

Comcast Parent Involvement Matters Awards

*Maryland State Department of Education
Baltimore, Maryland*

Parent volunteers in Maryland felt like movie stars at the Comcast Parent Involvement Matters Award last spring. Officials from the Maryland State Department of Education supported a glamorous award ceremony, featuring music, crystal trophies, and large cash prizes for finalists.

The idea for the award ceremony began in 2005 when the Maryland Parent Advisory Council made a recommendation to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). The council wanted to encourage more parents to take active roles in their children's schools, but there was no system of rewards in place, even for the most dedicated volunteers. They decided that an awards ceremony would help to celebrate the stellar parent participation that benefited Maryland Public Schools year after year.

MSDE approached members of the community and formed focus groups to help work out the details of how to implement the state-wide ceremony. After the discussions, MSDE designed the nomination process and the celebratory event. MSDE partnered with Comcast Cable Television who helped advertise the award on the air. They also organized several mass mailings to parents, students and school administrators.

The process of narrowing the field from 140 applicants was an arduous task. Officials from Comcast and the Maryland State Board of Education adopted a four-tiered system to review applications. This process involved 48 individuals from several well-respected educational organizations across the state. In keeping with the highest standards for Maryland's state education system, officials used a complex rubric to review and rate the applications.

MSDE staff picked up to three finalists from 23 participating districts. Then, MSDE invited influential administrators and other reviewers from across the state to select one winner from each local school system and six

semi-finalists across the state. These candidates were passed on to staff at MSDE and Comcast for a final round of questions in personal interviews and the selection of the state winner.

The 23 district award winners and their supporters attended the celebration in April to commemorate all parents' hard work. State officials opened the event with congratulatory remarks. Students from various schools across the state provided music during the ceremony. The winners from each district received glass trophies. The semi-finalists received a crystal bowl and cash prizes of \$250. The state winner received \$1,000.

The cost to implement the award ceremony was \$35,000, including payments for the trophies, decorations, and other elements of the reception. Funding came from the state and from Comcast. The Annapolis facility in which the award ceremony was held waived its rental costs.

The state plans to host an award ceremony again next year. They will start planning earlier to provide judges with more time to make their decisions.

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