

## Briefing Report

U.S. Department of Education and partners

### Webinar - A New Day: Family, School, and Community Engagement in Education Reform



On June 30, the U.S. Department of Education (ED), United Way Worldwide, National PTA, SEDL, and the Harvard Family Research Project Center hosted a webinar to explore how to reframe family, school, and community engagement to build sustained and systematic strategies.

- **Anna Hinton, Director of Parental Options and Information** in the ED office of Innovation and Improvement stressed the need to move to a research-based definition of family, school, and community engagement that includes efforts driven by data and research as opposed to random, piecemeal activities.
- **Thelma Melendez de Santa Ana, Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education**, asserted that family engagement is an important factor in ED's overall school reform efforts. She noted that [ED's ESEA Blueprint](#) included enhanced transparency for parents in academic performance and school climate, as well as an emphasis on a more systemic integration of engagement strategies to a school's overall efforts to increase student achievement. Additionally, in May, ED proposed to increase the amount of federal funds set aside for family engagement from one to two percent of Title I dollars and add another \$145 million for competitive grants to Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs), districts, and community-based organizations under a new Family Engagement and Responsibility Fund. Melendez also stressed the need for strong state-level partnerships to help increase the capacity of schools through technical assistance and targeted Title I funding in an effort to link family engagement strategies to student success.
- The best example of a state-level partnership highlighted in the webinar is the partnership between the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Maryland State PIRC. **Barbara Scherr, Family Involvement Coordinator at MSDE**, stressed that increasing and sustaining family engagement in Maryland schools is a multifaceted effort by a number of organizations and individuals at multiple levels. For instance, Maryland State PIRC provides statewide support with the MSDE goal of building capacity for family engagement and student achievement. The Maryland PTA provides leadership development and family engagement training to Title I schools. A parent involvement policy exists at the district level, as well as family involvement coordinators, ELL-family outreach coordinators, and Title I coordinators. At the school level, each Title I school has a plan for implementing Title I for parents that is distributed to parents in a family-friendly format.
- Building capacity for the current system began at the end of the 2007 school year with multiple discussions between MSDE and the Maryland State PIRC about the requirements of Title I. At that time, one local school system had already developed training for family engagement and drafting the school-parent compact. MSDE further developed this training to include

requirements under ESEA (known in its current form as NCLB) before adopting it statewide. MSDE also added the requirement that districts and school-level plans include how they share information with parents about PIRCs. PIRCs sponsor many of these Title I Parental Involvement School Team Trainings with the assistance of Title I coordinators. Trainings must have in attendance a minimum of one administrator, one parent, and one teacher. A large part of the training session is focused on the school-level plan and initiating a draft of the school-parent compact. Forty-nine Title I Parental Involvement School Team Trainings were held over the past two years with more than 500 total participants. The results thus far have been promising. Maryland transitioned from 67 schools non-compliant with ESEA parental involvement provisions in the 2008-2009 school year to 11 schools non-compliant in the 2009-2010 school year.

- Scherr and **Susan Shaffer, Director of the Maryland State PIRC**, highlighted the following four key lessons learned over two years of training: 1) Participants often feel intimidated and knowledge of Title I varies, 2) Buy-in from administrators and Title I coordinators is a must, 3) Support from PIRCs are necessary, and 4) Substantial time to work on the school-level involvement plan and school-parent compact is necessary.
- **Related Resources:**
  - [A Toolkit for Title I Parental Involvement](#) (SEDL resource)
  - [Tellin' Stories](#) (Washington, DC and Maryland parent organizing program)
  - [Taking Leadership, Innovating Change: Profiles in Family, School, and Community Engagement](#) (National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group report)
  - [New Visions for Public Schools: Using Data to Engage Families](#) (Harvard Family Research Project case study)
  - [Creating Environments to Promote Innovation](#) (Harvard Family Research Project commentary)

### **Implications for NCTE**

NCTE supports teachers in their efforts to engage families in their child's education. For example, [ReadWriteThink](#) provides teachers with family engagement lesson plans. NCTE also commented on the importance of family and community engagement in the 2010 Legislative Platform. The platform defines teacher effectiveness in multiple ways, including as professional practice that "engages parents and community members as partners in educating students." The platform also encourages legislators to improve the quality and use of assessments in numerous ways, including by investing in community-based plans with contributions from parents and community leaders.

NCTE might consider going beyond statements of support for family and community engagement to providing in-depth information that could better inform stakeholders at the federal, state, and local levels. For instance, the James R. Squire Office of Policy Research could provide recent research on family and community engagement. NCTE could also survey members about engagement strategies they support and have utilized with proven success.

Stacey Novelli  
NCTE DC Office