



Nancy S. Grasmick
State Superintendent of Schools

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

TO: Members of the State Board of Education
FROM: Nancy S. Grasmick *Nancy*
DATE: February 24, 2009
SUBJECT: Diversity and Cultural Proficiency Initiatives

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this item is provide an overview of current and expanding initiatives focused on developing and enhancing diversity awareness and cultural proficiency within the Maryland State Department of Education. These efforts are aligned with the Department's mission and organizational principles, targeting all employees through recruitment, screening, orientation, and continuing professional development.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The mission of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is to provide leadership, support, and accountability for effective systems of public education, library services, and rehabilitation services. Organizational principles in place to support this mission include two that are directly related to diversity and cultural proficiency:

- We believe people are our greatest resource and are committed to their growth and development.
- We believe cultural diversity, mutual trust, respect, open communication, and celebration of achievements are essential to a productive organization.

MSDE has a long history of commitment to assuring that all staff value and appreciate diversity within the agency and that this carries over to providing services for all of the stakeholders that the Department serves. Individuals must possess, develop, and maintain knowledge-based skills and understandings to successfully interact and work effectively with colleagues and clients from a variety of cultures. Organizationally, cultural proficiency includes the policies and practices at a systemic level as well as values and behaviors at the individual level that enable effective cross-cultural interactions among employees, clients and the community.

In working with stakeholders, MSDE implements a State Regulation (COMAR 13A.04.05), expanded in 1995 and revised in 2005, that requires all local school systems to infuse Education That Is Multicultural into instruction, curriculum, staff development, instructional resources, and school climate. It also requires the Maryland State Department of Education to incorporate

multicultural education into its programs, publications, assessments, and instructional resources. Education That Is Multicultural is defined as "a continuous, integrated, multidisciplinary process for educating all students about diversity and commonality. Diversity factors include, but are not limited to race, ethnicity, region, religion, gender, language, socioeconomic status, age, and individuals with disabilities. Education That Is Multicultural prepares students to live, interact, and work creatively in an interdependent global society by focusing on mutual appreciation and respect. It is a process that is complemented by community and parent involvement in support of multicultural initiatives.

Internally, it is essential to ensure that recruitment and selection activity conducted as part of the employment process are designed to ensure hiring practices and outcomes that will bring individuals into the Department who understand, embrace, and extend the organizational principles of diversity and cultural proficiency. Orientation for new staff members is an important component to ensure that there is consistent awareness and understanding of this organizational priority. Additionally, all MSDE staff can benefit from systemic professional development that expands cultural proficiency.

In order to increase awareness and value of diversity, and to build cultural proficiency within the MSDE, planned enhancements to employee selection, orientation, and professional development programs are underway. An overview of current practices and enhancements is attached; additional information specific to employee selection, orientation, and professional development is attached, as well.

SUMMARY:

Critical to the mission of the Maryland State Department of Education are the priorities of valuing diversity and developing cultural proficiency. Current practices related to these priorities extend across the State in work with external stakeholders and clients. Additionally, internal emphasis on diversity and cultural proficiency is vital to ensuring that the MSDE staff succeeds in embodying the organizational principles associated with (1) the growth and development of individuals, our greatest resource; and (2) recognition that cultural diversity, mutual trust, respect, open communication, and celebration of achievements are essential to a productive organization. Longstanding commitment to these principles is reflected in current practice, and significant initiatives are underway to enhance cultural proficiency.

ACTION:

This item is presented for information; no action is required.

NSG:jes

Attachments