



Testimony HB352 - Favorable

Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - Personnel and Per Pupil Grants - Eligible Uses
House Ways & Means Committee
February 9, 2026

The Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE), a coalition of over 30 education advocacy, civil rights, and community-based organizations committed to eliminating racial disparities, policies and practices in Maryland's education system. MAREE **strongly supports House Bill 352, Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - Personnel and Per Pupil Grants - Eligible Uses.**

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future admirably intends to transform Maryland's public education system into one that is world-class. To help us get there, we must be diligent to ensure that all **critical and core content areas**, including the arts, are upheld and **supported through this transformation**. Particularly for schools that serve concentrations of students experiencing poverty, communities should have the opportunity to invest supportive funding into strategies they know to be best for their students. HB352/SB289 furthers the goals of the Blueprint in delivering this world class education by ensuring **uninterrupted allowable usage of funds** established at the outset of the Blueprint's implementation.

Currently, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future states that **concentration of poverty funds from the personnel and per pupil grant** may be used through fiscal year 2027 to provide the programs required under COMAR 13A.04 ([2022, HB1450, §5-223\(c\)\(9\), Pg. 3](#), repeated in [2025, HB504§5-223\(c\)\(9\)](#), Pg. 16). These programs form the core subject areas of a public school students' education: everything from science, mathematics, and fine arts to English language arts, social studies, and physical education.

After fiscal year 2027, the eligibility of this use of the concentration of poverty funds from the personnel and per pupil grant will expire. HB352/SB289 seeks to **eliminate the sunset timeline** in the law to ensure that arts education, among other subject areas, continues to be an allowable use of funding in perpetuity to support the world-class education every student deserves.

Maryland has made [significant progress](#) in closing gaps in access to arts education for students from low-income backgrounds and students of color, and state leaders must ensure that this progress continues. In 2024, 86% of Latino students (exceeding the state average) and 84% of Black students (on par with the state average) were enrolled in arts classes. Maryland leaders must continue to ensure that students of color have equitable access to arts education. Research has shown that when students participate in arts education, they have better social, emotional, and academic outcomes. A [2019 study](#) found that students enrolled in arts programs had fewer disciplinary infractions, improved their writing scores, and expressed greater compassion for other people who were wronged.

Arts education is critical and transformative for our students. When students of color participate in art, their worlds expand. This is not just about schools increasing students' access to diverse skin tone crayons



or exposing them to the works of Eubie Blake or Amy Sherald. This is about Black and Latino students discovering who they are in classrooms that encourage exploration, innovation, and uniqueness. This is about Maryland leaders making good on their promise to ensure that all students continuously access a world-class education system.

The arts offer unique ways to connect and engage with the world around us, which often leads to a strengthened sense of belonging. The arts support social-emotional skill development that helps children thrive in all aspects of their lives. Learning an arts discipline **boosts neuroplasticity, producing long-lasting impacts on the brain**. The arts are also essential for college and career readiness, strengthening student's problem solving and critical thinking skills applicable to any path, including a collegiate or professional pathway in the arts.

Sunsetting this allowable use of funding would make it very difficult to continue supporting arts education at the levels that are currently provided. To continue the investment in our children that we know is needed and possible, we believe that school communities should **continue having the option** to invest their CPG funding in the arts in response to community need.

With the passage of HB352/SB289, Maryland can maintain the Blueprint's foundation of a well-rounded education. Therefore, we urge the committee to provide a **favorable report on HB 352**. Thank you for investing in the future of our state: Maryland's public school students.

peace and truth,
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