

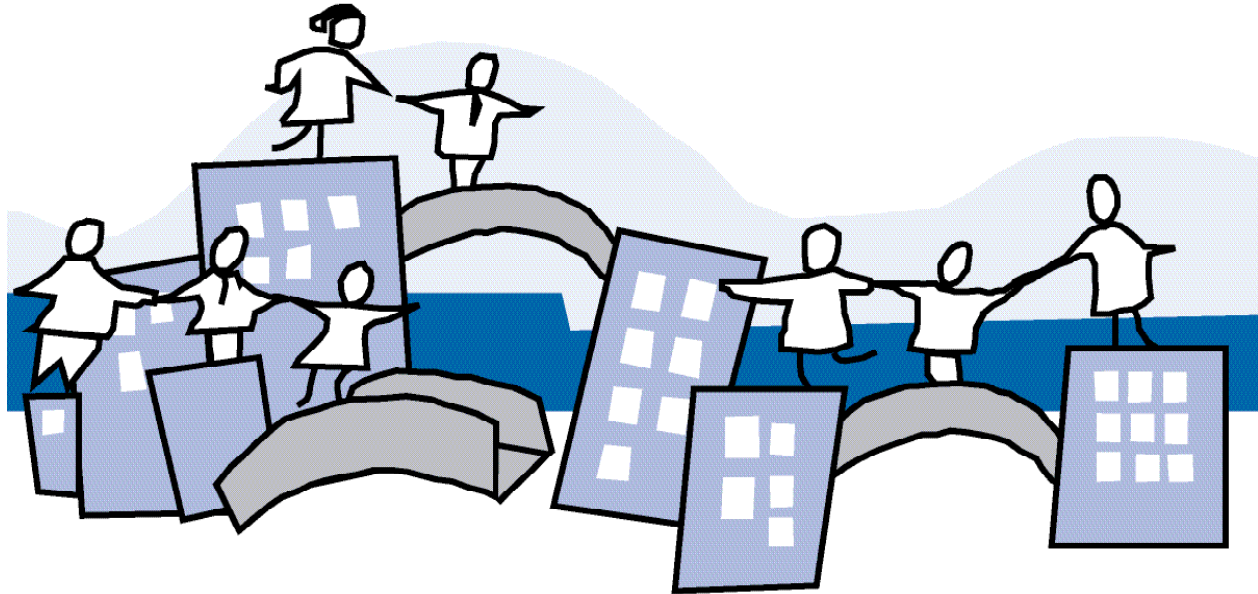
A Shared Responsibility

Recommendations for Increasing Family
& Community Involvement in Schools



Maryland's Parent Advisory Council (M-PAC)
Summary Report

A Shared Responsibility



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Recommendations for Increasing Family
and Community Involvement in Schools
Maryland's Parent Advisory Council (M-PAC)

Summary Report
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MESSAGE FROM THE MARYLAND SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

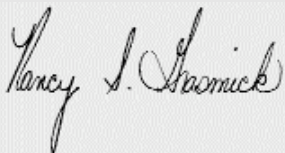
Dear Reader,

In 2003, I convened Maryland's Parent Advisory Council (M-PAC) because I believe in the powerful influence of parents, family, and the community on children's learning. Although Maryland had already undertaken several initiatives to increase involvement, I felt strongly that the state needed a long-term vision and plan for increasing involvement in public schools. And I felt just as strongly that this vision and plan not be created by the Department in isolation. I needed to hear from people who are, as they say, "in the field"—parents, teachers, principals, community members, activists. Thus, M-PAC was conceived.

Words can't express the respect I hold for the 120 M-PAC members and the work they have done. I am especially grateful to M-PAC Chair Esther Parker, who is bold in leadership and tireless in promoting M-PAC's work to stakeholders and policymakers across Maryland.

Although M-PAC has completed its task, the Department's work is, in many ways, just beginning. We must now take these recommendations and "give them legs." I have told M-PAC members that this report must not become "another dream on the shelf," crowded out by competing demands. We must now gather together—policymakers, parents, educators, advocates, and community leaders—to make the collective vision of M-PAC members a reality in Maryland public schools.

Sincerely,



Nancy S. Grasmick
State Superintendent of Schools

Policymakers, parents,
educators, advocates, and
community leaders **must**
now gather
together to make
the vision of M-PAC
a **reality**.

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MESSAGE FROM THE M-PAC CHAIR

Dear Reader,

Many states have convened groups to discuss family and community involvement in education, but M-PAC is unique. Rather than a group of educators with a few parent representatives, we are a group of parents with educator representatives. And, due to a survey of thousands of Maryland parents, our direction has been parent-driven. This was no accident. In fact, it was by Superintendent Grasmick's design. By convening M-PAC, and then by giving us the space and time necessary to do our work, Dr. Grasmick demonstrated her commitment to, and respect for, family involvement in schools.

I must also recognize here the Department's staff to M-PAC. Their superb planning and logistical support allowed M-PAC members to concentrate fully on the task at hand. Many thanks to Maureen Moran, Sandra Toomey, JoAnne Carter, Linda Bazerjian, Ann Chafin, Rosemary Johnston, Marlo Lemon, Barbara Scherr, Tom Rhoades, Valerie Ashton, Andrea Lewis, Larry Rogers, Natasha Miller, Cindy Schaefer, Pamela Brockington, Sheila Cox, Sharon Williamson, Marilyn Woschenko, and Lauren Proutt. And, of course, many thanks to the unsung heroes of every M-PAC meeting—facilitators Martha "Marti" Pogonowski, Lois Sanders, and Cindy McNamara.

For their invaluable guidance, I give special thanks to Adam Kernan-Schloss, President of KSA-Plus Communications, and Soo Hong, Gordon M. Ambach Policy Fellow from the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Together, we can
make a difference in
children's lives.

M-PAC has spent nearly two years studying the current state of family and school involvement in Maryland and identifying ways to increase the quantity and quality of it. The group took its work very seriously. The subcommittees spent long hours conducting research, writing analyses, and discussing their findings. The Main Council spent many nights and weekends analyzing the work of the subcommittees, discussing it, and adding to it, until we arrived at a final product.

I am very proud of M-PAC members and their dedication. It was an honor to be their Chair. I am also very proud of this report. There is no question in my mind that these recommendations have the potential to transform our schools. Please join us in supporting these recommendations. Together, we can make a difference in children's lives.

Sincerely,



Esther Parker
Chair, Maryland's Parent Advisory Council
President, Maryland PTA

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Membership

Main Council

Esther Parker—Chair
Rev. Vaughn L. Adams, Sr.
JoAnne L. Carter
Larry Crouse
Tina Cruz
Aaron Deal
Kirstie Durr
Peter Fernandez*
Larry Gaines
Sam Georgiou
Monica Heinsohn
Shelia Helton-Ingram
Shawn Johnson
Lisa Kaminski
Kay Kelley
Stephanie Kirby
Jean Lewis
Samuel Macer*
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Christina Park
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Robyn Scates
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Nancy Spence
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Shirley Brown
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Annie Foster-Ahmed
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Molly Groton
Tracee Hamlett
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Michael G. Leahy
Michael McLaughlin
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Marva Mitchell
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Ann Wolfgang
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Nontraditional Communication

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Kim Blair
Kari Bullamore
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Nora I. Cartland
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Nomsa Elizabeth Geleta
Susan Hahn
Marnie Halpern
LaTanya Bailey Jones
Margaret Ann Kennedy
Rosemary King-Johnston
The Honorable Susan Krebs
Cheryl Logan
Denise Madden
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Joseph Prudden
Paul Rankin
Patrice Ricciardi
Peter Rosen
Natalie Ruark
Terry Troy
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Frank Wise

Advisors to M-PAC

Adam Kernan-Schloss, President
KSA-Plus Communications
Soo Hong, Gordon M. Ambach Policy
Fellow, Council of Chief State
School Officers

* Subcommittee Chairs

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HISTORY & CHARGE

State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick established Maryland's Parent Advisory Council (M-PAC) in fall 2003. She charged M-PAC with making recommendations on how the Maryland State Department of Education can meet the family-involvement goal (Goal 5) and objectives from its strategic plan, **Achievement Matters Most**.

Goal 5: Families will be involved in education.

Objectives:

1. School systems and schools will communicate more frequently and clearly with families and communities.
2. Schools will help parents and legal guardians enhance their parenting skills and will share with them activities to promote academic success.

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3. All school systems will adopt a family involvement policy aligned with the state's.
4. Schools will help parents and legal guardians improve school and student performance.

M-PAC's scope included state, local, and school-based policies and implementation strategies. Its work began with a parent survey developed by Soo Hong, Policy Fellow from the Council of Chief State School Officers. The survey was distributed to and collected from thousands of parents. The survey feedback directed the work of three subcommittees. The M-PAC Main Council oversaw the work of the subcommittees, which were organized around the following categories: parent involvement and its impact on student achievement; communication and partnership through non-traditional channels such as community and faith-based groups; and education policy issues. Each subcommittee was asked to address the overall goals according to the parameters of its area of responsibility.

Subcommittee members met once or twice monthly to delve into the issues. They conducted research, listened to presentations from state and national experts, provided the Main Council regular progress reports, and produced final reports. The Main Council guided the subcommittees in their work, analyzed their reports, discussed them in detail, and built on the subcommittee work to create preliminary recommendations. Chair Esther Parker presented the preliminary recommendations to the State Board of Education in February 2005.

From March through May 2005, M-PAC held public forums in all 24 school systems to allow the public an opportunity to review and provide feedback on the preliminary recommendations. The public forums were well publicized—in multiple languages and formats—and yielded impressive turnouts in many locales. Diverse groups of parents, educators, and other stakeholders attended. Their feedback was considered carefully by the Main Council and used to finalize the recommendations in this report.

With publication of this report, the current M-PAC has completed its work. However, a new, smaller advisory group will carry on the work of the original M-PAC. This new group will monitor implementation of the M-PAC recommendations and gather and communicate best practices in increasing family and community involvement in schools.

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VISION & PRINCIPLES

Vision

Parents, families, educators, and community members work together as real partners, hold themselves mutually accountable, and have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed at **improving the achievement of all students**.

Underlying Principles

To achieve this vision we embrace these principles:

- Parents, educators, and communities are mutually accountable for improving student achievement by supporting parent involvement. This shared responsibility should be monitored and annually reported on by the Maryland State Department of Education.



- Schools must offer a welcoming, trustful, and engaging environment.
- The Maryland State Department of Education, institutions of higher learning, local school systems, and schools must provide ongoing training so that parents and educators can be full partners, informed decision-makers, and effective advocates for children.
- Schools and school systems must respond to the increasing needs of the state's diverse families and communities.
- Parents must support their child's learning at home and in school and must serve as their child's advocate.
- Parents, educators, and community members must be advocates for all children.

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PREAMBLE

The case for involvement

Thirty years of research show that family involvement is a powerful influence on student achievement. When families are involved in education—such as organizing and monitoring children’s time, helping with homework, discussing school matters, and reading to them—children tend to perform better academically than their peers. They earn higher grades and test scores than students with less involved families; attend school and complete homework more regularly; are better behaved; and are more likely to graduate high school and attend college.

Research also shows us that what a family does is more important to student success than what a family is or earns. That is, family involvement exceeds parents’ education and household income as the most reliable predictor of academic achievement. It all boils down to this: when parents are involved in education, their children do better in school and in life. That’s an enduring power families have; it’s the kind of power Maryland schools must capitalize on. M-PAC’s recommendations are designed to help schools and families do that.

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M-PAC has been a collaborative effort among parents, educators, activists, community members and others for whom public education is a concern. For nearly two years, the Main Council and subcommittee members worked together—sharing, learning, deliberating, and negotiating—to arrive at the recommendations in this report.

So, too, M-PAC intends for the execution of these recommendations to be a joint activity—and a shared responsibility—among the home, school, and community. At forums across the state, educators reviewing the preliminary recommendations said, in essence, “We cannot do this alone.” M-PAC emphatically affirms this position. Certainly, the school is a good starting point for building momentum, and a critical partner in sustaining it. But families and community member—e.g., childcare providers, business leaders, faith-based institution representatives—must also be in the school and “at the table,” and the state and local school systems must provide leadership and support, if Maryland is to bring about the changes proposed in this report.

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The Maryland State Board of Education recognized the importance of involvement from all areas—school, home, and community—when it adopted in October 2001 the Maryland Family Involvement Policy. Crafted by M-PAC’s predecessor, the Maryland Family Focus Council, the Family Involvement Policy broadly defines roles and expectations for involvement. The policy specifically calls for schools to better involve parents in the educational process, for parents to provide a home atmosphere conducive to learning, and for community members and organizations to be involved in the learning process. See pages 11-12 for the full text of the Maryland Family

Involvement Policy, which M-PAC members fully support. In fact, they specifically requested that the Policy be included in this report.

Building an organizational structure

Throughout their discussions, M-PAC members repeatedly emphasized the need for an organizational structure—at the state, school system, and school levels—that supports family and community involvement. M-PAC’s emphasis on an organizational structure is supported by National PTA standards to bolster parent involvement in education and by the Six Types of Family Involvement Framework by Dr. Joyce Epstein, Director of the National Network of Partnership Schools and the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University. The organizational structure would ensure the necessary processes, resources, and opportunities are in place.

Without state, local, and school level organizational structures, Maryland is unlikely to see any real change. The recommendations in the Leadership section of this report support this organizational structure.

“Education is too important to be left solely to educators.”

Francis Keppel, U.S. Commissioner of Education, 1962-1965

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MARYLAND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT POLICY

The Maryland State Board of Education adopted this policy as a resolution on October 30, 2001.

WHEREAS, the Maryland State Board of Education recognizes that parents and families are a young child's first teachers, and that when children enter school the responsibility for their education is then shared with the school and the entire community; and

WHEREAS, the Maryland State Board of Education recognizes that creating positive home, school, and community partnerships is essential to carrying out this shared responsibility successfully; and

WHEREAS, the Maryland State Board of Education recognizes that in order to accomplish the mission of Maryland's schools to successfully educate all students, the community, schools, parents, and students must work as knowledgeable partners;

NOW THEREFORE, the Maryland State Board of Education adopts this policy statement for key stakeholders in ensuring quality education for all students:

The State Board believes that schools must create an environment that is conducive to learning and supports strong comprehensive family involvement programs. Schools will strive to involve parents and family members of children at all ages and grade levels by providing and respecting a variety of types and degrees of involvement, while recognizing the diverse needs of families in their community. Schools will inform and involve parents and caregivers in children's learning activities and academic decisions at home and in school. Further, schools will establish high levels of cooperation and coordination with other community agencies that provide services to children and families.

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Parents and other family members are the child's first teachers. They will be encouraged to provide a home atmosphere conducive to learning and express to their children the importance of education. Further, parents and family members will be expected to cooperate with teachers and school administrators in matters relating to their child's education and will be encouraged to participate meaningfully in school programs, program planning, and decision making. Schools also need the support of other members of the community, including parent organizations, public libraries,

businesses, and faith-based organizations to promote effective education. Community groups will be helped to recognize that investment in education is investment in the community. Further, community groups will be encouraged to help schools develop and implement innovative programs that promote educational goals and support high academic expectations for all students.

The Maryland State Department of Education has the role of fostering wider and more substantive family and community involvement by identifying and sharing information with parents and families about effective educational programs. It will also provide information on funding sources for the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs. Further, it will develop professional development programs on family/school/community involvement for school staff and families. The Maryland State Department of Education will develop programs that nurture and support parents/families by enhancing their parenting skills and encouraging them to provide academic assistance to their children. Special efforts will be made to reach those who did not have a positive school experience or for whom English is not their native language.

The Maryland State Board of Education and the Maryland Department of Education will continue to support and assist schools and local school systems in developing, implementing, and evaluating policies and programs that involve all parents and families at all grade levels. It will seek to collaborate with faith-based organizations and other community agencies serving children and families to encourage parent and family involvement in the lives of children.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The recommendations are presented in five themes: communication, leadership, training, partnership, and accountability. These themes arose from the Main Council's discussions of the subcommittee reports. Because the recommendations are often cross-cutting and the themes so interwoven, some recommendations would be equally appropriate in multiple themes. The purpose of the categorization was to provide structure to the recommendations. It is important to note that the recommendations are not prioritized. Each recommendation builds on the other, thereby resisting attempts at ranking.

However, the Main Council does emphasize the importance of one recommendation, feeling strongly that it is the linchpin for achieving the rest of the recommendations. This recommendation is the second bullet-item in the Leadership section: "Ensure the establishment of an organizational structure that includes personnel at the state, local school system, and school levels. This structure will oversee leadership, training, monitoring, and support for family and community involvement and partnerships." The Main Council believes that this particular recommendation must be implemented if Maryland is to make substantive improvements in family and community involvement.

Readers may notice that many recommendations are "encouraged" rather than "required." In these cases, the Main Council felt that it was either not appropriate or not possible to make the recommendation a requirement. The group and Dr. Grasmick recognize that, in practice, encouraged items often receive much less attention than those that are mandated. To help maintain the focus on family and community involvement, Dr. Grasmick plans to appoint a standing advisory group that will monitor progress of state and local implementation of the M-PAC recommendations. This standing group will also gather best practices in local school systems and facilitate sharing of these practices across the state.

Lastly, as it was not part of the group's charge, M-PAC consciously omitted any references to funding in this report. The group believes that the responsibility for identifying funds to support family and community involvement lies with the State Department of Education and State Board of Education.



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I. Communication

Rationale

Clear, regular, two-way communication is the linchpin of successful school-home partnerships. If schools seek to increase involvement, they must communicate to families and communities their rights and responsibilities and how they can support schools. Likewise, families and communities contribute to school improvement by providing feedback on—or directly shaping—policies, programs, student achievement, and more.

Communicating clearly and regularly takes time and careful planning. The task becomes even more challenging when one considers the diversity of Maryland families. More than 100 languages are spoken in the state. Students hail from varied racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. Family structure and characteristics vary as well—two-parent, single-parent, and no-parent families, military families, single-income or dual-income families, families with step-parents and step-siblings, the list goes on. Educators are faced with the monumental task of communicating effectively with an amazingly diverse group of people.

The following recommendations take such diversity into account and support clear, regular, two-way communication between schools, families, and communities.

Recommendations

To improve parents' ability to be involved in schools, the Maryland State Department of Education should...

- n Communicate—using varied methods, media, resources, and languages—the rights and responsibilities of parents to develop and respond to education policy, procedures, and practices at the state, local school system, and school levels.

local school systems and schools should...

- n Hold regular, meaningful parent/teacher conferences that address the full range of issues affecting student achievement.
- n Using varied methods, media, and languages, regularly provide parents information on their rights and responsibilities, on grading and discipline policies, and on the importance of meaningful parent involvement.

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- n Using varied methods, media, and languages, provide parents curriculum and program information by grade and suggest steps for improving individual student achievement. A committee of parents and educators should review the information to ensure that it is understandable to all parents.

II. Leadership

Rationale

Strong leadership is essential for any major reform effort. M-PAC members held lengthy discussions about the importance of leadership at the state, district, school, parent, and community levels. A critical part of leadership, group members decided, is ensuring the necessary processes and organizational structure are in place to involve all stakeholders. After all, there are already some strong parent involvement policies in place across the state. What is somewhat lacking, group members noted, is the implementation of such policies. This could be improved with more defined processes, and with more structured encouragement and modeling of family involvement initiatives from the State and local school systems.

Hence, the following recommendations are designed to create leadership opportunities and to build an organizational structure to support family involvement. Implementing these recommendations will be a strong show of leadership for the State and local school systems.

Recommendations

To build the leadership and organizational structure necessary to support family and community involvement in schools, the Maryland State Board of Education and/or Maryland State Department of Education should ...

- n Initiate and/or support legislation that would place at least two parents with a child attending a Maryland public school on the State Board of Education.
- n Ensure the establishment of an organizational structure that includes personnel at the state, local school system, and school levels. This structure will oversee leadership, training, monitoring, and support for family and community involvement and partnerships.
- n Encourage local school systems to establish parent involvement advisory groups to advise their local boards of education on parent involvement concerns, practices, and research. These groups would also communicate board policies, parent involvement strategies, and research to parents and communities.

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III. Training

Rationale

The Main Council and the work of the subcommittees made clear the imperative for training—not only for teachers, but for principals, parents, central office staff, community members, and others with a stake in improving schools.

Consider that math teachers are required to understand and teach math. Prospective math teachers take relevant coursework and receive pre-service training in math instruction. Experienced math teachers hone their skills with regular professional development. If teachers and other educators are expected to facilitate relationships and partnerships with the family/community, then they must understand communication and involvement strategies. Specific, ongoing training is required to build this understanding. Likewise, parents and other stakeholders require training to become full partners. They need to learn how to contribute to school improvement teams, how to advocate for children, how to help individual students academically, and more.

Recommendations

To increase the amount and effectiveness of family and community involvement in schools, the Maryland State Department of Education should...

- n Assess local school systems' parent and community involvement training needs, and then provide school systems appropriate technical assistance, training, resources, and mentoring.
- n Encourage local school systems to include family and community involvement measures in their local assessment of training needs.
- n Work with local school systems, colleges, and universities to develop and offer coursework on family involvement for current teachers, administrators, and other school staff.
- n Work with colleges and universities to develop a course in parent and community involvement that is a requirement for all undergraduate education students seeking teaching certification in Maryland.

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the Maryland State Board of Education should...

- n Encourage local boards of education to support parent and community involvement training for central office staff, school-based staff, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members.

local school systems should...

- n Provide or ensure that schools provide job-embedded staff training that addresses issues related to individual student needs, family advocacy, cultural proficiency, and—to ensure a family-friendly atmosphere in the school—parent involvement and customer service skills.
- n Provide or ensure that schools provide training for parents and community members on leadership and effective involvement with schools. To maximize access to training, it should be offered at schools, at additional sites that are convenient to the community, and on the Web.



IV. Partnership

Rationale

“It takes a village to raise a child,” is an oft-used phrase, with good reason. A family’s influence can reach only so far, so positive influences and supports from the community are needed for children to realize their potential. Further, some children and families have unmet health and welfare needs that serve as barriers to achievement. Working together, schools, families, and communities can remove such barriers and set the stage for accelerated academic achievement.

Home-school-community collaborations, however, are more than supportive services or mentoring programs—though these are invaluable. True partnerships involve mutual respect, two-way communication, shared decision-making, and shared accountability. The recommendations presented here are designed to support strong partnerships among Maryland families, schools, and communities.

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Recommendations

To encourage and support schools' partnerships with families and communities, the Maryland State Department of Education should...

- n Encourage all committees and task forces at the state, local school system, and school levels to offer an opportunity for participation to at least two parents (or 25% of the membership) with a child attending a Maryland public school.
- n Encourage public schools to collaborate with community agencies to provide in schools such services as wellness centers, health care (physical and mental), social services, and childcare.
- n Develop programs and incentives for more effective communication and partnerships (parent and community, including businesses) at the state, local school system, and school levels.

V. Accountability

Rationale

Accountability was a recurring theme throughout the Main Council's discussions and the three subcommittee reports. Modern families and school staffs have strict time constraints and multiple priorities. M-PAC is sympathetic to these demands. But, to make sure involvement does not get lost in the shuffle, accountability measures are necessary. As several M-PAC members said, "We treasure what we measure," and "What gets measured gets done."

This call for accountability was accompanied by an admission that involvement is not the responsibility of educators alone. Rather, it is a responsibility shared among schools, families, and communities. M-PAC believes that accountability measures are useful tools in improving student achievement, but that they should not be used or perceived as a means of placing blame on any particular group or person. Accordingly, the group arrived at several recommendations (some required, some encouraged) designed to change attitudes and actions. These accountability recommendations will help move away from the notion of family involvement as an "add-on" and toward the acceptance of involvement as a valuable, essential strategy to improve student achievement.

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Recommendations

To support and measure the effectiveness of family and community involvement in schools, the Maryland State Board of Education and/or Maryland State Department of Education should...

- n Adopt the State Board's 2001 Family Involvement Policy Resolution into the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR). Require local school systems to align their family involvement policies with this COMAR regulation.
- n Develop a set of survey questions—that could stand alone or be incorporated into existing local school system survey instruments—to assess annually the effectiveness of parent and community involvement policies and practices. Input from local school systems and advocacy and community groups must be sought in the development of the survey. This survey information should be used to design and modify parent/family involvement activities detailed in each local school system's Master Plan and annual update.
- n Establish benchmarks—in collaboration with local systems and advocacy and community groups—for local school systems and schools to use in measuring the effectiveness and progress of their parent and community involvement policies and practices. Once these benchmarks are established, progress should be reported in the Maryland School Performance Report.
- n Encourage local school systems to factor parent and family involvement into the annual performance evaluations of school administrators and staff.

Concluding Statement

Maryland's Parent Advisory Council, and its subcommittees, crafted the preceding recommendations with much research, discussion, and deliberation. Members emphasized that full implementation of these recommendations is fundamental if Maryland is to increase the quantity and quality of family and community involvement in public schools. Information on the forthcoming M-PAC monitoring implementation committee will be published on the M-PAC section of the Maryland State Department of Education Web site at www.marylandpublicschools.org.



Maryland State Department of Education

on the **Web**

www.marylandpublicschools.org