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Fostering a school community – a shared responsibility

There has been no greater time in our country's history when the word community has been so critical. Whether talking about a neighborhood, a business, an education system, or our nation as a whole, the word community is entwined in every facet of our lives. And the strength of our community fabric is what will determine future outcomes. In the school community, there is a shared responsibility between school staff and parents not just to support children, but also to support each other to ensure the future has positive outcomes for all. Research has proven that when schools and families work together, students do better, teachers feel supported, and parents feel connected.

When I look at the over 1,400 schools in our state, I see the tremendous potential to improve the lives of each member of the school community. This week, as schools across the state celebrate American Education Week and National Parent Involvement Day on November 19th, I encourage parents take the first step to engaging or re-engaging in the school community. Engagement is a commitment that strengthens the school community regardless of what language a family speaks or the socio-economic level they come from. Whether it is reading together at home, helping with homework, or talking to school staff to see what is needed, the important part is that it happens, consistently. There are as many ways to get involved in the school community, both within the building as well as from home, as there are parents. Two examples are:

- If a parent speaks a foreign language, he/she could volunteer to translate for other parents who speak the same language during Back-to-School night or some other school function.
- A parent can help with cleaning up or landscaping school grounds either by working for an hour or more on a Saturday or Sunday, or making calls to a local gardening businesses to see if they could donate supplies or plants.

This year, Maryland has had a lot of achievements to celebrate. Our education system was ranked first in the nation by *Education Week journal*. We had the highest percentage of high schools offering and students taking college-level courses on the America's Top Public High Schools List by Newsweek Magazine. Our 8th graders posted the nation's 4th-largest four-year gain on the national math exam. These achievements could not have happened without strong parent and community involvement. We all have something to contribute to the communities we live in, every day.