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TO: Members of the Maryland State Board of Education
FROM: Nancy S. Grasmick 
DATE: January 25, 2011
SUBJECT: Charter School Program Review

PURPOSE:

To continue the State Board of Education's efforts to expand the Board's understanding of the operation of charter schools under present State statute and to identify opportunities to strengthen Maryland's Charter School Program.

BACKGROUND:

In June, the State Board approved a Charter School Policy which was prepared to provide greater clarity of Maryland's Charter School Law. During the discussion of that Policy, questions were raised regarding the need to suggest amendments to improve the functioning of the law. At that time, it was agreed that the Board did not have sufficient knowledge of the operation of the Maryland Charter School Program to determine whether or not it was appropriate and/or necessary for the State Board to suggest amendments to the current Charter School Law. It was further agreed that the Board would conduct a review of the charter schools using a process similar to that followed by the Board in examining and reviewing the operation of Alternative Teacher Education Programs. The review would take place over several meetings of the State Board and include panel presentations by representatives of charter schools as well as representatives of local boards of educations and school systems.

The review began at the August Board meeting with a presentation by Department staff which included both State and national data on charter schools and an overview of Maryland's Federal Charter School Program Grant. In September, the Board heard presentations by representatives of three charter school operators in Maryland. At its meeting in October, the Board heard commentary from a panel of representatives of national organizations that are actively involved in the charter school movement: the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools, the Center for Educational Reform, and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. In December, the Board received commentary from the Maryland Association of Boards of Education and representatives of two local school systems.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This month, the Board will receive comments from the Baltimore Teachers Union (BTU) and the Maryland State Educators Association (MSEA) on the operation of Maryland's charter school program and the present charter school statute. The presidents of these organizations, Marietta English (BTU) and Clara Floyd (MSEA), will speak on behalf of their respective organizations.

ACTION:

For information only, no action is required.