MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Preparing World-Class Students

Lillian M. Lowery, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Schools

200 West Baltimore Street • Baltimore, MD 21201 • 410-767-0100 • 410-333-6442 TTY/TDD • MarylandPublicSchools.org

TO: Members of the State Board of Education

FROM: Lillian M. Lowery, Ed.D.

DATE: July 24, 2012

SUBJECT: Facilities Guidelines for School Courtyards

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this action is to request State Board approval for the publication and distribution of "A Practical Guide to Planning, Constructing, and Using School Courtyards." This document provides technical information to members of the school community to assist in the creation of supportive learning environments by providing a common language for educators and architects.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The State Board has the power and duty to establish, with the recommendation of the State Superintendent, standards and guides for planning and constructing school building projects (Annotated Code of Maryland – Education Article 2-205). The Division of Business Services School Facilities Branch develops and distributes these facilities planning guidelines. The guidelines are provided to local board of education staff and consultant architects for use as voluntary design criteria on new construction and major renovation projects. Recent guidelines have addressed physical education facilities, general classroom design, and classroom acoustics.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

"A Practical Guide to Planning, Constructing, and Using School Courtyards" was developed in partnership with the MSDE Divisions of Early Childhood Development and Instruction. A committee representing local school systems, environmental educational organizations, higher education, and private architects from across the State provided review and advice to the project. A draft of the guide was made available to local school system superintendents for comment in February 2012.

The guide addresses the use of school courtyards as creative instructional spaces for all subjects and provides numerous color photographs, diagrams, and examples from Maryland, other states, and other countries. School courtyards benefit the school community by letting natural light and ventilation into classrooms; providing a safe, contained, outdoor area for instruction; supporting environmental education programs, especially where other outdoor opportunities are limited; and offering opportunities for creative, hands-on instruction.

The guide is applicable both to new schools and to schools planning to revitalize and better use existing courtyards. It includes recommendations for building and plant materials; size, volume, and solar orientation; construction, accessibility, and maintenance considerations; and safety and security. School system compliance with recommendations in the guide is completely voluntary.

The guidelines will provide technical assistance to public school staff charged with developing high quality instructional programs and maximizing the use of facilities. The document will be available for download on the MSDE website. A very limited number of hard copies will be available.

ACTION:

I am requesting approval for MSDE to publish and distribute *A Practical Guide to Planning, Constructing, and Using School Courtyards.*

Attachment *A Practical Guide to Planning, Constructing, and Using School Courtyards* will be available if approved at http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/newsroom/publications/