to do this is through partnerships with our local colleges. In order to ensure equitable access to college and career pathways, we must ensure that we can both create these pathways in every school AND staff them appropriately.

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

The connection between arts and SEL has been well-established in educational research. Students who have exposure to the arts develop increased social emotional competencies compared to students who do not have those opportunities. The arts also promote positive mental health for students, and for many adolescents, arts can serve as a life-saving and life-giving force.

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. The adoption of the Fine Arts Strategic Plan is a great start, but from my work leading districts around the country through their strategic planning process, I know that what happens *after* the plan is created is just as important as the document itself. Considerations include project governance (who will do what?), communication planning, implementation planning, and frequent progress monitoring. It would be my honor to be elected to the Board and to be able to ensure that we set standards and procedures that promote equitable arts education access.