

# Maryland Parent Advisory Council

Maryland State Department of Education  
Baltimore, Maryland

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) knew that it wanted to raise student achievement in its schools and that increased parent involvement was one way to accomplish that goal. The department leaders also knew, however, that this goal would not be accomplished overnight. MSDE developed a long-term plan for increasing parent involvement in Maryland's public schools.

M-PAC is Maryland's Parent Advisory Council, a statewide group of 120 parents, educators and advocates appointed by the State Superintendent of Schools, Nancy S. Grasmick, in the fall of 2003. Its purpose was to advise Dr. Grasmick and the State Board of Education on parent involvement issues ranging from policy to implementation.

To insure that M-PAC represented all of Maryland's parents, membership nominations were solicited from many groups and organizations that work with parents and families. The department selected members to serve on the main committee and on subcommittees, based on their expertise, region and experience.

The department's vision for education is organized around five goals. MSDE charged M-PAC with examining Goal 5: "Parents will be involved in education." The council examined state, local and school-based policies and school-based implementation strategies. The Main Council of M-PAC oversaw the work of three subcommittees on: 1) parent/family involvement and its impact on student achievement; 2) communication and partnership through non-traditional channels such as community and faith-based groups; and 3) education policy issues.

M-PAC's subcommittees conducted research, attended presentations by state and national experts, provided the Main Council with regular progress reports and produced final reports. From March through May 2005, M-PAC held public forums in all 24 school districts to give the public an opportunity to

review and provide feedback on the preliminary recommendations. The forums were well-publicized in multiple languages and formats, and yielded an impressive turnout in many locales.

M-PAC produced a final report, "A Shared Responsibility: Recommendations for Increasing Family and Community Involvement in Schools," and an executive summary that has been widely distributed. One recommendation stated that parents should participate on statewide and local educational committees and task forces. After publication of the report, MSDE surveyed these task forces and committees to see that they included parents.

Another recommendation focused on increasing parental involvement in decision-making. MSDE partnered with other organizations, including NNPS, to increase training opportunities for parents in the decision-making process and in developing school-based partnership programs. Still another recommendation addressed the need for varied methods of communication to parents. The department now translates publications in multiple languages and has designed a website that is more parent-friendly.

By heightening awareness of the importance of parent involvement, the state has increased opportunities for parents to participate in their children's education at many levels. This should increase the chances for success of the more than 800,000 Maryland students.

The work continues. A new group, the Superintendent's Family Involvement Council, was formed to advise the state superintendent on issues related to family involvement. This council meets twice a year to give parents' perspectives on statewide issues and activities.

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