



**A few words
from State
Superintendent
of Schools
Nancy S.
Grasmick**

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has joined with other organizations across the nation to emphasize the importance of wellness and daily physical activity.



MSDE has expanded its Take 15 for the Health of It! program in an effort to stimulate physical activity and fitness in a variety of ways that

include, issuing grants to increase the Team Nutrition program into additional schools; improving the quality of the School Breakfast and School Lunch programs; and administering a poster contest to Maryland students to raise health awareness and engage children in nutrition education and increased physical activities.

We believe that the betterment of one's physical health is not just a personal endeavor, but also a means through which to better serve society and humanity, while ensuring wellness. Restoring wellness and increasing daily physical activity in children is not just an MSDE goal or agenda - it is an obligation for all of us. Parents play an intricate role in the success of any wellness routine by

EFFORTS TO IMPROVE SPECIAL EDUCATION IN BALTIMORE CITY PROVING SUCCESSFUL

Baltimore City has made important progress toward meeting the needs of its special education students, according to a new report, and the Maryland State Department of Education's involvement has played a critical role in strengthening the city's ability to be successful.



State Superintendent Grasmick spotlights the work of the past four years, as Baltimore City CEO Andrés Alonso looks on.

Vaughn G. v. the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, et al., has been an ongoing federal education case since 1984. MSDE voluntarily became a party to the case when State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick agreed to assist the school system. Since May 2000, the case has been under the

supervision for the federal court by Special Master Amy Totenberg.

Special Master Totenberg's latest report, filed this month, found that Baltimore City Public Schools are on the right path. Progress has been made with the critical involvement of MSDE's Intensive Management Capacity Improvement Team (IMCIT), put in place by Dr. Grasmick in 2005.

MSDE joined Baltimore City representatives in a press

practicing nutritional responsibility with their family.

I encourage you to visit our websites that offer physical education links and nutrition information for a healthier lifestyle. Remember to Take 15 for Physical Activity and Take 15 for the Health of It!

For more information about the Take 15 for the Health of It! program, [click here](#).

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Healthy eating promotes healthy learning. Toward that end, MSDE's School and Community Nutrition Programs Branch is celebrating National Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Week next week.

The theme, "Pleasing the Picky Palate," encourages child care providers and parents to promote a variety of nutritious foods to children. The CACFP is a US Department of Agriculture-funded nutrition education and reimbursement program for licensed child care centers and family child care homes.

Children enrolled in child care operations that participate in the CACFP receive nutritious meals that ensure their proper development.

Child care providers interested in the opportunity to participate in the CACFP should contact MSDE at 410-767-0214. For more information about CACFP, visit www.eatsmartmaryland.org.

Calendar

March 15-21 — National Child and Adult Care Food Program Week

March 24-25 — State Board Meeting

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conference last week to celebrate the progress that has been made.

"This has been successful because it has been a partnership," Dr. Grasmick said. "Our plan was to address the management and training needs of administrators in the Baltimore City system. We placed education experts directly into the system office to work hand-in-hand with City staff. The results have been gratifying, for these are our most vulnerable students."

The plan provided BCPSS personnel with hands-on management, technical assistance, and guidance. The IMCIT operation was not a system takeover, but a necessary step to improve services. Dr. Grasmick and Baltimore City CEO Andrés Alonso have worked collaboratively and consistently to make certain the program would work for students.

Dr. Alonso complimented MSDE for its perseverance in the case, and vowed to end the case in two years. "This is a time for celebration," he said.

MSDE's plan to improve Baltimore City special education included:

- **Hiring top school system staff from around the state with expertise to manage and direct in targeted areas**, such as special education, human resources, transportation of students with disabilities, information technology, special education finance, and student services.
- **Direct involvement by MSDE experts.** The IMCIT staff are housed at the BCPSS offices, but report directly to MSDE. State Superintendent Grasmick was given full decision making authority for implementation of the plan.
- **Annual reviews to chart progress.** MSDE staff meet with the court each year to review BCPSS compliance.

The Special Master's report praised MSDE's involvement. "The MSDE has embraced both the monitoring and leadership capacity building roles and has provided important institutional back-up support for the BCPSS," the report said. "The MSDE has continuously improved the scope and quality of its monitoring and resulting data, and has partnered effectively with the Special Master's Office."

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The results have put the City Schools on the right path in special education, despite some hurdles caused grafting the staffs together, the Special Master added.

STATE BOARD LOOKS TOWARD NEXT STEPS

The Maryland State Board of Education this week reviewed Governor Martin O'Malley's education priorities, focusing on the State's current position and the actions to be taken in the future.

Governor O'Malley came before the State Board last month for the first time, unveiling a series of priorities that ranged from benchmarking Maryland student performance against that of students in other nations, to building a comprehensive database of student progress from the elementary grades through college. The State Board this week held a special meeting to discuss the Governor's priorities and take stock of progress already taking place at MSDE in these areas. The Governor's priorities mirror those of U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan.

In fact, the Department is involved in work in virtually all areas cited by the Governor. For example, MSDE implemented a unique identifier for students in 2007, the first step toward a database.

Board President James DeGraffenreidt noted that a strong academic performance database also should include teacher information, so student and teacher work could be tracked in tandem. Board members also suggested working with neighboring states to develop a more robust database.

Benchmarking student performance against students in other nations was embraced by many board members, although there was little consensus on which testing program to use. The two major international tests - one commonly referred to as TIMMS (**Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study**), the other as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) - have vastly different characteristics. TIMMS is targeted at early grades, although it is aligned with relatively common mathematics and science curriculums. PISA includes high school assessments, but does not track to curricula.

The State Board will work with MSDE to develop a strategic plan based on the initiatives of the Governor and the U.S. Department of Education.

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