

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Testimony to the House Appropriations Committee in Support of House Bill 1469 – School Arts Fund – Established

March 17, 2022

The Baltimore City Public School System (City Schools) supports HB 1469, which seeks to establish a School Arts Fund to provide grants to public schools in Baltimore City. The fund will be used to expand the arts curriculum for students in schools with high concentrations of poverty, as defined under the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future. Grants will be used to purchase art supplies for classrooms and to provide arts experiences.

City Schools is deeply committed to supporting arts education and to reducing barriers to participation so that students can be engaged and empowered through excellent arts opportunities. Specifically, we seek to increase student access to fine arts instruction – including the highest quality of music, visual arts, theater, dance, and media arts instruction – while nurturing each student’s unique gift of talent and creativity. While this commitment has long been a priority for the district, none of us could have foreseen a global pandemic that would cause us to rethink our priorities and establish and refine how we educate our students.

Research has long shown that participation in the arts can support the social and emotional learning needs of students, especially in addressing healing and trauma. As we continue to face the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, we recognize the arts can play a critical role in providing an outlet for students to process their emotions so they can begin the healing process and build resiliency as they adjust to post-pandemic transitions.

After schools were closed for more than a year, we set out to “Reconnect, Restore, and Reimagine” what school experiences and opportunities needed to look like for our students, and where the arts organically fit within that work. With districtwide concentrations such as the “Arts as Healing” initiative, we are pulling on the power of the arts to help us meaningfully engage our students, as well as provide professional development opportunities for teachers of other subjects to lean into understanding how the arts make us whole humans, and how incorporating arts into their content helps students to better connect with other academic content.

In closing, we look forward to partnering with Arts Everyday to administer the school arts fund established by HB 1469 and to maximizing the reach of the grant dollars throughout the district. For all these reasons, we enthusiastically urge a favorable committee report of HB 1469.