



BALTIMORE ADVOCATES FOR ARTS EDUCATION

OUR SCHOOLS

OUR DOLLARS

OUR VOICES

BUDGET-TO-ACTION TOOLKIT



Learn more at: www.ba4ae.org

ABOUT THIS GUIDE & OVERVIEW

BALTIMORE ADVOCATES FOR ARTS EDUCATION

Baltimore Advocates for Arts Education (BA4AE) works with families and community members to advocate for equitable access to strong arts education across Baltimore City Public Schools. BA4AE obtained the district's School Budget Guidance and made it publicly available so families can better understand the expectations and resources that shape Fine Arts programs in their schools. Now we can put that information to use.

Looking for broader arts advocacy resources?

This BA4AE Arts Budget-to-Action Toolkit focuses specifically on Baltimore City school budgets, Fine Arts accountability, and opportunities for local action. For broader family arts advocacy resources, visit the **AEMS toolkit**.



USE THE COMPANION WORKSHEETS As you move through the Toolkit, use the BA4AE Family Answer Worksheet to record what you learn about Fine Arts staffing, resources, and opportunities at your school.

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STRONG ARTS PROGRAMS NEED STRONG DISTRICT SUPPORT.

1 | KNOW THE BUDGET GUIDANCE

WHAT SCHOOLS ARE EXPECTED TO PROVIDE

School Budget Guidance helps principals make decisions about staffing, programs, resources, and funding. For Fine Arts, there are three areas families should pay particular attention to:

1. FINE ARTS STAFFING

Look for the district's guidance for Fine Arts staffing. Consider: What Fine Arts staffing is recommended for a school of your size? What types of Fine Arts instruction are students expected to receive? Does the guidance identify minimum staffing expectations? How does school enrollment affect Fine Arts staffing?

2. MATERIALS OF INSTRUCTION

Arts programs need appropriate materials and resources to support instruction. Look for guidance related to art materials and supplies, musical instruments, equipment, and other instructional resources.

3. FUNDING & THE ARTS

Look at the funding sources schools can use to support Fine Arts staffing, materials, and programming. Understanding the guidance gives families a starting point for comparing what schools are expected to provide with what students actually receive.

READ THE FY27 BUDGET GUIDANCE RESOURCES

- FY27 PreK–8 Fine Arts Guidance [ACCESS RESOURCE](#)
- FY27 Grades 6–8 Fine Arts Guidance [ACCESS RESOURCE](#)
- FY27 Grades 9–12 Fine Arts Guidance [ACCESS RESOURCE](#)
- Full Guidance Pages [BA4AE RESOURCE](#)

2 | LOOK AT YOUR SCHOOL

WHAT WAS BUDGETED AND WHAT ARE STUDENTS ACTUALLY RECEIVING?

The School Budget Guidance tells you what schools are expected to consider. Your school's approved budget tells you what was planned. Your student's experience helps tell you what was actually provided.

1. WHAT'S EXPECTED

What does the district's Budget Guidance say?

2. WHAT'S BUDGETED

What does your school's approved budget include?

3. WHAT STUDENTS RECEIVE

What Fine Arts staffing, programs and resources are actually available?

CHECK YOUR SCHOOL CHECKLIST

- ☒ What Fine Arts programs does our school offer?
- ☒ How many Fine Arts educators are included in the approved budget? Are those positions full-time or part-time? Are they currently filled?
- ☒ How often do students receive Fine Arts instruction?
- ☒ What funding was budgeted for Fine Arts materials and instruction? Do students have the supplies, instruments, and materials they need?
- ☒ Does our school offer instrumental music?
- ☒ Does what students are receiving reflect what was included in the approved budget?

READY TO CHECK YOUR SCHOOL?

Use the Companion Answer Worksheet to record what you find.

[COMPLETE WORKSHEET ONLINE](#)

[DOWNLOAD PRINTABLE PDF](#)

3 | ASK & ENGAGE

QUESTIONS TO ASK AT YOUR SCHOOL AND WHEN TO ASK THEM

You don't have to be a budget expert to ask informed questions.

ASK ABOUT STAFFING

- What Fine Arts staffing was included in our approved school budget?
- Are all of those positions currently filled?
- Does our current Fine Arts staffing reflect the district's Budget Guidance?

ASK ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES

- What Fine Arts opportunities are available to students?
- Does our school offer instrumental music?
- If not, what would be needed to provide instrumental music?

ASK ABOUT RESOURCES

- What funding was budgeted for Fine Arts materials and instruction?
- Are those funds being spent according to the approved budget?
- Do our arts educators have the materials, supplies, instruments, and equipment they need?

ASK ABOUT DECISION-MAKING

- When will families have an opportunity to provide input into next year's school budget?
- How can families participate before staffing and funding decisions are finalized?

WHEN TO ASK QUESTIONS

- **At the beginning of the school year:** Ask what arts classes, teachers, staffing, and resources students will have this year. Identify differences between what was budgeted and what is in place.
- **When something changes:** Ask questions if an arts teacher position is vacant, a class is cancelled, schedules change, or planned materials don't appear.
- **During school budget planning:** Ask what is being proposed for Fine Arts before the budget is finalized and share what families prioritize.
- **After the budget is approved:** Follow up to see whether Fine Arts staffing and resources were actually put in place.

WHEN SHOULD FAMILIES ENGAGE?

AT YOUR SCHOOL:

- School budget meetings
- School Family Council meetings
- Family/community engagement sessions
- Conversations with principals & leadership

AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL:

- District budget engagement sessions
- Proposed budget releases
- School Board meetings & public comments
- Districtwide decisions affecting Fine Arts

4 | BA4AE’S TWO SHARED PRIORITIES

WHAT WE’RE ASKING THE DISTRICT TO DO

Families may have different experiences at different schools, but some challenges require district-level solutions.

PRIORITY 1: ACCOUNTABILITY

What was budgeted should reach students.

BA4AE is calling for a clear accountability process to ensure schools meet Fine Arts Budget Guidance and that funds are spent according to the approved budget.

WHAT WAS BUDGETED?

WHAT WAS SPENT?

WHAT DID STUDENTS ACTUALLY RECEIVE?

PRIORITY 2: EXPAND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

More Baltimore City students deserve the opportunity to play an instrument.

BA4AE is calling on Baltimore City Public Schools to **EXPAND THE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC PLAN TO 10 SCHOOLS**. Expanding the plan would provide more students with access to instrumental music instruction and move the district toward more equitable access to arts opportunities

5 | TURN YOUR EXPERIENCE INTO TESTIMONY

YOUR SCHOOL, YOUR EXPERIENCE, YOUR VOICE.

What you learned about your school can become part of your public testimony. You don't need to be a budget expert. Start with what you know: your school and your student's experience

PUBLIC TESTIMONY TEMPLATE

- 1. INTRODUCE YOURSELF:** My name is [Your Name]. I am a parent / caregiver / student / educator / community member connected to [School Name].
- 2. SHARE WHAT YOU SEE:** One thing I value about our school's arts program is [Value]. One concern or need I see is [Concern]. What I learned about our school's Fine Arts staffing, budget or resources is [Details].
- 3. EXPLAIN WHY IT MATTERS:** This matters to students because [Impact].
- 4. CONNECT TO ACCOUNTABILITY:** I want the district to establish a clear accountability process to ensure schools meet Fine Arts Budget Guidance and spend funds according to their approved budgets because [Reason].
- 5. CONNECT TO INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC:** Expanding the Instrumental Music Plan to 10 schools matters because [Reason].
- 6. CLOSE:** Strong Arts Programs Need Strong District Support.

SAMPLE TESTIMONY

"Good evening. My name is Maria Johnson, and I am a parent at Baltimore City Elementary School.

The arts are an important part of my child's education. At our school, students have access to visual art and music, but I want to know that the arts staffing and resources included in our school budget are actually reaching our students.

Having access to the Fine Arts Budget Guidance has helped families better understand what schools are expected to provide. But access to information is only the first step.

We need a clear accountability process to ensure schools meet Fine Arts Budget Guidance and that funds are spent according to the approved budget.

We also need to expand opportunities for students who don't currently have them. Instrumental music gives young people the opportunity to discover an interest, develop a skill, and participate in an experience that should not depend on which school they attend.

I am asking the district and School Board to expand the Instrumental Music Plan to 10 schools.

Families should be able to trust that the arts resources included in school budgets reach students while the district continues to expand opportunities for students who don't yet have them.

Strong Arts Programs Need Strong District Support. Thank you."

6 | OCTOBER 21 SCHOOL BOARD MEETING / ARTS NIGHT

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

The October 21st School Board Meeting / Arts Night is an opportunity to bring what you've learned about arts education at your school directly to the School Board. The District has strict guidelines for public comment; they can be found **here**.

HOW PUBLIC COMMENT WORKS

BA4AE will have one designated speaker who will deliver BA4AE's official testimony and present our shared priorities. But BA4AE's organizational testimony doesn't have to be the only voice the Board hears.

Parents, caregivers, students, and community members can sign up individually to give public comment. When you sign up individually, you speak in your own voice about your own experience.

GET READY FOR OCT 21st

- Read FY27 School Budget Guidance
- Look at your school's approved budget
- Ask school leadership questions
- Use testimony template to identify 1 strength, concern or need
- Sign up for public comment
- Record what you learn in the Companion Worksheet



Download or Fill in
Worksheet

STAY INFORMED. SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE. ADD YOUR VOICE.

Strong Arts Programs Need Strong District Support.

FOLLOW



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