

MARYLAND'S FAMILY INVOLVEMENT POLICY INITIATIVES

Maryland State Department of Education

Baltimore, Maryland

The Maryland State Department of Education, under the leadership of State Superintendent Nancy S. Grasmick, has emphasized family involvement as integral to the state's development of high standards. With strong commitment to family involvement in schools, Dr. Grasmick established the Family Focus Council in April 2000 to advise on, advocate for, and help develop programs and policies that encourage effective home-school partnerships. Members of the Council include representatives of school systems, public libraries, statewide nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, Parent-Teacher Associations, interdepartmental offices, national organizations, and many others. These members are charged with supporting strategies to create school, family, and community partnerships in all Maryland schools. The Council began its initiative by drafting the state policy on family involvement that was adopted in October 2001 as a resolution.

The planning process to develop the family involvement policy began in July 2000 as a sub-committee of the Family Focus Council. The twenty-member group included representatives from the Maryland PTA, National Network of Partnership Schools, public libraries, National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, non-profit organizations, local school systems, and staff from the Maryland State Department of Education. The policy enhanced the Maryland State Board of Education's resolution on parent/community involvement of 1991. Over the course of the year, committee members reviewed the current resolution, researched policies from other states, and crafted language that met the needs of all stakeholders included in the policy. The committee also solicited input from various national, state, and local organizations, families, and school systems. The policy encourages schools and local school systems to implement long-term, comprehensive programs using the six types of involvement to build on the strengths of families and communities as schools work on reaching academic success for all children.

After the policy was adopted in October 2001, the next step was to communicate the policy to the schools, families, and communities in Maryland. The Maryland State Department of Education sent a press release to the media announcing the policy. A poster and brochure were produced to share the policy in easy-to-read formats. Dr. Grasmick sent a letter to every Maryland school with a copy of the policy poster, and copies of the poster were distributed to public libraries and PTAs, as well as other stakeholders. The brochure contains the policy, a letter from Dr. Grasmick, tips for helping

children to succeed in school, and contact information for further questions. It has been widely distributed at public events and conferences.

In November 2001, a ten-member subcommittee of the Family Focus Council began the essential task of turning the policy into action steps. This representative group has collaborated to write the goals, strategies, and activities to accompany the family involvement policy. The committee is in the process of examining critical issues and research-based information, setting goals based on the six types of involvement, developing strategies and guidelines, and identifying activities for comprehensive family and community involvement in Maryland schools. Once this document is completed in fall 2002, it will be presented to the State Board of Education for their approval. Once approved, dissemination and training through the PTA and the local school systems' family involvement coordinators will support schools in enhancing their partnership programs to align with the policy. The evolution of policy to action steps has taken time, and should prove to be a sound foundation for statewide school, family, and community partnership program development.

For further information about Maryland's family involvement policy or other family and community involvement initiatives, please visit the website at www.msde.state.md.us.

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