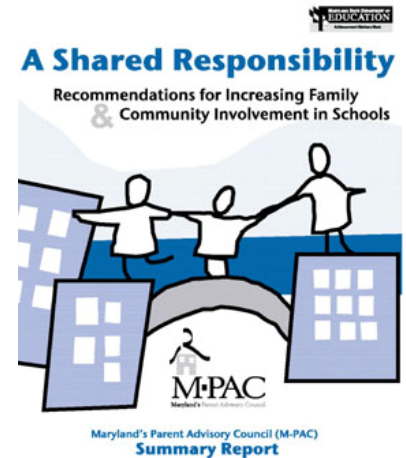


# Maryland's Recommendations for Increasing Family and Community Involvement in Schools

The November NPCIE meeting featured a presentation of the Maryland Parent Advisory Council's (M-PAC) recommendations to the Maryland State Board of Education for strengthening parent involvement. On hand to share with us the M-PAC final report, *A Shared Responsibility: Recommendations for Increasing Family and Community Involvement in Schools* and to provide first hand knowledge of its development was **Esther Parker**, President of Maryland's PTA and Chair of M-PAC, Maryland's Parent Advisory Council, **LaVerne Nicholson Sykes**, a Main Council member and Director of the Office of Parent Involvement and Family, School, Community Connections in Baltimore City Public Schools, and **Adam Kernan-Schloss**, President, KSA-Plus Communications, who served as a consultant to M-PAC during this process. An overview of their presentation and highlights of the M-PAC project including the History, Rationale and Recommendation is provided below.



## A Look at Parent Involvement Initiatives in Maryland and M-PAC's Charge

In October 2001, The Maryland State Board of Education adopted a statewide Family Involvement Policy. At the time of its adoption, this policy was one of the most inclusive policies in the country and was a demonstration of Maryland's support and commitment to promoting family and community involvement in public education. In the fall of 2003, Nancy Grasmick, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools, convened Maryland's Parent Advisory Council (M-PAC); a statewide group of 125 appointed parents and advocates who advise the State Board of Education and Dr. Grasmick on parent involvement issues ranging from policy to implementation. Specifically, Dr. Grasmick charged M-PAC with making recommendations on how the Maryland State Department of Education could meet the state's family-involvement goal (known as Goal 5) and objectives from its strategic plan, *Achievement Matters Most*. Goal 5 states that: *Families will be involved in education*. There are four objectives related to this goal:

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

M-PAC spent nearly two years studying the current state of parent and family involvement in Maryland and identifying ways to increase the quantity and quality of it. The scope of the project included state, local and school-based policies and implementation strategies. The work of the project began with a survey developed by Soo Hong, a Policy Fellow from the Council of Chief State School Officers. The survey was distributed to and collected from 1,684 parents, educators, community members and other stakeholders. Feedback from that survey directed the work of three M-PAC subcommittees:

- Parent Involvement and its Impact on Student Achievement
- Communications and Partnership Through Non-Traditional Channels

## Education Policy Issues

An M-PAC Main Council oversaw the work of each subcommittee, which met one to two times a month. Additionally, they each conducted research, listened to presentations from state and national level experts in their respective committee level areas, and submitted reports to the Main Council. It was the information gleaned from these individual reports that guided the creation of a preliminary set of recommendations from M-PAC to the State Board of Education in February 2005.

In order to allow the Maryland public to review and provide feedback on these preliminary recommendations, public forums were held in all 24 school systems in the state. Each forum was held in locations close to public transportation, publicized in multiple formats and languages and participation by diverse groups of stakeholders in the community was very good, including: parents, educators, and community and business partners. The feedback given in these forums was used to finalize a set of recommendations to the State Board.

### **M-PAC's Five Recommendations**

M-PAC's final report to the Maryland State Board of Education represents the strongest set of recommendations in the country in support of parent involvement in public education. This includes mandatory participation by parents on the State Board of Education, emphasis on training in the field of parent involvement for parents and educators alike, as well as regular satisfaction surveys, and a recommendation for local level districts to include parent satisfaction as a factor in staff reviews and assessments. The recommendations have five themes:

1. Communication
2. Leadership
3. Training
4. Partnership
5. Accountability

**M-PAC's Communication Recommendations:** To improve parents' ability to be involved in schools, the Maryland State Department of Education should...

- 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...

- Hold regular, meaningful parent/teacher conferences that address the full range of issues affecting student achievement.
- 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.
- 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.

**M-PAC's Leadership 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 ...

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

**M-PAC's Training Recommendations:** To increase the amount and effectiveness of family and community involvement in schools, the Maryland State Department of Education should...

- Assess local school systems' parent and community involvement training needs, and then provide school systems appropriate technical assistance, training, resources, and mentoring.
- Encourage local school systems to include family and community involvement measures in their local assessment of training needs.
- Work with local school systems, colleges, and universities to develop and offer coursework on family involvement for current teachers, administrators, and other school staff.
- 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.

The Maryland State Board of Education should...

- 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...

- 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.
- 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.

**M-PAC's Partnership Recommendations:** To encourage and support schools' partnerships with families and communities, the Maryland State Department of Education should...

- 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.
- 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.
- Develop programs and incentives for more effective communication and partnerships (parent and community, including businesses) at the state, local school system, and school levels.

**M-PAC's Accountability 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...

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Encourage local school systems to factor parent and family involvement into the annual performance evaluations of school administrators and staff.

## **Concluding Statements and Next Steps**

The recommendations by M-PAC were unanimously adopted by the Maryland State Board of Education on August 30, 2005. They have also been endorsed by the National PTA and the Secretary of Education. The work of the current M-PAC has been completed and a new advisory group will monitor the implementation of the recommendations, gather information and communicate to Maryland's citizens the best practices involved in increasing parent involvement in schools.

*(Source: A Shared Responsibility Final Report, NCPPIE Update-March 2002, "Md. Backs Closer Ties Between School, Family," The Washington Post, August 31, 2005)*