

Home-N-School Mini Grant Projects

*Cecil County Public Schools
Elkton, Maryland*

The Cecil County Public Schools has funded Home-N-School Mini Grant Projects to schools to strengthen family involvement since 1990. At that time, district-level staff conducted a systemic self-evaluation for improving student academic performance. The district team was inspired to initiate the Home-N-School Mini Grant Projects after a visit with Dr. Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University in 1989. Since then, this now institutionalized grants program, sponsored by the Board of Education, has grown from 6 schools and an initial budget of \$2,000 to 29 schools with a budget of \$17,000, allowing each Cecil County school to have at least one family involvement grant. This year the grants funded 67 different family involvement programs.

This promising practice is the district's primary means of improving and sustaining family involvement. The members of the system-level team help promote, select, monitor, and evaluate the Home-N-School Mini Grant Projects. Visits to schools are made to see the programs in action. Each year, the announcement for Mini Grant Project proposals is made to school teams in late March, with the written requests due by mid-June. One project per month is highlighted during a board of education meeting. Board of education members this year will participate in a gallery walk where specific schools will present displays of their projects.

Initially, secondary schools did not participate. Over time, and with the success at the elementary schools well documented,

these schools saw the value of the grant process and are now actively involved. In fact, across all levels, grant recipients report academic and social benefits for their students, with nearly all schools being placed above "needs improvement" status. A first-grade teacher at one elementary school reports, "My students and parents thoroughly enjoy the activities we do." A board of education member shares, "This is the most cost-effective program we have!" The board plans to increase funding for this project next year.

*Peter L. McCallum, Ed.D., Executive Director for
Middle School Education
(410) 996-5480
pmccallum@ccps.org*