

# Visual and Performing Arts Strategic Plan

## Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS)

### Executive Summary

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This strategic action plan seeks to establish a clear and documented path for increasing access to, participation in, and the quality of visual and performing arts education for all MNPS students. This document should serve as a roadmap for implementing key organizational goals by setting priorities, focusing energy and resources, strengthening operations, and ensuring that staff and other stakeholders are working toward common goals.

This document is the result of an eight-month process between MNPS' Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) department and Spark Impact, which included stakeholder mapping, interviews, and roundtable discussions with key stakeholders; sector analysis and interviews with peer school districts; and strategy sessions with department staff and district leadership.

The priorities identified through the process described above resulted in three overarching goals, each with its own strategic actions. It is important to note that these goals are highly interrelated and some of the strategies outlined target multiple goals.

#### **Goal 1: VAPA are a priority for the district and are integrated into district planning.**

Currently, VAPA are not highly integrated into district priorities, resulting in limited focus and support from the district towards VAPA. The long-term viability and sustainability of the work outlined in the following pages will depend on it being a priority for the district and for that priority to be pursued at the individual school level. The following six strategic actions are designed to more deeply integrate VAPA into existing district priorities.

- 1. Position VAPA as a district social-emotional learning (SEL) leader: Leverage the existing relationship between VAPA and SEL to increase VAPA education's relative importance to the district.**

2. Coordinate with outside partners on the district’s strategic priorities: The VAPA department needs to lead and coordinate partner efforts around a clear and cohesive strategy to achieve VAPA objectives.
3. Reorient the Music Makes Us® (MMU) Advisory Council: Refocus the council's efforts around the goals of advocacy and connection.
4. Foster stakeholder and community engagement: Rallying community around the importance of visual and performing arts education.
5. Implement a district-level VAPA-focused data collection protocol: Design and implement an in-house district-wide school rating system for VAPA education.
6. Improve coordination with the STEAM department and the Academies of Nashville: Work towards increased coordination and collaboration with the STEAM department and the Academies of Nashville.

## Background and Overview

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The goal of our partnership with Metro Nashville Public Schools is to provide a comprehensive strategic action plan to increase access to, participation in, and the quality of arts education for all MNPS students. Through collaboration and consultation with the MNPS visual and performing arts (VAPA) office and district leadership, we identified the set of priorities for the district outlined below. The following pages contain an overview of our strategic planning process, summaries of key inputs along the way, and detailed steps for short- and long-term implementation of agreed-upon priorities.

## Goal 1: VAPA Are a Priority for the District and Are Integrated into District Planning

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Currently, VAPA are not integrated into district priorities, resulting in limited focus and support from the district towards furthering VAPA. This lack of a strong focus on VAPA from the district leadership often translates into even less focus on VAPA at the school level and increased disparities between schools in terms of VAPA prioritization. Long-term viability and sustainability of this work will depend on it being a priority for the district and for that priority to be pursued at the individual school level.

At the school level, increased focus on ELA and math achievement has led to the implementation of a double-blocking strategy in high schools, significantly reducing student choice in electives. Additionally, VAPA classes are sometimes used as the “catch all” class, with reports of students frequently being pulled away from class—or of class time being cut short—for other commitments. This leads to lower enrollment, which reduces funding for VAPA courses, and creates a barrier for sequential arts education.

In order to address this set of issues, we propose the following six strategic actions designed to more deeply integrate VAPA in existing district priorities.

**Strategic Actions:**

1. Position VAPA as a district social-emotional learning (SEL) leader: Leverage the existing relationship between VAPA and SEL to increase VAPA education's relative importance to the district.
2. Coordinate with outside partners on the district's strategic priorities: Lead and coordinate partner efforts around a clear and cohesive strategy to achieve VAPA objectives.
3. Reorient the Music Makes Us® (MMU) Advisory Council: Refocus the council's efforts around the goals of advocacy and connection.
4. Foster stakeholder and community engagement: Rallying community around the importance of visual and performing arts education.
5. Implement a district-level VAPA data collection protocol: Design and implement an in-house district-wide school rating system for VAPA education.
6. Coordinate with the STEAM department and the Academies of Nashville: Work towards increased coordination and collaboration with the STEAM department and the Academies of Nashville.

**Position VAPA as a district social-emotional learning (SEL) leader**

*Leverage the existing relationship between VAPA and SEL to increase VAPA education's relative importance to the district.*

SEL has been designated as one of the school board's key priorities for the 2019–2020 school year and is expected to remain a key priority for the upcoming year. Additionally, the 2018 Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce Education Report Card recommended that the district focus on social emotional learning.

Arts education has been shown to be an excellent vehicle for learning social-emotional skills since these skills are integral to art making. Visual and performing arts help students develop social-emotional skills necessary for self-actualization, self-management, and interpersonal relationships through developmental experiences that they enjoy. This connection between VAPA and SEL, and the unique value that VAPA could provide in achieving district SEL objectives, is not well-recognized by the district, or incorporated into district SEL plans.

While district VAPA teachers receive training to integrate SEL approaches in their classes through workshops and professional development, and many do, they do so in a vacuum. These efforts are not meaningfully connected to the larger district SEL goals. By leveraging the existing relationship between VAPA and SEL as well as the work VAPA teachers are already doing in this area, VAPA can be further integrated into district planning and VAPA education's relative importance can be elevated, thereby improving district SEL outcomes and student access to high-quality VAPA education.

## Step 1: Research and create documents outlining VAPA SEL benefits, needs, and approaches for each stakeholder group

SEL is a topic of increased focus in the education field, however there are still many misconceptions and much misinformation about what SEL is as well as about its relative importance to a child's education and development. There is even less awareness in the academic community of the potential to use the arts as a vehicle for SEL. It is the responsibility of the VAPA department to educate all stakeholders about the value of VAPA classes and strategies (e.g., arts integration in non-VAPA classes) for improved SEL outcomes, and to make sure they have the necessary resources and information to properly advocate for increased arts involvement in SEL.

The first step in accomplishing this goal is creating documents and communication plans to explain the priority for VAPA for each stakeholder group. Documents to be designed can include:

- District and school board and MMU Advisory Council: How arts can be used to foster SEL
- Principals and cultural partners: Resource list to help them integrate VAPA into their SEL-focused activities and SEL into VAPA activities. How VAPA SEL supports other school priorities
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Annex 6 includes a list of VAPA SEL resources that can be used as a starting point for research.

In this phase, we recommend you enlist the appropriate SEL-focused cultural partners. The MNPS VAPA department has existing relationships with multiple cultural partners with expertise in the intersection of VAPA and SEL that can help build out this resource list and communication materials. As we will expand upon the following strategic initiatives, it is important to engage cultural partners in working with the VAPA department towards a clear objective rather than simply providing a service. This presents a unique opportunity to collaborate with existing partners in work that is important and well aligned for their institution, is valuable for the students, and also helps position VAPA as a district priority.

## Step 2: Identify opportunities and roadblocks towards VAPA and SEL integration

Convene a collaborative session between district leadership and school principals to identify opportunities and roadblocks to thriving VAPA integration throughout the district and at the school level. During this session, it is important that you:

- Communicate the priorities from the district.
- Ensure critical district leadership is present and leading.
- Engage principals in brainstorming or other activities to identify opportunities and roadblocks.
- Prioritize the most critical and greatest opportunities for change.

## Step 3: Support the inclusion of VAPA within the district-wide SEL framework

Work with district leadership and previously identified partner organizations to ensure that the district-wide framework for SEL highlights VAPA as integral and essential to achieving SEL objectives. This will also help to ensure that VAPA are a measurable priority for the district.

Regarding VAPA, the district-wide framework should include:

- Specific and measurable goals for VAPA SEL and tools by grade level.
- Grade-appropriate SEL training and activities, with professional development that focuses on the value of VAPA as a vehicle for SEL. Currently, SEL-focused professional development is included in the district’s Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports (PBIS) practice and as part of SEL support practices. However, no VAPA SEL professional development is currently included.

#### Step 4: Review, revise and support VAPA outcomes for district-wide SEL framework

As this is a multi year plan, it is essential that the VAPA team review the VAPA outcomes annually and revise the planning and implementation of VAPA-related interventions based on lessons learned. Reporting out in some form to the stakeholder groups discussed in Goal 1, and enlisting their help and support in advocating for annual improvement for VAPA, will help strengthen the VAPA stakeholder ecosystem, and thus improve overall community support for VAPA programs and policies. We recommend an annual review followed by a short document highlighting successes and opportunities for improvement to be shared both publicly and with MNPS administrators and faculty. The ultimate goal is that there is a district-wide understanding of how VAPA can inform and improve SEL outcomes, and district-wide plans to improve those outcomes for students via VAPA.

#### Step 5: Workshops with teachers about their use of VAPA SEL

The need to improve the professional development relationship for MNPS teachers is described below (Goal 3, Strategic Action 3), along with specific steps to ensure that MNPS is better able to meet teachers’ needs (Goal 2, Strategic Action 1), and teachers are more able to take advantage of the PD available to them. Here we highlight the importance of including SEL-related professional development among the opportunities available to teachers. Many VAPA teachers successfully use SEL-related techniques but would benefit from further training and more intentional SEL integration in their instructional practice, and many “core subject” teachers may not know the value of arts-related content to improve SEL skills for their students. While focusing on arts-related content in core subject areas is not a priority at this time, it may be valuable to provide some PD that offers teachers insight into how they can use the arts to improve the SEL outcomes in their classes.

#### Step 6: Ongoing support and advocacy for SEL through VAPA

Coordinate with business and other outside VAPA partners to elevate the emphasis on the value of SEL in the community, advocate for SEL through VAPA as a priority, and support new and ongoing SEL work.

## Impact of Covid-19

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This strategic plan was begun in the fall of 2019 and largely complete by February of 2020. It is intended to be an adaptable, long-term roadmap that highlights and addresses the most pressing systemic needs and opportunities. While intended to be easily adapted to current and unexpected situations, the work was

effectively completed before the onset of Covid-19, and so strategic thinking here does not revolve around the new and pressing issues that the Covid-19 crisis has created.

At the time of this writing, when and how students will return to school, what changes may be made in the school day, how much distance learning will continue and for how long, and what impacts extended isolation will have on students are all largely unclear and unknown. We have included this additional section with a few thoughts about how this strategic plan could be impacted by or adapted to the current situation brought upon by the Covid-19 pandemic, and how VAPA programs may be most helpful in responding to the impact on students, teachers, and other stakeholders.

### Distance learning

Many of the values, benefits, and joys of participation in visual and performing arts activities involve self-expression and collaboration. Some modalities of VAPA instruction are more easily adapted to distance learning than others. As the district pursues the goals of sequential learning and culturally responsive programming, in particular, special consideration should be given to how to implement a VAPA curriculum that is flexible enough that it can thrive in distance learning and in-person contexts. For example, drawing classes that are not material-intensive present fewer obstacles in a distance learning context than the popular pottery classes.

### Exacerbation of existing inequities among MNPS students

The impact of Covid-19 may well be to exacerbate existing inequities, and this extends to VAPA as well. Those students with resources may have access to private arts lessons, better instruments or materials, or even simply space enough to dance, play music, or create visual art. Beyond this, obviously, is the impact of unequal access to computers and other technologies that facilitate learning. These are societal issues, and beyond the scope of this document to meaningfully address, but important to mention here is the need to consider these inequities when planning for VAPA during Covid-19 and beyond. Lower dependency on specialized materials or tools, and lesser need for internet access during instruction time or to complete assignments will be beneficial.

### Increased value of SEL initiatives

Finally, while the impacts of this on students' emotional wellbeing and their social development are uncertain, we do know that this experience is isolating and traumatic for many. Visual and performing arts as a way to express, process, and communicate about traumatic experiences is well documented. Students are likely to be hungry for outlets where they can be expressive in dynamic ways that are limited at the moment for most of us. Coming together through the arts has long been one way that people deal with, process, and move through complex societal experiences. The more space that the district and MNPS VAPA teachers can make for expressive, dynamic, collaborative VAPA experiences that permit young people to have individualized experiences within a group setting, the better. VAPA should be seen as a powerful tool to help students reconnect with their peers and the school community, and process the changes in their lives in constructive ways.

## Annex 2: Yearly Action Plan—Goal 1

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### Goal 1: VAPA Are a Priority for the District and Are Integrated into District Planning

Timeline	Strategic Actions	Actions	Checklist
Year 1	Position VAPA as a district social-emotional learning (SEL) leader	SEL support documents prepared	<input type="checkbox"/>
Year 1	Position VAPA as a district social-emotional learning (SEL) leader	SEL-focused collaborative working session conducted	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ongoing Starting Y1	Position VAPA as a district social-emotional learning (SEL) leader	Ongoing support and advocacy for SEL through VAPA	Ongoing
Year 2	Position VAPA as a district social-emotional learning (SEL) leader	Annual review of VAPA-SEL initiatives conducted	<input type="checkbox"/>
Year 3	Position VAPA as a district social-emotional learning (SEL) leader	VAPA section of District-wide SEL framework designed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Year 3	Position VAPA as a district social-emotional learning (SEL) leader	VAPA-SEL professional development for teachers held	<input type="checkbox"/>
Year 3	Position VAPA as a district social-emotional learning (SEL) leader	Annual review of VAPA-SEL initiatives conducted	<input type="checkbox"/>
Year 4	Position VAPA as a district social-emotional learning (SEL) leader	Annual review of VAPA-SEL initiatives conducted	<input type="checkbox"/>
Year 5	Position VAPA as a district social-emotional learning (SEL) leader	Annual review of VAPA-SEL initiatives conducted	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Annex 5: Strategic Actions by Stakeholder Matrix

	VAPA Department	Teachers	Parents	School Administrators	Partners	District Leadership	MMU Advisory Council	Others
<b>Goal 1: VAPA are a priority for the district and are integrated into district planning</b>								
Strategic Action 1: Position VAPA as a district social-emotional learning (SEL) leader	Secondary Stakeholder	Secondary Stakeholder		Secondary Stakeholder	Secondary Stakeholder	Key Stakeholder	Secondary Stakeholder	

## Annex 6: VAPA SEL Resources

Allensworth, E.M., Farrington, C.A., Gordon, M.F., Johnson, D.W., Klein, K., McDaniel, B., & Nagaoka, J. (2018). Supporting social, emotional, & academic development: Research implications for

educators. University of Chicago Consortium on School Research.

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Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. (2018) From a nation at risk to a nation of hope. <http://nationathope.org/report-from-the-nation/>

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Edgar, S.N. (2017). *Music Education and Social Emotional Learning: The Heart of Teaching Music*.

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Farrington, C., Maurer, J, Aska McBride, M, Nagaoka, J, Puller, J.S., Shewfelt, S, Weiss, E.M. & Wright, L. (2019). Arts Education and Social-Emotional Learning Outcomes among K–12 Students: Developing a Theory of Action. Ingenuity & University of Chicago.

<https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2019-05/Arts%20Education%20and%20Social-Emotional-June2019-Consortium%20and%20Ingenuity.pdf>

Greenberg M, & Weissberg R. (2018). *Social and Emotional Development Matters: Taking Action Now for Future Generations*. Pennsylvania State University & Robert Wood Johnson

Foundation. <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2018/12/social-and-emotional-development-matters.html>

Layne, S. (2017). *Acting Right: Building a Cooperative, Collaborative, Creative Classroom Community Through Drama*

Martin, A.J., Mansour, M., Anderson, M., Gibson, R., Liem, G.A.D., & Sudmalis, D. (2013). The role of arts participation in students' academic and nonacademic outcomes: A longitudinal study of school, home, and community factors. *Journal of Educational Psychology*.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258100829\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Arts\\_Participation\\_in\\_Students'\\_Academic\\_and\\_Nonacademic\\_Outcomes\\_A\\_Longitudinal\\_Study\\_of\\_School\\_Home\\_and\\_Community\\_Factors](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258100829_The_Role_of_Arts_Participation_in_Students'_Academic_and_Nonacademic_Outcomes_A_Longitudinal_Study_of_School_Home_and_Community_Factors)

Further resources on social-emotional and therapeutic use of the arts collected by Turnaround Arts can be found here: <https://turnaroundartsca.org/social-emotional-and-therapeutic-use-of-arts/>

An example of a successful program which integrates SEL and VAPA is the UCLA Arts & Healing program “beat the odds<sup>®</sup>: social and emotional skill building delivered in a framework of drumming” more information on the program can be found here: <https://uclartsandhealing.org/services/professional-development/beat-the-odds-drumming-program/>