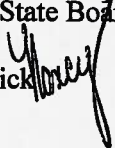




Nancy S. Grasmick  
State Superintendent of Schools

200 West Baltimore Street • Baltimore, MD 21201 • 410-767-0100 • 410-333-6442 TTY/TDD • MarylandPublicSchools.org

**TO:** Members of the State Board of Education  
**FROM:** Nancy S. Grasmick   
**DATE:** March 22, 2011  
**SUBJECT:** Meeting the New Standards: Support Programs for Graduation and Dropout

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**PURPOSE:**

To provide information on what the Department and local school systems (LSSs) are doing to promote school program completion and prevent dropping out.

**BACKGROUND/HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:**

During the 1980s and 1990s, federal funds were available for dropout prevention that were granted to LSSs for implementing of a program entitled **Maryland's Tomorrow**. This was a program geared to 9<sup>th</sup> grade students who were at high risk for dropping out of school. It involved intensive intervention, daily support, and exposure to cultural and higher education opportunities. As those funds were eliminated, the Department working with the LSSs began to view dropping out as a process and not an event. Signs appearing as early as elementary school demonstrated the need for a K-12 dropout prevention and intervention strategies and programming.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Many factors contribute to a student failing to complete a program of studies. Students who are disengaged from school which can start as early as elementary school are a risk. Some students who do not adjust to school rules and receive multiple suspensions often feel that they are not wanted or cared for by the school staff. Factors such as financial and caretaking responsibilities, pregnancy, and gaining early employment can gravely influence a teenager's decision to stay in school.

Poor attendance and/or truancy are indicators that a student is withdrawing from the educational process. LSSs are required to implement attendance policies that include a process for intervening in cases of truancy and high absenteeism and motivational programs to reward good attendance (COMAR 13A.08.01.05). Factors such as failure to attain reading abilities by the fourth grade, not making a smooth transition from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school greatly influence a student's perspective on school.

Interventions that have demonstrated improved student connectedness to school show promise in attaining program completion. High expectations and challenging curriculum have also shown a positive effect on students deciding to stay in school. Providing assistance in making transitions, such as cohort groups, 9<sup>th</sup> grade academies, and advisory periods have shown effectiveness also.

Members of the State Board of Education  
March 22, 2011  
Page 2 of 2

Moreover, LSSs are required to report in their Bridge to Excellence Master Plans and annual updates their progress in preventing dropping out and increasing their graduation rates. This emphasis has focused attention on issues relating to attendance, dropping out, and improving graduation rates.

The Department has assisted LSSs through participation in a national movement entitled America's Promise. LSSs were asked to convene a school/parent/community team to attend a conference and develop an action plan. Moreover, the Department has developed tools to assist LSSs in their prevention efforts such as an early warning system and a Dropout Prevention Resource Guide. The Department has led the way in setting expectations for students who receive a high diploma through the High School Assessments. Moreover, efforts in the area of early childhood initiatives have shown progress in assisting students prepare for learning and school.

**ACTION:**

For information and discussion purposes.

NSG:AEC:cjb