Comprehensive Arts Pathways Overview

The arts – including dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual art – are vital to a well-rounded education and a healthy, meaningful society. They foster creativity, improve critical thinking, and strengthen community bonds; they contribute to strong economies and improve health and well-being (NEA, 2025; WHO, 2023). Arts education has proven benefits that extend beyond arts classrooms, including improving student attendance, strengthening academic skills development in reading, language, and mathematics, as well as improving students' sense of belonging and motivation to learn (Bowen & Kisida, 2021). Studies show that these benefits are even stronger for specific student populations, such as students with individualized education programs (IEPs), students who have been historically chronically absent, African American male adolescents, English language learners, and students experiencing homelessness (Wolf Brown, 2018; Walton, 2020; Pavlakis, 2019).

As Maryland aims to transform the state's education system through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, a robust arts education will play a critical role in achieving the Blueprint's ambitious goals. This document provides policy guidance on Comprehensive Arts Pathways for secondary grade-level students, which will prepare Maryland students to be college and career-ready in the arts upon high school graduation. They also provide broader benefits beyond college and career-readiness, supporting healthy high school ecosystems and strong communities overall.

The Comprehensive Arts Pathways describe sequential courses of study in any of the five arts disciplines and additional career-aligned activities that prepare students to be college and/or career-ready in the arts upon high school graduation. The Pathways are aligned to Blueprint Pillar 3's College and Career Readiness goals and the MSDE College and Career Readiness Standard Policy Document, Version 2.0 (CCR Standard, 2025).

Comprehensive Arts Pathways have been designed to:

- Provide explicit guidance for sequential study of arts disciplines throughout high school, prioritizing scheduling arts courses in the 9th grade to:

  - leverage proven arts benefits related to attendance and sense of belonging (Bowen & Kisida, 2021)
  - keep student pathway options open

- Ensure Blueprint alignment across different trajectories, including:

  - career and technical education pathways for applicable arts disciplines (such as audio engineering or technical theatre)
  - college preparatory guidance aligned with the Maryland AP Option that will enable local education agencies to build out advanced options for arts without applicable AP courses (performing arts)

REQUIREMENTS

Completion of a Comprehensive Arts Pathway for a Maryland public high school student requires:

- **4 credits** taken in 9th-12th grades of fine arts courses (dance, media arts, music, theatre, visual art)

- **3 credits** must be in the same arts discipline (dance, media arts, music, theatre, visual art)

- **At least one of the following** is required in addition to the arts course requirements above:

  - Participation in county-, region-, and/or state-wide exhibition, performance, or audition, where applicable

  - Completion of a capstone arts project, performance, or exhibition

  - Earning an arts-aligned industry-recognized credential and/or completing a high school level registered apprenticeship or internship

  - **Arts diploma acknowledgement earned upon graduation**

ARTS-ALIGNED INDUSTRY-RECOGNIZED CREDENTIALS

As part of the College and Career Readiness Pillar of the Blueprint, MSDE is committed to ensuring that students graduate high school having taken steps towards a structured career pathway. To that end, MSDE and the CTE Committee have implemented a new definition of an [Industry-Recognized Credential (IRC)](#) and maintain a state-approved list of IRCs that have been vetted and meet state standards. As of July 1, 2025, the list below includes state-approved IRCs that align to the Comprehensive Arts Pathways:

- [Adobe Content Creation and Marketing using Adobe Express](#)

- [Avid Certified User: Pro Tools](#)

- [BACKstage Exam](#)

- [Certified Radio Operator - Society of Broadcast Engineers](#)

- [ParaPro - Educational Testing Service (ETS)](#)

- [PraxisCORE - Educational Testing Service (ETS)](#)

- [Print[ED] - Printing & Graphic Communications Association (PGCA)](#)

Students across Comprehensive Arts Pathway programs – whether College Preparatory or CTE – may earn arts-aligned IRCs. Per the [March 2025 CCR Standard Policy](#), "Starting in School Year 2025-2026, students may also meet the CCR Standard by meeting at least one of the following Alternative CCR Measures [including earning] a state-approved Industry-Recognized Credential, aligned with a Career and Technical Education and/or Comprehensive Arts pathway."

SAMPLE SCHEDULES

The following sample schedules are organized by:

- **General as an overview, applicable across all arts disciplines**

- **Arts discipline category**

- Visual & Media Arts

- Performing Arts (dance, music, theatre)

- **Blueprint post-CCR pathway alignment (HB 1300, Ch. 36 of 2021)**

  - College preparatory programs

  - Career and technical education programs, including:

    - Apprenticeship or workplace experience

    - Leading to an industry-recognized credential

General Arts Pathway: applicable to Dance, Media Arts, Music, Theatre, Visual Art, or Multiple Arts

Based on COMAR 13A.03.02 Graduation Requirements, a minimum of 22 credits[+] including:

9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
English 9 (1)	English 10 (1)	English 11 (1)	English 12 (1)
Foundational Math Course (1)	Foundational Math Course (1)	Advanced Math Pathway Course (1)	Advanced Math Pathway Course (1)
Science Requirement (1)	Science Requirement (1)	Science Requirement (1)	Elective
American Govn/US History/World History (1)	American Govn/US History/World History (1)	American Govn/US History/World History (1)	Elective
PE I (0.5)/Health (0.5)	Tech Ed Requirement (1)	Health II (0.5)/Local Graduation Requirement or Elective (0.5)[*]	Elective
World Language (1)/CTE Approved Program	World Language (1)/CTE Approved Program	Arts Elective (Optional)	Arts Elective (Optional)
Fine Arts I Requirement	Arts II	Arts III	Arts IV

Based on local requirements, this course can be substituted with an additional arts elective

■ COMAR   ■ Arts Pathway   ■ Both

+ All students must complete:
- *Additional local graduation requirements, such as an additional 0.5 credit of PE*
- *High school program of environmental literacy*
- *Student service requirements*
- *Assessment requirements*
- *COMAR 13A.03.02.09 Diplomas and Certificates: Specifies the types of diplomas and certificates that can be earned*

College Preparatory Arts Pathway: Visual & Media Arts

Aligned to the Maryland AP option, minimum of 5 AP courses, with 2 in same content and 2 or more content areas included:

9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
English 9 (1)	English 10 (1)	English 11 (1)	English 12 (1) – *AP option*
Foundational Math Course (1)	Foundational Math Course (1)	Advanced Math Pathway Course (1) – *AP option*	Advanced Math Pathway Course (1) – *AP option*
Science Requirement (1)	Science Requirement (1)	Science Requirement (1) – *AP option*	Elective
American Govn/US History/World History (1)	American Govn/US History/World History (1)	American Govn/US History/World History (1) – *AP option*	Elective– *AP Art History option*
PE I (0.5)/Health (0.5)	Tech Ed Requirement (1)	Health II (0.5)/Local Graduation Requirement or Elective (0.5)*	Elective
World Language (1)/CTE Approved Program	World Language (1)/CTE Approved Program	Arts Elective (Optional)	Arts Elective (Optional)
Visual/Media Arts I (Fine Arts Requirement – 1)	Visual/Media Arts II	Visual/Media Arts III – *AP option*	Visual/Media Arts IV– *AP option*

*Based on local requirements, this course can be substituted with an additional arts elective

■ COMAR   ■ Arts Pathway   ■ Both

At least one of the following is required in addition to the arts course requirements above:

- Participation in county-, region-, and/or state-wide exhibition, performance, or audition, where applicable

- Completion of a capstone arts project, performance, or exhibition

- Earning an arts-aligned industry-recognized credential and/or completing a high school level registered apprenticeship or internship

College Preparatory Arts Pathway: Advanced Performing Arts

Aligned to the Maryland AP option, minimum of 5 AP/IB/AICE-comparable courses[+], with 2 in same content and 2 or more content areas included:

9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
English 9 (1)	English 10 (1)	English 11 (1)	English 12 (1) – *AP option*
Foundational Math Course (1)	Foundational Math Course (1)	Advanced Math Pathway Course (1) – *AP option*	Advanced Math Pathway Course (1) – *AP option*
Science Requirement (1)	Science Requirement (1)	Science Requirement (1) – *AP option*	Elective
American Govn/US History/World History (1)	American Govn/US History/World History (1)	American Govn/US History/World History (1) – *AP option*	Elective– *AP Art History option*
PE I (0.5)/Health (0.5)	Tech Ed Requirement (1)	Health II (0.5)/Local Graduation Requirement or Elective (0.5)*	Elective
World Language (1)/CTE Approved Program	World Language (1)/CTE Approved Program	Arts Elective (Optional)	Arts Elective (Optional)
Performing Arts I Requirement	Performing Arts II	MSDE-Approved Advanced Performing Arts III [+]	MSDE-Approved Advanced Performing Arts IV [+]

Based on local requirements, this course can be substituted with an additional arts elective

■ COMAR   ■ Arts Pathway   ■ Both

At least one of the following is required in addition to the arts course requirements above:

- Participation in county-, region-, and/or state-wide exhibition, performance, or audition, where applicable

- Completion of a capstone arts project, performance, or exhibition

- Earning an arts-aligned industry-recognized credential and/or completing a high school level registered apprenticeship or internship

+ *Sequential, upper-level performing arts courses that are **approved by MSDE Comprehensive Arts Branch as Maryland Advanced Performing Arts courses** will meet the Blueprint post-CCR enrollment requirement of "a competitive entry college preparatory program". For more information on Maryland Advanced Performing Arts courses, see the Final Notes section of this report.*

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Arts Pathways: Arts, Media, Communications (AMC) Career Cluster

Aligned to the Maryland CTE AMC cluster, CTE Arts Pathways prepare students to enter careers upon or soon after graduation, in industries such as, graphic design, video production, media arts, technical theatre, audio engineering, and digital design and production:

9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
English 9 (1)	English 10 (1)	English 11 (1)	English 12 (1) – *AP option*
Foundational Math Course (1)	Foundational Math Course (1)	Advanced Math Pathway Course (1) – *AP option*	Advanced Math Pathway Course (1) – *AP option*
Science Requirement (1)	Science Requirement (1)	Science Requirement (1) – *AP option*	Elective
American Govn/US History/World History (1)	American Govn/US History/World History (1)	American Govn/US History/World History (1) – *AP option*	Elective
PE I (0.5)/Health (0.5)	Tech Ed Requirement (1)	Health II (0.5)/Local Graduation Requirement or Elective (0.5)*	Arts Elective (Optional)
CTE Approved Program: AMC Core Concentrator 1	CTE Approved Program: AMC Core Concentrator 2	CTE Approved Program: AMC Flex Course 1**	CTE Approved Program: AMC Flex Course 2**
Arts I (Fine Arts Requirement – 1)	Arts II	Arts III – *AP option*	Arts IV– *AP option*

**Flex Course options could include: additional core-aligned coursework, dual enrollment, apprenticeship, work-based learning, AMC certification exam preparation

■ COMAR   ■ Arts Pathway   ■ Both

In addition to fulfilling the CTE Approved Program requirements, which may include earning an industry-recognized credential aligned to the chosen arts career cluster, at least one of the following is required in addition to the arts course requirements above:

- Participation in county-, region-, and/or state-wide exhibition, performance, or audition, where applicable

- Completion of a capstone arts project, performance, or exhibition

- Earning an arts-aligned industry-recognized credential and/or completing a high school level registered apprenticeship or internship

Forthcoming Guidance and Support

While this policy document provides a general overview of the Comprehensive Arts Pathways, the MSDE Comprehensive Arts Branch plans to issue additional guidance on specific related topics and provide ongoing support to LEAs, through professional learning, office hours and visits, as Comprehensive Arts Pathways are put into practice for students across the state.

Specific topics that will be addressed in forthcoming guidance and/or support sessions include:

- Requirements for MSDE approval of **Advanced Performing Arts courses**, aligned with College Preparatory Pathways in Performing Arts

- **Tracking enrollment and completion** of Comprehensive Arts Pathway requirements

- Process and requirements to obtain an **Arts Diploma acknowledgement** upon graduation and successful completion of a Comprehensive Arts Pathway

- Organizing and applying for **arts-aligned Industry-Recognized Credentials**

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