



OPPOSE: Senate Bill 429/House Bill 504
Excellence in Maryland Public Schools Act
Budget and Taxation Committee
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
House Appropriations Committee
Ways and Means Committee
February 19, 2025

Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS) writes **in strong opposition to Senate Bill 429/ House Bill 504**, which would significantly cut promised education funding under the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. This bill undermines the investments our state has committed to making in our students, our teachers, and the future of our communities.

AEMS is a statewide nonprofit, committed to ensuring that all students in the state of Maryland have access to high quality arts education. We envision a public education system in Maryland that supports, cultivates, nurtures, and uplifts all students' creativity through a robust arts education experience so that they can thrive in a healthy society. We regularly engage with arts educators around the state to learn about their successes and challenges as well as support them through professional development opportunities. **Maryland's arts educators are dedicated, passionate, and creative**, and they also face barriers that make it difficult to support their students in the best ways they know how. **SB429/HB504 poses yet another barrier** that will make their jobs serving our students more difficult, and it will continue to make it difficult to recruit new arts educators thereby stifling the reach of arts education in our public schools.

Cuts to per-pupil foundation funding will mean fewer resources for classrooms, including teacher salaries, instructional materials, and critical student services. **Schools already struggling to meet the needs of students will be forced to make tough choices**, like increasing class sizes. These sorts of situations have already happened, given that even current funding is insufficient. In budgeting for SY24-25, Frederick County Public Schools planned to cut 4th and 5th grade instrumental music programs until massive community outcry caused them to reverse their decision. Instead, they increased class sizes, which supplused one of the fewer than 10 dance educators working in Frederick County, completely **eliminating that high school's dance program** (COMAR states that ALL Maryland PreK-12 public school students should have access to Dance and the other 4 arts discipline throughout their entire school career – there are clearly not adequate funds to even meet existing regulations like this one). The reality of SB429/HB504 is that it will strain base funding, which will thereby make it **more difficult for local education leaders to support critical and central learning opportunities for students such as the arts that their communities value**.

Delaying collaborative time will also prevent teachers from receiving necessary professional development and planning time. Especially for new teachers who we hope to retain and develop, this planning time would be crucial to building their confidence and skills and allowing mentor teachers the time and space to support those new teachers without burning out. We hear this loud and clear in the arts community: especially for the many teachers who are taking up the call to serve and entering the classroom on conditional licenses, more support is needed and increased collaborative time would help. **Far from elevating the teaching profession, a stated goal in Pillar II, SB429/HB504 will deepen the crisis the Blueprint has promised to solve.**

Finally, delays in funding for community schools will widen the opportunity gap and leave vulnerable students without the necessary support systems. Many schools have been able to utilize these funds to support student's social-emotional development, critical thinking, and creativity through new arts learning experiences. LEAs have reported in their Blueprint implementation plans that these funds have been used to support student art shows for English Language Learners who are the first in their families to earn college credit; to provide after school music, theatre, and art clubs in collaboration with local cultural institutions; and to support full-time fine arts staffing in alignment with articulated community needs. **SB429/HB504's funding delays to community schools could endanger delivery and prevent further expansion of the arts to already-under-resourced schools.**

Maryland made a commitment to improving education through the Blueprint. **The legislature should uphold its promise to students, educators, and families by both 1) maintaining the investments that were pledged and 2) expanding the state's revenue by passing the Fair Share Maryland plan.** In the 2000s, Maryland passed an ambitious education reform plan based on the recommendations of the Thornton Commission: the Bridge to Excellence. But with the 2008 financial crisis, the plan was all but scrapped. Now history repeats unless bold action is taken. SB429/HB504 sacrifices the potential and growth of our most vulnerable populations; we urge you to **invest in our students, teachers, and communities** by upholding your promise to the Blueprint and rejecting the harmful alterations that SB 429 proposes. As education advocates, we are watching and keeping our constituents informed.

In the strongest possible terms, AEMS urges you to reject Senate Bill 429/House Bill 504 and prioritize the future of Maryland's students, generating progressive revenue through the passage of Fair Share Maryland. Cutting funding now will have long-term consequences that harm not just our schools, but our communities as a whole. **Please vote no on SB429/HB504 and stand with those who believe in fully funding the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

For questions, please contact AEMS Executive Director Rachel McGrain at rmcgrain@aems-edu.org.