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From the Baltimore Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/baltimore/news/2025/02/28/why-arts-education-fuels-marylands-economy-bsa.html>

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Career & Workplace

Viewpoint: Why arts education fuels Maryland's economy

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Feb 28, 2025

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Across the country, arts education is under threat. Funding cuts and program closures are becoming alarmingly common, dismissing the arts as non-essential in favor of core academics. This false and dangerous narrative not only limits student success but stifles Maryland's ability to produce the innovative, adaptable workforce that businesses demand. Cutting arts programs limits our capacity to develop creative problem-solvers – the very professionals our economy needs.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future education reform plan has left arts education susceptible, allocating only 25% of funding to arts programming, sports and after-school extracurriculars – a reduction from previous levels. This could lead to fewer instructors, limited resources and the loss of programs that have produced some of the state's most accomplished graduates.

Factors like the national teacher shortage, financial strains from the pandemic and inflation are the main contributors to this reduction. While valid challenges, advocates warn that Blueprint funding distribution needs a more balanced approach – one that ensures the arts remain a key part of our education system while addressing other pressing priorities for Maryland schools.

At Baltimore School for the Arts (BSA), we see firsthand how quality arts education produces high-achieving, well-rounded students who go on to thrive in a range of industries – not just in the arts, but in business, law, education, medicine, and science. If we want to prepare students for the modern world, we must preserve and expand access to arts education.



Roz Cauthen is the executive director of the Baltimore School for the Arts.

BALTIMORE SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS

The broader value of arts education

Far more than an extracurricular, the arts drive student achievement. Data consistently shows that students involved in the arts demonstrate higher GPAs, graduation rates, and improved test scores in school regardless of socioeconomic status, [according to a flagship study](#) conducted by the Arts Education Partnership (AEP).

Beyond academics, the study highlights how arts education bolsters critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, communication, leadership, community and collaboration – all essential for today’s workforce. Access to arts programs also reduces absenteeism, boosts engagement and enhances overall well-being among students. The arts don’t just improve academic performance, they elevate career readiness and quality of life.

A model for holistic education

At BSA, we have long championed arts-embedded learning, proving that academic performance and creative expression go hand in hand. Our symbiotic model blends academic rigor with artistic excellence, showing that students don’t have to choose between the two – they can excel in both.

Despite having no academic entrance criteria, the latest data highlights BSA’s exceptional student achievement:

- 94-97% daily attendance rate and 98-100% graduation rate
- 80% of students maintain a weighted GPA of 3.0 or higher
- 73% score a 3 or higher on AP exams, earning BSA “Gold” status on the 2024 AP School Honor Roll
- BSA students consistently lead city, state and national averages on the PSAT and SAT

But numbers alone don’t tell the full story. While many of our alumni build successful careers in the arts, others excel in fields such as law, health care,

education and business. Our graduates have held executive positions at organizations like LifeBridge Health, Merrill Lynch, American Psychological Association, the University of Pennsylvania and the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland – demonstrating that the creativity, adaptability, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills fostered through arts education drive success across every industry.

The ripple effect: Why arts education matters for everyone

As Maryland strengthens its economy and positions itself as a leader in technology, cybersecurity, AI and life sciences, we must recognize that workforce readiness starts in the classroom. Businesses across industries seek employees with the very skills arts education cultivates.

[According to the World Economic Forum’s Future of Jobs Report](#), creative thinking is the second most important skill for workers, behind only analytical thinking. The ability to solve problems, communicate effectively, and adapt is valuable not just in the arts, but in the fastest-growing and most in-demand industries across our economy.

Additionally, schools like BSA serve as cultural hubs and important third spaces, enriching communities by fostering civic engagement and inspiring local pride. In Baltimore, our students and faculty regularly collaborate with local organizations, businesses and artists to create performances, exhibitions and programs that uplift the city. Their engagement in the arts not only adds to the community but also equips them with valuable experiences that build their resumes.

Arts education is a catalyst for workforce readiness

At BSA, we see firsthand how the blend of arts and academics equips students with essential skills. Whether our graduates go on to be performers,

entrepreneurs or physicians, they take with them the innovative mindset fostered by their arts education – helping to propel them forward in today’s competitive job market.

If we want Maryland to remain a leader in innovation, we must invest in creativity, starting in the classroom. Arts education isn’t just about self-expression, it equips the next generation to think critically, lead boldly and solve complex problems that drive progress across every industry. In a rapidly evolving job market, where creative thinking is in high demand, we can’t afford to sideline the arts.

As we look toward the future, we must ensure students have access to all that the arts offer – not as an afterthought, but as an essential component of workforce readiness. Investing in arts education isn’t just an enrichment, it’s a strategic move to secure Maryland’s economic future.

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