



Education Advocate Newsletter

October 2008

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ACLU Weighs in on High Stakes Tests

ACLU-MD sent a letter to the state Board of Education, anticipating a discussion of Maryland's high stakes exit exams at the Oct. 28th board meeting. Under the new policy, members of the class of 2009 will not receive a diploma even if they have earned all their credits to graduate unless they meet the High School Assessment requirements (4 tests or multiple projects). The letter calls on the state board to examine whether it is fair to deny diplomas to students who have passed their courses while the state has not provided qualified teachers and adequate resources to the students.

Schools Push to Increase Return of Lunch Forms

Baltimore City schools are pushing toward the October 31st deadline to get parents and students to submit their Free and Reduced Meals (FARM) forms. Each student who qualifies for FARM is considered "at-risk" and is allocated an additional \$4,825 from the state, which could produce up to \$40 million for city schools. Parents, educators, and advocates have been working hard to bring resources such as art and music, tutors, after school programs, and highly qualified teachers to their schools. These resources are greatly needed for our students and a successful effort to submit FARM applications could provide the funding necessary to implement these programs. BCPSS is currently funding community-based organizations to work with many schools to increase enrollment in the FARM program. Contact your principal or the school system's central office at 410.545.1870 for more information.

The ACLU proposed this initiative during BCPSS budget hearings last March, noting that low FARM enrollment, particularly in middle and high schools, was depriving City schools of needed funds.

Pre-K Campaign Shows Gains

ACLU-MD has been pressing Maryland public schools to monitor and comply with the pre-Kindergarten mandate in the Bridge to Excellence law. The law requires school systems to provide at least a 1/2 pre-K day class for all income-eligible and homeless children who turned four by 9/1/08. The ACLU, in a partnership with the state NAACP, has targeted communities across the state to educate parents non-profit and community groups, and schools about the law. Eleven newspapers around the state and local radio have publicized the effort.

In Baltimore, City schools have added pre-K classes for the past three years, due in part to the ACLU's advocacy for the expansion. We commend Baltimore City for continuing to provide full day classes to meet parent's needs. However, the number of families with four year-olds in the City requesting pre-K outweighs the number of seats available, which continues to leave many students on waiting lists. BCPSS this year has made progress in addressing the issue by centralizing a pre-K tracking system for waiting children. Their new system of contacting parents whose child has been wait-listed is expected to enroll additional children. The ACLU advocates that more slots for pre-K be targeted to certain overcrowded areas in the City for greater expansion-- to comply with the law and to meet the needs of the children.

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