

*parent engagement as
a strategy for success*

THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION

introduction

Located in one of the nation's top-performing states for public education, Prince George's County is poised to offer students the best opportunities for both academic and career success. Unfortunately too many youth are becoming disconnected from educational opportunity. The population in Prince George's County between the ages of 16-24 is most likely to be unemployed and undereducated due to factors that begin early in their academic careers. These disconnected youth, defined as young adults between the ages of 16-24 who do not hold a high school diploma and who are unemployed, are at risk of suffering long-term consequences without the collective intervention of philanthropists, businesses, school leaders, community members, parents and families.

There are many levers of change surrounding the problem of disconnected youth in Prince George's County. School leaders have already begun implementing programs and strategies to address the academic needs of students. The County has also enjoyed the support of local government officials to promote community-based efforts around the cause of disconnected youth. Nonprofit and community-based service providers and businesses are partnering together and with Prince George's County Public Schools to offer resources, advocacy, and direct involvement around the issue of disconnected youth. Still, parents and families are the best resource when it comes to first-hand knowledge of students. They should be empowered to lead the transformation of education within the community and help reconnect youth with opportunity in Prince George's County. This requires assisting parents in identifying the problems in education and supporting them as they partner with school leaders, philanthropists, businesses, policy makers, and the community to generate solutions. The Community Foundation is committed to supporting parents and families as they fulfill their roles as teachers at home, partners in education, advocates for all children, and decision makers within the educational community.



4 THE *problem*

If asked to define “NCLB”, what answer could you give? What about “ESEA” or “IDEA”? How about Title I, IEP, ELL, FARMS or 504? Not only do these acronyms represent the ABC’s of education, they also represent the services that students receive or are entitled to receive on a daily basis. Although our educators have been trained to know and provide these services, most parents would have difficulty understanding them and thus have difficulty advocating for their child. Educating parents is part of the ongoing process of educating students. Parents should be aware of the educational offerings available to students and should be engaged in the decision-making process. In order for this to occur, several key stakeholders including schools, local policymakers, businesses and the community can support parents in their efforts.

Research reveals several important connections between parents, children, and academic success. While the levels of income and education of a parent can be an indicator of later student success, family involvement in a child’s education is twice as likely to influence student achievement.¹ Family expectations – attitudes about school and work ethic – are among the most important predictors of student success in school, especially in the early years of a child’s academic career.² Equally important are parental efforts to attend school events and parent-teacher conferences, showing children that parents are invested in the process and outcomes of education. Since student success hinges upon parental involvement and support, efforts by schools and communities to engage parents should also focus on involvement and support.

“...family involvement in a child’s education is twice as likely to influence student achievement.”

did you know...

In response to a growing desire to learn more about legislation and regulations facing their children’s schools, the National Coalition of ESEA Title I Parents formed in 1973. With a grant from the Carnegie Foundation, they established the National Parent Center, which focuses on providing training and resources to other parents who wish to learn more about policies affecting their child’s school.

glossary of terms parents should know...

NCLB – In 2002, Congress reauthorized ESEA as the No Child Left Behind Act. In addition to the provisions of the 1965 law, the 2002 act included a new accountability system for states, districts and schools based on assessments.

ESEA – Known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and passed in 1965 as part of the Civil Rights Act, this collection of Federal laws defined equal access and opportunity in public education.

IDEA – The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act was passed in 1975 and reauthorized in 2004. It legally mandates services in public schools for students with documented physical, emotional, behavioral, and learning disabilities. Prince George’s County Public Schools received \$22.6 million in funds from the Federal government during the 2013-2014 school year for IDEA associated expenses.³

Title I – The first part of ESEA, Title I is a set of need-based funds distributed to districts and schools according to the number of students receiving Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS). Prince George’s County receives \$24.7 million in Title I funding.⁴ Title I has also been revised in recent years to include more provisions for parent involvement in education and school decisions. For example, Title I requires that schools, in partnership with parents, develop an improvement strategy for their school.

IEP – Short for “Individualized Education Plan”, a student with behavioral, emotional, or learning disabilities is entitled to an IEP document. This is a legal document that outlines the nature and extent of a student’s needs and requires medical verification. Once created, the IEP follows a student throughout his or her educational career. Because many disabilities are identified early in a student’s career, most IEP’s are created at the elementary and middle school levels.⁵

ELL – An acronym for “English Language Learner”. The Prince George’s County school system offers a program for these students through the Teaching English as a Second or Other Language (TESOL) program. Students who do not speak English as their first language are assessed by an educator with a specialized license in ELL instruction in their understanding of English to determine the level of language supports they will need. ELL students are not isolated, but are given academic supports through tutoring, built-in reading and study time, and assistance on class assignment. Ideally students will eventually move out of the support program, as they will have mastered the English language and the ability to learn in English.

FARMS – This acronym stands for Free and Reduced Meals and entitles students to a hot breakfast and lunch provided by the school at a reduced cost or for free. Eligibility for the program depends upon family

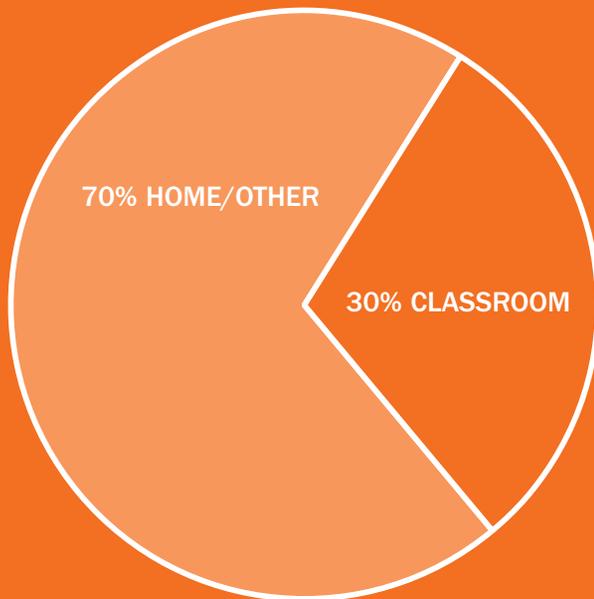
size and yearly income. Additionally, students whose family participates in the Food Supplement Program or Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) are automatically eligible for FARMS. Almost 60% of Prince George’s County Public Schools students are eligible for FARMS.

Household Size	Income Yearly	Monthly	Weekly
1	20,665	1,723	398
2	27,991	2,333	539
3	35,317	2,944	680
4	42,643	3,554	821
5	49,969	4,165	961
6	57,295	4,775	1,102
7	64,621	5,386	1,243
8	71,947	5,996	1,384
For each additional family member, add:	7,326	611	141

504 – A 504 Form is a document that describes the academic “modifications”, or supports, that a student might be eligible to receive in the classroom or on a test. Filled out by a guidance counselor, student, parent and teacher(s), examples of modifications include Extended Time (ET) to complete assignments, a Separate Room or Setting (SR) to finish tests, having tests Read Aloud (RA) or having a dictionary in the student’s native language.

just the facts...

STUDENT TIME



THE *causes*

Although we often view the school building as a student's primary habitat, children spend nearly 70% of their time outside of the classroom.⁶ How they use that time is important. Research shows that when students are consistently and actively engaged with the material they are learning, then they are more likely to commit what they have learned to long-term memory. Parents play a critical role in engaging students outside of the classroom and can facilitate an environment that encourages learning and academic success outside of the school building.

So why are many parents not engaged in the educational process in Prince George's County? The answer to this has many layers. One key factor is a lack of streamlined services to support parents as teachers, parents as partners, parents as advocates, and parents as decision-makers.

PARENTS AS TEACHERS

Raising a child is challenging. Understanding how to support a child as a student is even more difficult, especially for parents already burdened by economic challenges or for adults who experienced their own academic struggles.

PARENTS AS PARTNERS

Most parents in Prince George's County recognize the importance of being involved in their child's education. Their difficulty is identifying ways to connect, and making themselves available to existing opportunities. Parents who work, have multiple children, who do not speak English as their first language (or at all), or are disabled, experience difficulties participating in partnership opportunities with their child's school.

PARENTS AS ADVOCATES

To advocate for someone or something is to "plead for a cause". Parents in Prince George's County have a responsibility to advocate for their child and for all children, but often lack the knowledge of policies, programs and practices that positively impact teaching and learning, resources, or support to do so.

PARENTS AS DECISION-MAKERS

Deciding on the best course of education for your child means knowing what options are available. Parents in Prince George's County are limited in their ability to make informed decisions because of lack of resources outlining educational options in Prince George's County.

parent perspective

Sandy and Terri Roberts are long-time Prince George's County residents. Terri, originally from Prince George's County and a graduate of the public school system, is a business consultant. Her husband Sandy is an attorney, and together they have two sons, a 9th grader and a college freshman. Because of what Terri describes as a "fascination" with the Montessori educational model, the couple decided to enroll each of their sons in Henson Valley Montessori Academy during their early years.

"We were really happy with the experience we had. The school provided a nurturing environment, and the teachers and staff were like an extended family." After such a positive experience, Terri and Sandy recognized that their boys needed a more "individualized" approach to education that was not available through Prince George's County Public Schools. At that point, the family made a conscious decision to continue their sons' educations in private school, but they were frustrated by the lack of options in Prince George's County.

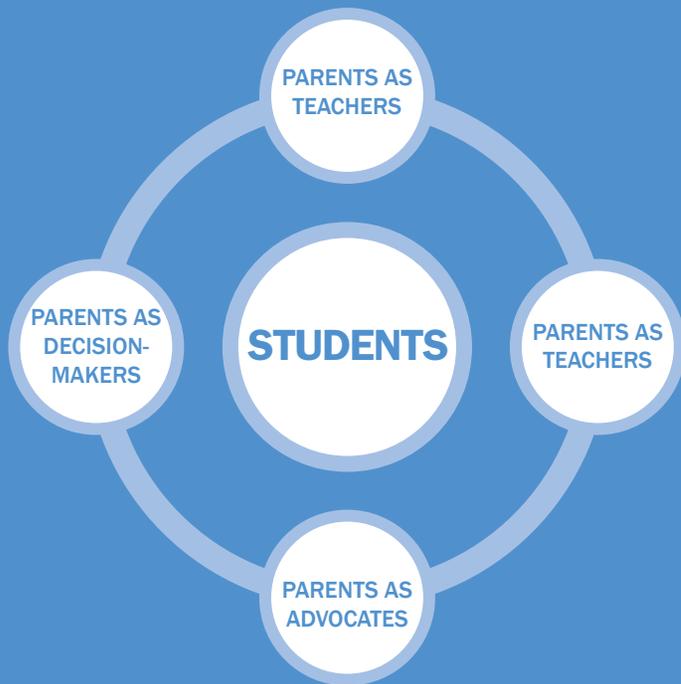
The family found that many parochial schools, while offering education in religious doctrine, did not teach



to the academic level they desired for their children. "There still aren't a lot of private school options available to us in the County," said Terri. "We decided to look outside the county. It was either D.C. or Annapolis, and Annapolis would be an easier commute for us." The family decided on The Key School in Annapolis, Maryland, and Sandy says they couldn't be happier. "The money is well-spent. The investment was worth it. Our oldest son is thriving, was admitted to Columbia University, and is flourishing academically. He was given the freedom to develop as an individual."

did you know...

A 2011 Prince George's County Public Schools School Climate Survey revealed that "The only characteristic of effective schools about which less than one half of the students had positive perceptions was 'Parent/Community Involvement'". The lowest student perception of parent/community involvement was reported at the high school level, where only 34% of students have positive perceptions.



THE *solutions*

When parents, schools and the community partner to improve student achievement, the results are tremendous:

- Students perform better academically and behaviorally.
- Students attend school regularly.
- Students are more likely to graduate and continue to a postsecondary program.⁷

The non-profit community plays an important role in linking parents with opportunities in education and supporting them in their roles as teachers, partners, advocates, and decision-makers.

PARENTS AS TEACHERS

Families do not need a specialized degree to facilitate learning for children at home, but clearly defined roles and expectations are important. In order to support students as learners, top researchers like Anne Henderson observe that the most effective parents take an active approach to parenting, including engaging in the following activities with children:

- *Express* expectations about schoolwork.
- *Monitor* and limit activities that are not related to school, like watching television.
- *Participate* in activities together – like shopping, eating meals, or going to the movies.
- *Know* your child – ask questions about schoolwork, friends, and goals.⁸

Local non-profit service providers can help train parents with the skills needed to support students

at home, which will increase academic achievement. Home visits from a professional counselor can benefit both student and parent with individualized attention.

PARENTS AS PARTNERS

Parents should also look for specific opportunities to actively engage themselves with the school. Involvement in parent/school partnerships like the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), attendance at school concerts and events, and participation in Open Houses and conferences are small ways to make a large impact in the life of the school. Partnerships are also two-way opportunities. Schools should look for ways to make participation in these activities more accessible to parents, especially those who work and have other family obligations.

Businesses play an important role in supporting parents as partners by sponsoring local school parent associations, which are investments in the school. Non-profit groups support parents by providing transportation to school events and acting as mediators at conferences and meetings.

PARENTS AS ADVOCATES

In addition to actively participating in the implementation of educational services at the local school level, parents and community members have the opportunity to participate in the policymaking process through local forums and board meetings. School board meetings, Town Hall meetings hosted by the County Executive's office, and school system forums are the most direct, and allow the public to voice their concerns about issues ranging from

building maintenance to the implementation of state and Federal legislation. Prince George's County School Board meeting agendas and minutes are posted online for the public to access. In order to comment on an issue in person, you must register prior to the meeting. Parents should also exercise their power as electors and vote regularly in School Board elections. The Board has a wide range of powers, including program creation and policy implementation with a specific focus on improving student achievement and parent, student and community engagement as well as budget oversight. It is important for parents to make informed decisions about their representatives.

Advocacy groups like MarylandCAN help to inform parents and local residents of the educational system and the policies that will benefit students and families in Maryland and in Prince George's County.

PARENTS AS DECISION-MAKERS

The families of Prince George's County are representative of a diverse and growing population. Children are raised by two parents, single parents, grandparents, and teenage parents. Because of an array of public policies and budgetary decisions, public schools in general are well-equipped to respond to the needs of challenging populations, like low-income students and English Language Learners. As achievement gains are made for these populations, public school resources and attention are spread thin for students labeled "average" or who already perform at the top of their class. Unfortunately this sometimes means

that students who desire and are ready for more rigorous academic choices do not receive the attention that could benefit them. Many of these students have "outgrown" the public school system, or are frustrated by the "one size fits all" approach to education and are in need of an alternative. The problem for some Prince George's County families is that they either lack the knowledge to make an informed decision about educational alternatives, or lack the resources to act. It is the goal of the Community Foundation to support quality education of students at any institution, and in this spirit we support parents in their exploration of various school models throughout Prince George's County. In the following section we present a listing of educational options available to families in Prince George's County, as well as information about the differences between them and how parents searching for educational alternatives can go about making the best informed decision regarding their child's education. All parents should feel informed about their school choice options, and philanthropists, businesses, school leaders, policymakers, and the community should explore ways to expand quality options to all families in order to improve student success.

did you know...

In April 2013, Governor Martin O'Malley approved HR 1107 that added four appointed members to the Prince George's Board, three by the County Executive (one with high-level education knowledge and experience; one with high-level of business, finance or other higher education experience; one with success at running a large business, nonprofit or government agency) and one by the County Council (a parent of a student in the school system). All must be county residents. The appointed members will serve a four-year staggered terms and receive compensation, allowances and benefits as provided to elected Board members. The Act went into effect on June 1, 2013. To learn more about HR 1107, go to [General Assembly of Maryland](#).

public schools...

ACCESSIBILITY:

All school-aged residents, assigned to schools by neighborhood/zone. Students may also attend “Specialty” programs outside their zone through an application process.

ASSOCIATED COST: No tuition

PAID BY:

- Taxpayers
- 2012-2013 Per-pupil Expenditure: \$12,983
- FY 13 Operating Budget: \$1.664 billion⁹

REQUIRED TO PROVIDE:

Transportation, Meals, Basic Education, Special Education Services

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS: 204 schools

SCHOOL *options*

public school options

With the majority of school-aged children enrolled in traditional public school (49.3 million, or 90% of the student population), legislation at all levels of government has been increasingly focused on improving the quality of instruction for these students. A 2010 Gallup poll revealed that a majority of Americans support their local public schools. When asked how to respond to consistently low-performing schools (as measured by test scores and graduation rates), 54 percent of respondents indicated they would keep those schools open with community support – more local citizen and neighborhood involvement in the improvement process and regular operation of the school.¹⁰ Because education in the U.S. is compulsory (required by law) to a certain age (16 in Maryland), local governments spend most of their education budget on the elementary, middle, and early high school years. Understanding the types of public programs available is helpful to parents as they search for the best alternative for their child.

TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In Prince George’s County, there are 204 traditional public schools (this includes pre-kindergarten programs through high school as well as alternative centers). Students are assigned to a school according to place of residence. The curriculum in public schools is designed to prepare students for post-secondary opportunities, whether that means college or career. Students receive instruction in the “core” courses – Math, English, Science, and Social Studies. They are also required to demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language, and have the opportunity to explore their own interests through different course electives like music, art, and computer technology. Teachers are “highly qualified”, which means they are certified by the state of Maryland, have at least a Bachelor’s degree in education or their academic content area, and have passed the necessary teaching entrance exams (Praxis I, Praxis II). Teachers must also complete regular continuing professional development in order to keep and “re-certify” their credentials through the state.

SPECIALTY PROGRAMS

Recognizing the need for increased course offerings, many public school systems offer specialty programs for students. These programs include added emphasis in areas like Creative and Performing Arts or Biotechnology. The Prince George's County Schools Lottery for Specialty Programs facilitates the placement of students in these programs.

CURRENT SPECIALTY PROGRAMS AND LOCATIONS

Biotechnology

Fairmont Heights HS (Grades 9-12)
Largo HS (Grades 9-12)

Creative & Performing Arts

Benjamin Foulois Academy(Grades K-8)
Hyattsville MS (Grades 7-8)
Thomas G. Pullen (Grades K-8)

French Immersion

John Hanson French Immersion (Grades K-8)
Robert Goddard French Immersion (Grades K-8)

International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program

Central HS
Crossland HS
Laurel HS
Parkdale HS
Suitland HS

Montessori

John Hanson Montessori(PreK-8)
Judith P. Hoyer Montessori(PreK-6)
Robert Goddard Montessori(PreK-8)

Talented & Gifted (TAG) (TAG Center Programs)

Accokeek Academy (Grades 2-8)
Capitol Heights ES (Grades 2-5)
Glenarden Woods ES(Grades 2-5)
Heather Hills ES(Grades 2-5)
Highland Park ES (Grades 2-5)
Longfields ES (Grades 2-5)
Valley View ES (Grades 2-5)
Greenbelt MS (Grades 6-8)
Kenmoor MS (Grades 6-8)
Walker Mill MS (Grades 6-8)
Technical Academy
Suitland HS (Grades 9-12)
Crossland HS (Grades 9-12)
Bladensburg HS (Grades 9-12)
Laurel HS (Grades 9-12)
Gwynn Park HS (Grades 9-12)
Croom HS (Grades 11-12)
Tall Oaks HS (Grades 11-12)

Visual & Performing Arts Program

Suitland High School

did you know...

In addition to the minimum requirements for teacher certification, 304 teachers in Prince George's County have earned National Board Certification. This is an intensive three-year process that involves a portfolio review and performance-based assessments. Prince George's County ranks 3rd in the state for the number of National Board Certified Teachers, behind Montgomery County and Anne Arundel County, respectively.

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

In recent years many groups, most notably parent activists, have led the way for a public alternative to traditional schools. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, “Demand for charter schools is far outpacing the supply in most communities”.¹¹ Charter schools are operated differently in each state. All charter schools in Maryland must have an authorizer, or an entity to “sponsor” the school. According to the Maryland Charter School Law of 2003, this role is fulfilled by a local board of education.¹²

Advocates of charter schools enjoy the flexibility these schools have with regard to education. While charter schools are still accountable for student outcomes in the areas of assessment and graduation, they have more leeway with curriculum and scheduling, and are often used as models for innovation in education. Most notably, the funding in charter schools follows the student rather than the school, which ensures specialized academic services. Charter schools are often able to provide specialized courses and smaller class sizes that result in better outcomes for students who have not found success in traditional public schools.

private school options

Private school enrollment has been steadily increasing over the past decade, as evidenced by enrollment trends during the 2009-2010 school year. With enrollment in private schools increasing and predicted to continue increasing through the year 2020, it is important to investigate these models and alternatives.

Alternatives to traditional public school include religious and non-religious private schools. In Prince George’s County, there are 39 private schools approved by the Maryland State Board of Education. Parents also have the option of home schooling their children as long as they guide them through an accredited curriculum. Understanding these options and the different services and benefits they provide is essential to ensuring the best academic opportunity for students in Prince George’s County.

PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Public Charter Schools:

In 2003, the state of Maryland passed the Public Charter Schools Act, enabling the creation of public charter schools for the purpose of greater student choice and school flexibility. Currently there are 52 public charter schools in the state of Maryland, seven of which are in Prince George’s County

Specialty Programs:

Prince George’s County Public Schools offers specialty programs for students. These programs include Creative and Performing Arts or Biomedical Sciences. The School System Lottery for Specialty Programs facilitates the placement of students in these programs.

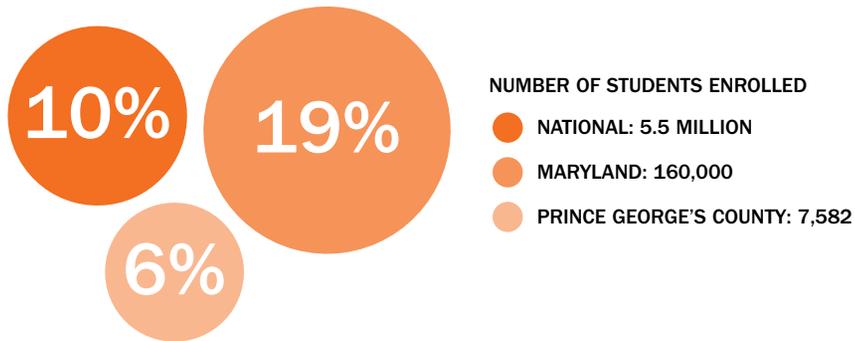
Traditional Public School:

Funded by property taxes, these schools serve the largest number of students in Prince George’s County.

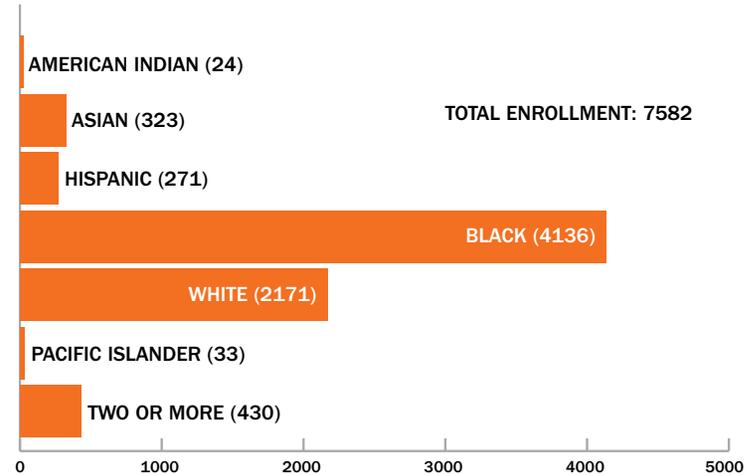
NON-RELIGIOUS PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Schools that do not receive public funds are considered private. This means it is the responsibility of the student’s family to provide the cost of attendance, usually in the form of tuition. All private schools must also be accredited by another agency, usually the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). In exchange for not accepting public funds, private schools have complete control over their curriculum and operations. Many families see this as an advantage to traditional public schools who are often accountable to curricular and assessment requirement from the state and Federal governments.

PRIVATE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, 2009-2010
 PERCENTAGE OF STUDENT POPULATION ENROLLED IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS



BREAKDOWN OF PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PRIVATE SCHOOL STUDENTS, 2009-2010



RELIGIOUS PRIVATE SCHOOLS

A subset of private schools, religious private schools offer independent academic curriculum in a variety of religious settings. Twenty out of the 39 private schools (51%) in Prince George's County are religious schools. Often affiliated with a place of worship like a church, synagogue, or mosque, religious private schools are able to provide a spiritual context to a student's academic development. Many families prefer religious private schools because the spiritual setting reinforces their beliefs.

HOME SCHOOL

During the 2009-2010 school year, approximately 38,000 students were homeschooled in Maryland. As an additional alternative to traditional public school, many families enjoy the flexibility of educating children at home. The benefits of homeschooling include individualized instruction, greater family unity, and more freedom to explore learning opportunities like field trips. Contrary to popular belief, parents do not need special credentials like a degree in education or teacher certification to homeschool their children. In fact, many families have found "cooperatives" to be beneficial – multiple families convening to share the responsibility of

educating their children. Parents who decide to homeschool are required by law to guide their children through an approved curriculum, but it does not have to be the same curriculum that the state of Maryland uses in public schools. For more information on the legislation and opportunities surrounding homeschooling, consult the Maryland State Department of Education's "[Non-Public School Approval Fact Sheet](#)".

14 DEVELOPING *successful practices*

School systems and organizations around the country and in Prince George's County have responded to the needs of parents as well as the desire of families to be more engaged in the educational process.

around the nation

Individual parents and groups across the country have begun to collectively organize in the interest of education for their children. In Missouri, a group of educators reached out to parents to form "Parents as Teachers", a program that informs new and expectant parents about the value of school-family partnerships. Similarly, the Creighton School District in Creighton, Arizona is beginning to model the idea of Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT). Designed to involve parents in the educational process, APTT uses teachers and administrators to involve parents in setting goals for students by teaching parents about curriculum and data.

in prince george's county

PARENTS AS TEACHERS

Side by Side is an organization that partners with parents of school children to help them help their children learn. Launched by the Laurel Clergy Association, community members were concerned with local education and saw schools as the central institution within the community. After offering afterschool services to students and surveying teachers and school administrators, Side by Side began to focus their efforts on helping parents in the community understand the education their children are receiving. "The teacher surveys indicated that lack of parent involvement was one of the biggest hurdles in the classroom, along with progress in reading and math, and behavior issues," says founder, Joe Murchison "We thought that by addressing the issue of parent involvement, we could address all three issues at once." Drawing on the research and practices of community organizers like Geoffrey Canada in the Harlem Children's Zone, Side by Side now provides "Great Start" family forums in seven different schools in the Laurel community. At these academies, meals and childcare are provided and parents learn about the school policies and practices that affect their children and how they can help reinforce learning at home. (www.sidebyside.org)



PARENTS AS PARTNERS

The Chesapeake Math and IT (CMIT) Public Charter School opened its doors in Prince George's County in 2010. Based on the model of the Chesapeake Science Point Public Charter School in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, the school offers a rigorous Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) curriculum. The goal of CMIT is to prepare students for post-secondary success through a school-family-partnership, and parent involvement is strongly solicited through the Parents Task Force. Faculty also makes regular home visits to gain a better understanding of students as individuals outside of the academic setting. Students may apply to attend CMIT through the Prince George's County Public Schools lottery, as long as they are a resident of the county. (www.cmitacademy.org)

PARENTS AS ADVOCATES

Joy Morrow is the Head of School at New Hope Academy in Landover Hills, Maryland. Now in its 3rd year of operation, the school began as a parent-led effort to provide character-based education to children in Prince George's County. Specifically, parents were worried about exposure to violence in schools, bullying, sexual behavior, and values that were not consistent with what they tried to teach at home. "We wanted them to have a well-rounded education, not focused on teaching to a test. It was also critical that they have significant opportunities to discover and develop their creativity and talents." Joy and one other parent, Ann Brown, began a grassroots effort to find other interested families and begin researching how they could start their own school. They met with local church members and formed committees who met monthly, tasked with investigating issues like policy, discipline, library/media, funding, curriculum, state certification, and staffing. Several parents took out second mortgages on their homes in order to buy a building that was being sold by Prince George's County Public Schools. New Hope Academy began operating as a fully licensed school in 1990, with 93 students from infants through grade 6. Today the school operates as a Pre-kindergarten – 12th grade school, with over 200 students from the Prince George's County and the D.C. region. "Getting the parents involved is a critical factor in the success of students, and something we try to do by fostering significant communication, so they can stay involved and coach their children academically," says Joy Morrow. (www.newhopeacademy.org)

PARENTS AS DECISION-MAKERS

Great Schools offers parents an online tool to identify public and private school options within Prince George's County and across the United States. A parent can view a school profile that includes enrollment, test score, demographic, programs and culture, and student and teacher information. In addition, each profile offers a quality rating by Great Schools as well as individual parents who have their child enrolled at the selected school. Great Schools does not offer a comprehensive listing of school options for Prince George's County but it is filling a critical information void for parents seeking information to inform their decisions about their child's education. (www.greatschools.org)



did you know...

Evaluations of the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), a nine-week program that builds immigrant parents' skills and knowledge about how to support their child's education, found that children of program participants were more likely to go on to college than similarly matched students.¹³

16 *CALL to action*

Engaging parents in the educational process in Prince George's County involves building on existing programs as well as taking steps to re-think the educational system in Prince George's County. The recommendations of The Community Foundation for parents, philanthropists, school leaders, policymakers, businesses, and the community focus on two core beliefs:

- Education is a partnership between schools, families, and the community.
- The school "system" is the network of all academic institutions that benefit our children.

Offering opportunities for youth engagement requires engaging parents as well, and it is with this goal in mind that we make a call to action to parents, philanthropists, school leaders, policymakers, businesses, and the community.

PARENTS & THE COMMUNITY AT-LARGE

Engage in the Information Process: Informed decision-making is critical in community advocacy. Groups like MarylandCAN exist to collect the most recent and accurate data on state and local education so that it can be used to empower parents and local community groups to improve educational conditions for their students. Reach out to MarylandCAN to organize an informational seminar in your neighborhood to learn more about current educational offerings and options. (www.marylandcan.org)

Get Involved: Community schools and the Prince George's County School System have worked hard to build programs that offer parents a voice in local education. Seek out opportunities that are a good fit for you and your family. These may include volunteering at the school level, participating in School Board meetings, or organizing a local activity to support your student and his or her educators. Whatever the forum, we encourage participation. Most importantly, create an environment of learning at home. Small gestures like asking questions about school and reading to your children can make a big impact.

PHILANTHROPY

Fund Parent Resource Centers: Well-researched and modeled across the United States, parent resource centers serve parents as well as schools and communities by providing a central source of sound data and information for decision-making. These physical and online locations exist to collect information from various sources and assist parents as they navigate through the educational system with their children.

Invest in Service Programs: Direct investment plays a critical role in the operation of community service agencies that provide parental supports and resources. Individual donors and organizations can play an important role in the establishment of programs that provide information to parents about education in Prince George's County, as well as programs that mentor new parents who are in need of supports at home.

BUSINESSES

Establish Scholarship Funds: While the strength of American education is the diversity of school options, it is difficult for many Prince George's families to gain access to some private schools that might benefit their children. Businesses can help link students with educational opportunity by partnering with local private schools to provide scholarships or other cost-deferment options like application fee waivers and school uniforms to families in need.

Provide Workplace Incentives: Many parents find the tasks of working and parenting difficult. Employers who provide incentives for working parents are more likely to benefit from increased productivity and long-term commitment. Investments like on-site daycare, paid time off for school conferences, and tuition assistance for continuing education will motivate workers and provide better quality of life for families in Prince George's County. Establish supports through the workplace that allow parents to support their families and remain focused on their jobs.

Develop Partnerships: Partnering with schools and with other businesses is a powerful method of finding ways to benefit parents and students. Consider sponsoring a local school's parent association and make use of local resources like the Prince George's County Chamber of Commerce as a convening authority to launch discussion groups and share innovative practices.

SCHOOL LEADERS

Facilitate Meaningful Interactions: Within the school system, students, parents, and educators must all communicate effectively with each other. In order to promote positive outcomes for all parties, the Prince George's County school system should proactively reach out to parents, especially those who have become disengaged from the school system, by communicating specific ways for parents to become involved. Implementing home visiting and creating programs like the Academic Parent Teacher Team help teachers, students, and parents understand academic expectations. The Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT), replaces the traditional parent-teacher conference with three group meetings throughout the year, where teachers meet at once with all parents in their classroom. Each parent is provided with a folder of their child's performance indicators. Teachers then provide an in-depth coaching session on how to interpret this data based on overall classroom performance, school benchmarks, and state standards. Parents are provided with strategies and tools to help support learning at home. And together, parents and teachers set goals for their students, individually and as a class.

Design Programming Around Parents: Many opportunities exist for parents to volunteer their time and talent to local schools. Formalizing the importance of parent involvement through regular parent orientations and actively soliciting their input in-person and through new technology will help introduce parents into the school system as well as validate them as meaningful stakeholders in local education.

Share Best Practices: Leaders in all educational settings (both public and private) can learn from and benefit from one another's best practices in the area of engaging parents. Too often, these conversations do not happen. School leaders, administrators, teachers, and staff should reach out to other schools and ask "what are you doing to engage parents?" Bringing leaders together from across educational settings (public and private) can be beneficial for parents, students, and the community. Consider reaching out to a third party, like The Community Foundation, to support the facilitation of these conversations.

did you know...

In 2011, District of Columbia Public Schools partnered with the Flamboyant Foundation to build the capacity of teachers to conduct home visits to families. Home visits take teachers outside of the classroom and into the homes of families to improve communication, build trust and support between teachers and families that result in increased attendance rates and test scores.



Schools in Seattle, Washington partner with community organizations to offer support to parents at the beginning of each school year. Part of Washington State's "Innovation by Design" initiative through Harvard University, these partnerships are focused on supporting students in the areas of health and behavior. Through targeting the skills of parents in the community, students are then able to benefit both at home and at school.

did you know...

The Brookings Institute Brown Center on Education Policy completed a review of large school districts' school choice and assignment mechanisms. Prince George's County Public Schools received a grade of "C-" overall, ranking them 41 out of 107 in terms of education choices available. In the category of "Assignment Mechanism", the school system received a 0 due to lack of flexibility or choice in determining which school a student attends. Relatedly, Prince George's County Public Schools also received a score of 0 in the "Transportation" category, indicating the difficulty parents have accessing transportation to a traditional school outside of their assigned zone.

POLICYMAKERS

Earmark Funding for Parent Engagement: Parent engagement decreases as students enter secondary grades (9-12). Policymakers at all levels should consider funding programs specifically at the public high school level for parent engagement. Some schools are able to use their Title I funds to employ a Parent Engagement Specialist or Parent Liaison; schools who are not eligible for Title I funds (32 high schools in Prince George's County) must secure funding for these positions from another source, or go without the position altogether. Locate funding for this important resource and make it a priority within Prince George's County high schools.

Rethink the School "System": As we encourage and promote community-based education in Prince George's County, the concept of a separate and singular "system" for education seems contradictory. The evolving needs of families and students have placed rigorous demands on public schools in Prince George's County, and parents desire alternatives.

Policymakers should investigate innovative alternatives to traditional school assignment policies. Ideas for research include breaking down the "walls" of school wards, researching "school match" systems within public schools that allow students and families more options when considering their education, and revising school assignment systems.

Promote Quality and Opportunity: The success of our students depends upon the quality of their education as well as the opportunities for educational alternatives. Policymakers should research the best ways to continue pushing and supporting the improvement of our public schools while also facilitating the creation of more alternatives for families who need them.

ENDnotes

- 1 Michigan Department of Education “What Research Says about Parent Involvement in Children’s Education” 2001.
- 2 University of Kentucky...
- 3 Prince George’s County Board of Education, “Requested Annual Operating Budget, FY 2014”, 2013.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Mapp, Karen L. “Title I and Parent Involvement: Lessons from the Past, Recommendations for the Future.” Center for American Progress, March, 2011.
- 6 Michigan Department of Education “What Research Says about Parent Involvement in Children’s Education” 2001.
- 7 “A New Wave of Evidence” Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Prince George’s County Public Schools.
- 10 Bushaw and Lopez, “A Time for Change: The 42nd Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools”, 11.
- 11 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools “Why Charter Schools?” 2012.
- 12 Maryland State Board of Education “Charter Schools in Maryland” 2012.
- 13 National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group, “Taking Leadership, Innovating Change: Profiles in Family, School, and Community Engagement.” Harvard Family Research Project, 2010.



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