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## **MARYLAND PARENTAL INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTER (PIRC) LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE TO ENGAGE PARENTS AND EDUCATORS**

Bethesda, MD, September 13, 2007—The Maryland Parental Information Resource Center (PIRC) is proud to announce the launch of its new website ([www.mdpirc.org](http://www.mdpirc.org)), aimed at giving parents and educators the tools they need to boost family engagement and achievement for all of Maryland's students.

The Maryland Parental Information Resource Center (PIRC)—also known as Parents as Essential Partners (PEP)—was launched in October 2006 as part of a five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement. The grant was awarded to the Bethesda-based Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAC), which oversees the project, in collaboration with community partners.

Though the Department of Education began offering the PIRC grants in 1995, this is the first time that “the emphasis of the program is a coordinated, statewide impact,” according to Maryland PIRC Project Director Susan Shaffer. Except in large states like California or New York, Shaffer points out, “there is now only one PIRC grant per state.”

Among the programs the grant is enabling in Maryland is this user-friendly website aimed at getting parents, parent advocates, community members, teachers, principals, and other administrators working together for the benefit of the state's children. Ultimately, the website will be translated entirely into Spanish. The Maryland PIRC already offers a bilingual, toll-free Parent Hotline—just one of the many resources listed on the new website.

The centerpiece of the website, according to Shaffer, is the Frequently Asked Questions section. Our PIRC's mission is that everything here emanates from the parents,” says Shaffer. “The main focus of the grant is to assist the under-served—low-income, African-American, Latino, new immigrants. So we created focus groups from those populations to provide questions for this section. We also asked the Family Involvement Specialists and Title I Coordinators from across the state, ‘What are the three questions that come up the most from parents?’—and that is what we put up on our FAQ page.” There are now 60 questions listed, grouped by relevance to school level (early childhood, elementary, high school, etc.); topic (legal issues, disability, testing, etc.); and demographic (African American, Asian, Latino, etc.). But Shaffer and her colleagues don't assume that they have covered all the bases. There is also an easy “Ask a Question” form that users can fill out to get a personalized reply directly from PIRC staff.

Other features include: lists of resources for parents, parent advocates, and educators; a searchable database of studies, reports, news articles, and training materials; and lists of social

service agencies, advocacy groups, and relevant government agencies. The website also has organizational information on the Maryland PIRC and descriptions of other programs that it is sponsoring through the PIRC grant and its partners (Teaching for Change, [www.teachingforchange.org](http://www.teachingforchange.org); the National Network of Partnership Schools, [www.csos.jhu.P2000](http://www.csos.jhu.P2000); Friends of the Family, [www.friendsofthefamily.org](http://www.friendsofthefamily.org); and Judy Centers, [www.mdk12.org/instruction/ensure/readiness/judy\\_centers.html](http://www.mdk12.org/instruction/ensure/readiness/judy_centers.html)).