



# THE BOARD REPORT



2003-2004: Issue 2

November-December 2003

The following is a summary of the November 5 and December 3, 2003, meetings of the State Board of Education.

### **Appointment of Commissioner of Education**

Following a national search, the State Board of Education appointed Dr. Betty J. Sternberg Commissioner of Education, effective November 6, 2003. Dr. Sternberg, a 23-year veteran of the Connecticut State Department of Education, served as Associate Commissioner of Teaching and Learning for the past 13 years. Dr. Sternberg stated, "I am delighted to have been selected by the Board to lead Connecticut's public education system in the coming years. My focus will be on closing the achievement gaps, recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers, and improving curriculum and instruction. While academic achievement is the heart of what we do, we must also make an equally strong effort to improve student ethical achievement. High academic honor without high ethical behavior is no honor at all," she concluded.

Dr. Sternberg earned her doctorate from Stanford University's School of Education, a master's degree from Columbia University and a bachelor's degree from Brandeis University. Prior to coming to the State Department of Education, she worked at RESCUE, a regional educational service center in Litchfield, and taught mathematics in San Jose, California.

### **PRESENTATIONS TO STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

#### **New Haven Public Schools**

#### **Hartford Public Schools**

At its August 2003 retreat, the State Board of Education decided to invite representatives of each of the Education Reference Group (ERG) I districts to attend a Board meeting in the 2003-04 school year to discuss their district's performance and needs. Representing the New Haven Public Schools at the October 2003 meeting were Dr. Reginald Mayo, Superintendent; Dr. Brian Perkins, Board Chair; and Dr. Eleanor Osborne, Assistant Superintendent. Representing the Hartford Public Schools at the November 2003 meeting were Dr. Robert Henry, Superintendent; Mr. Michael Borrero, Board Chair; Mr. Robert Long, Board Vice Chair; and Dr. Jaime Acquino, Deputy Superintendent. The invited guests were asked to respond to a series of questions sent to them in advance and to summarize for the Board progress made and areas that continue to need improvement. In addition, districts were asked to reflect on what assistance from the state would help them achieve their goals. Below are sample responses to some of the questions asked of the presenters.

#### **What are your district's most noteworthy recent accomplishments toward raising the academic achievement level of every student?**

New Haven: Performance on the CMT has improved in every area and every grade; systematic changes in reading instruction at the kindergarten through Grade 3 levels have resulted in significantly more students reading on grade level by the end of third grade; a model teacher training and support program are in place; there have been positive results from

the Essentials of Literacy Program, in place at all elementary schools and in the summer school program, and the Breakthrough to Literacy program in kindergarten. New Haven's efforts are supported by the active role New Haven Mayor John DeStefano plays on the board of education and by the strong links between the school system and the community.

Hartford: The percentage of students achieving the goal level on the CMT across all grades and subject areas tested has increased from 21.7 percent in 1998 to 32.3 percent in 2002, and the percentage at the intervention level across all grades and subject areas tested has decreased from 39.5 percent in 1998 to 26 percent in 2002. The largest increase in the percentage of students who scored at or above the goal level was on the Grade 8 writing assessment, which increased from 32 percent

in 1999 to 47 percent in 2002. The graduation rate increased from 81 percent in 1999 to 96 percent in 2003, coupled with a decrease in the dropout rate in Grades 9-12 from 13.2 percent in 1998 to 4.1 percent in 2003. These accomplishments were attributed, in part, to a districtwide approach to a common curriculum in all areas, consistent professional development in best instructional practices and uniform assessments.

### **How are you responding to the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?**

New Haven: Many programs already in place address the requirements of NCLB, including New Haven's extensive choice program. More than 40 percent of New Haven's students attend magnet or other schools of choice and more than 2,000 suburban students attend New Haven schools. Other initiatives supporting NCLB requirements include offering a degree program for interested paraprofessionals and providing test preparation for paraprofessionals, providing supplemental services to students, and taking various restructuring actions to improve staffing and student achievement.

Hartford: During the time when the Hartford Public School System was under state oversight, many components of the NCLB legislation became standard operating procedures. Greater accountability and increased student achievement for all students became focal points. The school system also

offered intradistrict choice options to parents, a program in which schools developed educational themes that would appeal to students and parents with particular educational interests. This program, Choice One, has been effective in accommodating those who have requested permission to attend. Further, this year the school system offered choice to parents of students attending a school designated as in need of improvement under NCLB, and developed short-term plans for the three schools designated as in need of improvement. Supplemental educational services were provided to 500 students by six providers, including the school district. Hartford also developed five host magnet schools over the last three years, and eight will be in place in the next few years.

### **What are your highest priorities and greatest needs, and what are the barriers to raising achievement levels and closing the achievement gap? What assistance do you believe the State Department of Education could provide to address these issues?**

New Haven: Ensuring that all children are successful on district and state benchmarks was cited as one of the highest priorities. Recognizing the conditions in which these children live prior to entering school is essential in terms of understanding their language experiences and abilities. Technical assistance and support for parental training from the state would be beneficial. Also, the state could provide grants and incentives to assist in professional development in instructional practices around literacy and numeracy. Accountability was also cited as a priority; the school system developed new evaluation documents for teachers and administrators, and had students sign pledge cards. State support via legislation and technical assistance would be helpful in addressing the needs of children of poverty, children having limited English skills and children with special needs. State support

for requiring preschool teachers to have a degree beyond the associate's degree would provide young children with more highly qualified teachers. Also mentioned was the need for additional support from the Department of Higher Education and the Alternate Route to Certification and Durational Shortage Area Permit programs in ensuring quality teachers.

Hartford: Hartford's highest priorities were noted as improving teaching and learning, especially in literacy and mathematics; ensuring that teachers and paraprofessionals are highly qualified; improving standardized test scores; providing more tutoring to students who need it; differentiating instruction, especially for English language learners and students with special needs; providing high-quality, job-embedded professional development; and expanding early

childhood programs. Hartford regarded the current "English-only" format of the CMT and CAPT as a barrier to assessing the academic capabilities of English language learners because actual content knowledge in the subject areas tested is masked by the students' inability to communicate effectively in English. Certification requirements for reading instructors have reduced the number of

teachers in the school system who can teach Direct Instruction, and have increased the class sizes for this remedial, corrective action program. Hartford requested that the Department provide tutoring assistance, leniency in certification requirements for Direct Instruction teachers, and released CAPT forms for use by Grade 8 and 9 students to help prepare for the Grade 10 test.

**Has the local board had discussions or taken specific actions regarding your achievement gaps? Is there evidence that your discussions and actions have led to successful outcomes?**

New Haven: Yes, the board is regularly provided with data on student performance. This data is used to assess student achievement within the district and for statewide comparison purposes. The Mandatory Retention Policy represents one example of how the board used achievement data to implement district policy. The Board approved a retention policy that ended social promotion and is targeted at improving reading skills.

Hartford: The Board has worked hard to develop relations with the administration, staff,

parents, students and Hartford community. At the second meeting each month, the Board is presented with data of CMT, CAPT, SAT and local assessments and program information about student achievement, school climate, special and bilingual education, etc. This is used to give direction to staff and in the development or revision of district policies. Further, the executive committee of the board conducts regular meetings with the Superintendent and key staff members to keep abreast of what is happening in the school system.

**CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP: REMOVING THE BARRIERS TO PRESCHOOL IN CONNECTICUT**

The Board approved the report titled, *Closing the Achievement Gap: Removing the Barriers to Preschool in Connecticut*. The report proposes the removal of barriers that limit children's access to high-quality preschool education by 2012. Recommendations included in the report follow. For more detailed language concerning each recommendation, please refer to the report, accessible on the Board's website.

- ✍ Encourage the existing kindergarten through Grade 12 educational system in Connecticut to include voluntary prekindergarten programs;
- ✍ assist low-income families to ensure that their children have an equal opportunity to attend preschool;
- ✍ provide funding for quality preschool programs and activities; and
- ✍ develop and maintain an early childhood career development system that will increase the number of individuals with an early childhood teacher certification.

To obtain a copy of the report, please call Associate Commissioner George A. Coleman at 860.807.2005.

**CONTRACT AUTHORIZATION: HARTFORD BOARD OF EDUCATION**

The Board granted the Hartford Board of Education the authority to enter into a design-build contract for the construction of Breakthrough Magnet School. Rather than following the traditional approach of having a complete set of architectural drawings prepared and then putting those drawings out to bid, design-build calls for the contractor-architect to build a facility within a specified budget that meets the overall requirements of the educational specifications.

**APPLICATION FOR FUNDS: IMPROVING THE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELL-BEING OF YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH COORDINATED SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAMS**

The above-titled grant application for funds (\$248,375) was approved for submission to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Grant funds will be used to strengthen the statewide infrastructure for

building partnerships to implement HIV/STD prevention programs for youth in Connecticut and provide professional development for teachers.

## **ADOPTION OF LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS**

The Board adopted several legislative proposals for the 2004 Session of the General Assembly. If approved by the General Assembly, the proposals would:

- ✍ require that local boards of education make placements in private schools, agencies and institutions providing special education only if the school, agency or institution is approved by the Commissioner of Education;
- ✍ protect school officials from defamation suits based on job references given for current or former employees;
- ✍ consolidate Regional Vocational-Technical School System reporting requirements to the General Assembly and change from annual to biennial reporting;
- ✍ raise the enrollment cap for charter schools that are other than kindergarten through Grade 8 from 250 to 300 students;
- ✍ change the qualifications of school readiness program staff members by providing that on and after July 1, 2004, certain staff members have an associate's or four-year degree in any subject area, with 9 credits or more in early childhood education or child development and, after July 1, 2005, 12 credits or more in those subject areas; and provide that those individuals who are qualified staff members with a credential issued by an organization approved by the Commissioner of Education must have, on and after July 1, 2005, 12 or more credits in early childhood education or child development;
- ✍ amend the school readiness statute to allow the Department of Education to use all unexpended funds to provide supplemental grants to eligible towns or to enhance professional development opportunities for preschool educators in school readiness programs;
- ✍ provide that the calculation for the funds for program administration of a school readiness program be made at the beginning of the fiscal year, rather than at the end of the year to improve fiscal planning by towns;
- ✍ provide that eligibility for school readiness competitive grants be determined on an annual basis, based on priority school designations each year;
- ✍ clarify services that family resource centers must provide and those that they may provide; and give centers flexibility in providing additional services. This will enhance collaboration between the schools and the centers and prevent duplication of services;
- ✍ repeal obsolete school construction statutes;
- ✍ permit, rather than require, the Commissioner of Education to provide information on procedures for school building committees, building methods and school construction materials and provide advisory services to local officials and agencies on long-range school plant planning and educational specifications, and review sketches and preliminary plans and outline specifications. This proposal was submitted in light of the current and projected staffing level in the school facilities unit;
- ✍ include certified indoor air quality emergency projects as projects eligible for local plan review;
- ✍ allow an additional charter school to receive state funds for school construction; and
- ✍ grant certain authority to the Commissioner of Education to intervene in matters of controversy involving a local board of education that, in his or her opinion, may put at risk the quality of education in that school district. The actions of the Commissioner, in exercising such authority, would generally precede the Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-4b process, but could also be used in matters that might not be an educational interest of the state, but still affect the education of students.

## **ROLE OF POLICYMAKERS IN ADDRESSING SCHOOL MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

The Board adopted a statement on the role of policymakers in addressing school management issues. It reads, in part, "the State Board of Education believes that before any statewide requirement regarding school management issues is acted on, there must be a thorough and comprehensive analysis, including data and research, of the need for the change and its impact statewide." The statement concludes as follows: "The state's focus should be on student achievement and providing the necessary resources to boards of education. The management of classrooms and schools on a day-to-day basis should be determined by teachers, principals, superintendents and boards of education, and not by the legislature or State Board of Education."

## RECOGNITION OF OUTSTANDING EDUCATORS

The Board recognized the following educators for their accomplishments:

**Diane Shea, 2003 Connecticut School Business Official of the Year.** Ms. Shea is the business administrator for the Farmington Public Schools

**William P. Davenport, 2004 Connecticut Teacher of the Year.** Mr. Davenport is an agriscience teacher at Nonnewaug High School in Woodbury. He will receive national attention as Connecticut's representative in the 2004 National Teacher of the Year Program.

**Tami M. Devine, a finalist in the 2004 Connecticut Teacher of the Year competition.** Ms. Devine is an English teacher at Rocky Hill High School.

**Michael N. Maheu, a finalist in the 2004 Connecticut Teacher of the Year competition.** Mr. Maheu is a second grade teacher at Southeast Elementary School in Mansfield.

**L. Leslie Coursey, a finalist in the 2004 Connecticut Teacher of the Year competition.** Ms. Coursey is a second grade teacher at Highcrest School in Wethersfield.

**Louis J. Pear, Connecticut Association of Schools' 2003 Elementary School Principal of the Year/National Distinguished Principal.** Mr. Pear, Principal of West Hill Elementary School in Rocky Hill, will serve as Connecticut's representative in the 2003 National Distinguished Principal Awards Program.

**Helen M. Byus, Connecticut Association of Schools' 2003 Elementary School Assistant Principal of the Year.** Ms. Byus is the Assistant Principal of Roaring Brook School in Avon.

**Richard T. Huelsmann, Connecticut Association of Schools' 2003 Middle School Principal of the Year.** Mr. Huelsmann, Principal of East Hampton Middle School, will serve as Connecticut's representative in the 2003 National Middle School Principal of the Year competition.

**Paul D. Stringer, Connecticut Association of Schools' 2003 High School Principal of the Year.** Mr. Stringer, Principal of Weaver High School in Hartford, will serve as Connecticut's representative in the 2003 National High School Principal of the Year competition.

**Dr. Lawrence L. Nocera, Connecticut Association of Schools' 2003 High School Assistant Principal of the Year.** Dr. Nocera is the Assistant Principal of Glastonbury High School.

**Dr. Reginald Mayo, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents' 2004 Superintendent of the Year.** Dr. Mayo, Superintendent of the New Haven Public Schools, will serve as Connecticut's representative in the 2004 National Superintendent of the Year competition.

**Dr. Steven Wlodarczyk, Connecticut Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's 2003 Education Leader of the Year.** Dr. Wlodarczyk is the Assistant Superintendent of the South Windsor Public Schools.

## APPROVAL OF PLAN OF REPRESENTATION – REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 15

The Board adopted a Plan of Representation submitted by the Reapportionment Committee of Regional School District No. 15. The Plan establishes a configuration on the board of four members from Middlebury with a weighted vote of 1.0, and six members from Southbury which each member assigned a weighted vote of 1.86. A crossover provision is included, meaning that no motion can pass unless at least one member from each town votes affirmatively.

## ACCEPTANCE OF GIFT FROM ING FINANCIAL ADVISORS FOR THE TEACHER OF THE YEAR PROGRAM

ING Financial Advisors awarded the State Department of Education \$20,000 to cover expenses associated with the Teacher of the Year Program. Funds will be used to sponsor the awards ceremony at the Bushnell Theater and to cover expenses incurred by the Teacher of the Year in the performance of his duties. The Board expressed its appreciation for the continued support provided by ING Financial Advisors for the Teacher of the Year Program.

**AMENDMENT TO REGULATIONS CONCERNING SPECIAL EDUCATION DUE PROCESS HEARINGS AND STUDENT RECORDS**

The Board approved amendments to Section 10-76h-11 of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies by adding a new subsection (d) concerning the appearance of counsel at special education due process hearings, and Section 10-76d-18 concerning the right to review and inspect student records, by clarifying the extent to which material in a student's file is required to be copied. In accordance with required notices and public hearings, oral and written comments were received and considered fully. The proposed amendments will be submitted to the Office of the Attorney General and, if approved, to the Regulations Review Committee of the General Assembly. The effective date of the regulations will be the date they are filed with the Secretary of the State.

**LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK**

The Board discussed the draft Language Arts Curriculum Framework. The framework contains skills expected of students at each grade level (prekindergarten through Grade 12) in the following areas: reading and responding; exploring and responding to literature; communicating with others; and English language conventions. The draft document will be sent to districts with an evaluative feedback form. The Language Arts Framework Committee will review comments and consider changes to the framework prior to finalizing this publication in the fall of 2004.

**NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS (NAEP)  
IN  
READING AND MATHEMATICS**

Commissioner Sternberg summarized Connecticut's performance on the 2003 NAEP assessments in reading and mathematics. NAEP assesses a representative sample of public school students from each state, reports the performance of economic, gender and racial groups in Grades 4 and 8, and compares their performance in the state as well as with their counterparts in states nationwide. Connecticut's students scored first in the nation (tied with three other states) in the percentage of students reading at or above proficient level and in the percentage of students scoring at the advanced level. Connecticut was grouped with several states in reading and mathematics (Grades 4 and 8) as performing above the national average. Despite Connecticut's strong performance in comparison to other states, Commissioner Sternberg stressed the importance of "closing the gaps in achievement between rich and poor, minority and nonminority, and boys and girls. We need to continue to raise the achievement of all students," she concluded.

**POSITION STATEMENT ON SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

The Board adopted the revised Position Statement on School-Family-Community Partnerships. The statement maintains the importance of building relationships among schools, families and communities. It also specifies the roles each party can play in supporting students' academic achievement and highlights the significant role students play. The revised statement explains the role effective partnerships play in closing the state's achievement gaps. A copy of the statement is attached and has been posted on the Board's website, [www.state.ct.us/sde](http://www.state.ct.us/sde).

**TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM: UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD**

The Board amended its February 5, 2003, resolution concerning provisional approval of educator preparation programs at the University of Hartford to include integrated elementary/special education, for the period October 1, 2003, through September 30, 2006.

**ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS**

The Board reappointed Kyra A. Nesteriak and James J. Ritchie to serve as State Board of Education representatives to the Connecticut Advisory Council for School Administrator Professional Standards through January 15, 2006. The Council advises the Governor, State Board of Education and the Education Committee of the General Assembly on matters relating to administrator preparation, training, certification, professional development, assessment and evaluation, and professional discipline.

**GOVERNOR’S TASK FORCE ON THE FUTURE OF THE REGIONAL VOCATIONAL -TECHNICAL SCHOOL SYSTEM**

At the beginning of the year, the Governor’s Task Force on the Future of the Regional Vocational-Technical School System (RVSS) released its findings and recommendations. The Task Force was established by Executive Order No. 24 to “develop an action plan for vocational education in Connecticut that will translate the short- and long-term needs of Connecticut’s economy...into the programming, budgeting and planning strategies for Connecticut’s vocational technical school system,” explained Mary Ann Hanley, Governor’s Policy Advisor, Office of Workforce Competitiveness. She told the Board that the convening of the Task Force allowed both the public and private sectors to examine the RVSS and arrive at recommendations to improve the schools. The recommendations concern the mission of the school system, the trade authorization process, performance measurement and accountability, image and marketing strategies, partnerships with industry and monitoring implementation of the recommendations.

Joining Ms. Hanley were Carol P. Wallace, President and CEO of Cooper Instrument Corporation and Task Force Co-chair, and Pat Downs of the Department of Economic and Community Development. Ms. Wallace stated that the Task Force believes that the RVSS must revise its mission statement and ensure that the organizational structure supports the mission and is tied closely to market demands, via the Department of Labor. The RVSS must be afforded greater flexibility to meet changing needs. Various groups from the business community must come together to ensure that the needs of many – rather than individual needs – are addressed. Ms. Wallace discussed the recommendation that the superintendent be given additional flexibility within the system’s budget to address those needs, and the importance of the RVSS making greater use of community college resources.

Pat Downs focused her remarks on appropriate assessment tools, noting that NIMSS may be an alternative option to NOCTI in assessing students’ skills. She noted that it is important to seek input from representatives of industry when determining the best tool to measure performance.

Discussion ensued regarding the image of the school system and the need to focus on improving the academic achievement of RVSS students. Task Force representatives regarded the system as a vital school offering, and believe it should have entrance criteria to elevate its image. Carmen Celentano, Acting Superintendent of Schools, stressed the importance of carefully crafting language regarding the RVSS mission. The mission statement will, in effect, determine priorities in terms of the delivery of academic and trade instruction, funding and how our schools prepare students for their future.

State Board of Education Chairperson Craig Toensing thanked the Task Force members for sharing their findings and recommendations and assured them that the Board will continue to work with them in the coming months.

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The Board received a report on the **2002-2003 Annual Plan** for the RVSS and approved the **2003-2004 Annual Plan for School Improvement** for the RVSS. The plan contains goals under each of five areas: teaching and learning, professional development, technology, school culture, and fiscal and facilities. It is aligned with the Long Range Plan of Priorities and Goals adopted by the Board in 2000 and incorporates the requirements set forth in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

The Board also approved the **Technology Plan** for the RVSS, required of school districts by the State Department of Education in a prescribed template. The plan calls for the use of technology to be intensified as an instructional tool, particularly for those schools that have been identified as “in need of improvement” under NCLB. The template was designed by the State Department of Education to help every district use technology effectively by developing a comprehensive educational technology plan that addresses the following: district strategic initiatives, curriculum, professional development, infrastructure, hardware, technical support, software, community involvement, fiscal planning, data management, monitoring and evaluation.

Three **textbooks** were approved by the State Board of Education for use in the **culinary arts program** of the RVSS.

# CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

(effective July 1, 2002)

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**NOTE:** The Board will meet on Wednesday, January 7, 2004. The meeting will begin at 9:30 a.m. in Room 307 of the State Office Building, 165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT.

***The Board Report*** is published monthly and is posted on the Department's Internet site (<http://www.state.ct.us/sde>). It provides a summary of matters considered by the State Board of Education at its regular monthly meetings. The Department welcomes comments and suggestions concerning the format and content of ***The Board Report***. Please submit your comments to Pamela V. Bergin, Office of the State Board of Education, 165 Capitol Avenue, Room 301, Hartford, CT 06106, or [pamela.bergin@po.state.ct.us](mailto:pamela.bergin@po.state.ct.us).

Connecticut State Board of Education  
Hartford

## Position Statement on School-Family-Community Partnerships

Adopted November 5, 2003

The Connecticut State Board of Education recognizes that education is a shared responsibility throughout a student's life. Schools, families and communities all contribute to student success, and the best results come when all three work together. School-family-community partnerships are formed to support student success and help adults coordinate their efforts to promote learning. Students, too, play an important role in partnerships and must take responsibility for their own learning. Schools should take the lead in developing and sustaining effective partnerships, but to harness the power of all learning in a child's life, partnership activities must be implemented at home and in the community, as well as at school.

### Characteristics of Successful Partnerships

Successful partnerships exhibit as much variety as the local conditions that create them. To be effective, they must recognize, respect and address families' diverse interests, needs, and talents, as well as economic and cultural differences. Partnerships must accommodate these differences by providing multiple opportunities for participation at various times and locations. From early childhood and preschool programs to before- and after-school settings, partnerships must be tailored to all stages and settings of a student's educational career. Most important, to succeed, partnerships must be flexible and based upon trust and mutual respect.

### A Framework for Action

The State Board of Education believes school-family-community partnerships should address each of the following six standards:

1. *parenting* – promote and support parenting skills and the family's primary role in encouraging children's learning at every age and grade level;
2. *communicating* – promote ongoing, meaningful and effective communication among schools, families and the community about school programs and children's progress;
3. *volunteering* – provide appropriate training and involve families and community members in instructional and support areas both in and out of the school;
4. *learning at home* – involve families in learning activities at home and in the community, including interactive homework and other curriculum-linked enrichment activities;
5. *decision making* – provide opportunities for all families to develop and strengthen their leadership role in school decisions; and
6. *collaborating with the community* – enable schools and families to access resources from businesses, social service agencies and other groups, and serve as resources to the community.

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To be effective, any use of these standards should be focused on educational goals and designed to engage students and families in developing specific knowledge and skills. Parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has greater effect on achievement than more general involvement.

Each member of a school-family-community partnership plays a unique and important role in contributing to success for all students.

### **A Role for Schools and Districts**

To develop and sustain strong partnership programs, local schools and districts, with the involvement of parent and community leaders, must identify goals for school-family-community partnerships; develop structures for systematically implementing the six standards; monitor progress to learn which practices produce the best results; make school facilities available to the community and families; and build relationships with local businesses and community organizations that support educational goals. Most significant, school systems must provide training and support for teachers, administrators, other staff members and parents in developing partnership skills, especially around understanding and appreciating diversity and developing skills to work with people from different backgrounds.

### **A Role for Families**

Families may take advantage of opportunities their school provides to become involved in activities related to the six standards cited above, or seek out other ways to contribute that meet their needs and interests. Most important, families make critical contributions to student achievement by providing a home environment conducive to lifelong learning, and by holding children to high but realistic expectations. Research finds that the way children spend their time at home has a stronger relationship to success in school than does family income level. Children tend to do better in school when families read to them, support homework completion, talk with them about school and help them plan their education programs. Programs that specifically engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement.

Engaging in family literacy activities that create a literate home environment and stimulating parent-child interactions are particularly important. Family literacy involves making day-to-day routines that are the fabric of family life fun and productive learning opportunities. Family literacy takes many forms, including not only reading books but also talking, singing, writing or drawing, and reflects the family's ethnic, racial or cultural heritage. Family literacy includes adults expanding their own skills and knowledge, and viewing themselves and their children as a learning team.

### **A Role for Communities**

Service organizations, religious groups, businesses and individuals can develop networks for communicating with schools and families about available support for education. Before- and after-school programs provide a particularly important opening for supporting schools and families. Community agencies can collaborate to provide integrated family support services that build upon existing community resources and link with public schools. Community members can serve as volunteers, role models and mentors, increasing individualized attention for students and demonstrating to both children and staff members that their community values education. Businesses can sponsor school-family-community partnership activities and encourage employees to play an active role in education.

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### **State Department of Education Leadership**

The State Board of Education believes that the State Department of Education must provide leadership in developing and promoting school-family-community partnership programs that contribute to success for all students. This leadership includes supporting and integrating the standards for comprehensive school-family-community partnerships described above in all appropriate programs and fiscal policies that support student learning; promoting interagency relationships among state and local partners; and collecting and disseminating information about current research, best practice, and model policies and programs.

### **Benefits of High-Quality Partnership Programs**

Well-planned partnerships between families, schools and communities result in greater student success. Students with involved parents, no matter their income or background, have higher grades and test scores, better attendance and higher rates of homework completion. They enroll in more challenging courses, have better social skills and behavior, and are more likely to graduate and go on to postsecondary education. In fact, the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which the student's family is involved in his or her education.

Families and schools also benefit. Research shows that families often develop a greater sense of effectiveness, stronger social ties and a desire to continue their own education. Teachers report that their work is enhanced with help from families, and families who are more involved have more positive views of teachers. Increased involvement develops feelings of ownership, resulting in families being more supportive of school and community initiatives.

Of course, it takes more than engaged parents and communities to produce high student achievement. High-performing schools have a combination of characteristics, including effective school leadership; a clear and shared focus; high standards and expectations, and alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessments with those standards; focused professional development; and a supportive learning environment. Developing an effective program of school-family-community partnerships is not a magic bullet, but it is one of the critical supports students require to maximize their potential, and one essential step toward closing our state's achievement gaps.