Customer Service Annual Report

FISCAL YEAR 2019
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The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) provides leadership for the State’s system of birth -12 public education and rehabilitation services. We provide strong leadership, strategic resources, and policy guidance to our local schools as they prepare our students for success beyond graduation. The MSDE is unwavering in pursuing the goal of equity and excellence for Maryland students. It is this goal that propels us to support and enhance ongoing initiatives, as well as pursuing new innovations. All of our resources are being leveraged to produce results, ranging from the launching of major initiatives to the commitment of making small improvements in operations every single day. Working together with all of our stakeholders, we are opening the doors to new ideas and ways of thinking that elevate and enhance student achievement.

The dedicated staff of MSDE will continue this journey with enthusiasm, guided by the goal of student success and driven by the promise and potential in every one of Maryland’s students.
FY2019 Highlights

• Since the implementation of the Customer Service Survey Initiative at the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) in January 2017, almost 4,500 customer service surveys have been completed by the MSDE customers;

• Overall, since January 2017, 81.1% of customers completing a survey reported they were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the customer service provided;

• All employees completed Customer Service Training in FY 2017. In FY 2018 and FY 2019, all new employees were provided Customer Service Training as part of new employee orientation; in FY 2019, targeted training was provided to employees based upon Customer Service Survey responses.

• Customer Service survey results have been integrated into the Maryland State Department of Education’s annual Managing for Results submission;

• The MSDE’s monthly employee newsletter, The Pulse, includes a “Customer Service Corner” with tips on improving customer service. It also recognizes individual employees who have received positive comments on the Customer Service Survey;

• The Office of the Ombudsman has proven to be an effective and successful strategy for fast tracking requests for information and resolving constituent concerns;

• Employee’s semi-annual Performance Evaluation reviews include a rating on Customer Service;

• A link to the Customer Service Promise continues to be prominently displayed on the MSDE Home Page. The Customer Service Promise is displayed on the “About Us” section of the MSDE website;

• All employees have placed the Customer Service Satisfaction Survey link in their email signatures. The Customer Service Satisfaction Survey link is also posted to the MSDE webpage;

• Customer Service Promise posters continue to be posted at each entrance to the Nancy S. Grasmick State Education Building, as well as at the Division of Rehabilitation Services, Disability Determination Services, and satellite offices throughout the State. Additional Customer Service Promise posters continue to be posted in public spaces and employee gathering places.
Recognition Given to Employees

The tremendous progress our agency has experienced would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of the MSDE employees. The State Superintendent, Dr. Karen B. Salmon, encourages management to nominate staff that have gone above and beyond to provide exceptional customer service to the citizens of Maryland and support the Department's mission.

Years of Service Awards

Each May, the MSDE provides certificates and pins to employees with 5, 10, 15, and 20 years of service. Those employees with 25, 30, 35, 40, and 45 years of State service, receive special recognition at a breakfast and Service Awards ceremony. These long-time State employees are presented with plaques and have their pictures taken with the State Superintendent and their supervisors.

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<tr>
<th>25 YEAR AWARD</th>
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<td>Julie Alpert</td>
<td>Sharon Brooks</td>
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<td>Wanda Bentley</td>
<td>Diane Craig</td>
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<td>Crystal Brice</td>
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<td>Donald Combs</td>
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<td>Susan Cooper</td>
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<td>Diana Stashik</td>
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<td>Joanne Tirabassi</td>
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<td>35 YEAR AWARD</td>
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<td>Juanita Brice-Davis</td>
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<td>Clara Coleman</td>
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<td>Kathy Donithan</td>
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<td>Joy Robertson</td>
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<td>Beth Sayles</td>
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<td>William Stancil</td>
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45 YEAR AWARD

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<td>Monica Bias</td>
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<td>Jacqueline Blanding</td>
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<td>Carol Breitman</td>
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<td>Linda Chaney</td>
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<td>Nevada Brewer</td>
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<td>Sheila Cox</td>
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<td>Esther Miller</td>
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<td>Lynne Muller</td>
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<td>Suzanne Ruark</td>
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<td>Janet Saunders</td>
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<td>Ava Spencer</td>
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<td>Susan Spinnato</td>
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State Employee Appreciation Week

Each May, MSDE employees are thanked for their hard work and dedication with a variety of activities including:

- Morning greetings to arriving employees by senior level staff at the entrances to the building;
- The aforementioned Service Awards ceremony and breakfast; and
- A capstone Friday afternoon Ice Cream Social with senior level staff scooping ice cream – a fan favorite!
Leadership Analysis of FY2019 and Summary of FY2020 Approach

Since the initial implementation of the Customer Service Initiative at the MSDE in January 2017, more than 4,400 customers have responded to the Customer Service Survey; more than 81% of customers indicated they were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the customer service provided.

The Customer Service Surveys provide us with data that help us to evaluate the quality of customer service provided by MSDE’s various Divisions, offices, and individual employees. With the two and one-half years of data we now have available, we have been able to identify trends, both positive and negative, in the quality of customer service provided.

In fiscal year 2019, tailored and enhanced customer service training was provided to those offices and staff that have been identified as needing additional professional development.

Additionally, all Customer Service Surveys comments are shared regularly with the Chief of Staff who forwards them to the applicable management level staff for follow-up.

Further, because exemplary customer service is expected of every MSDE employee and is a vital component of our mission, a customer service rating will continue to be a part of each employee’s semi-annual Performance Evaluation.

The MSDE continues to update online publications, forms, FAQs, and pertinent information on our website so that our constituents can find relevant information quickly and accurately. Additionally, we use social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) to help get the word out about services, events, and news to provide educators and citizens with information important to them.
Detailed FY2019 Results and FY2020 Plans

Voice of the Customer – Survey Results

Since the implementation of the Customer Service Survey Initiative at the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) in January 2017, more than 4,400 customer service surveys have been completed by the MSDE customers. Overall, 81.1% of customers completing a survey reported they were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the customer service provided.

In fiscal year 2019, two questions were asked. The first was: Overall, how satisfied are you with the customer service provided? From July 2018 through June 2019, more than 1,500 customers responded to this question; 1,118 customers indicated they were very satisfied and 121 indicated they were somewhat satisfied, yielding a total satisfaction rate of 81.1%, consistent with results since the implementation of the Customer Service Survey Initiative at the MSDE.

In fiscal year 2019, the second statement on which customer service was rated was: The state agency made it easy for me to handle my issue. During FY 2019, 1,527 customers responded to question two of the Customer Service survey and 78.4% of customers indicated they strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement.

On average, 29 survey responses were received each week during FY 2019. The fewest number of surveys received in a week was 12; the most was 56.

On the first question, both MSDE’s overall “satisfaction” rate to date of 81.1% and the FY 2019 rate of 81.1% exceed the State goal of 80%. With the survey data, we have been able to identify the offices and employees that could most likely benefit from additional, targeted training which will continue to be provided in FY 2020.

The MSDE just misses the 80% goal on the second question with an FY 2019 satisfaction rate of 78.4% and a cumulative satisfaction rate of 78.5% since January 2018, when this question was first asked.

Within the agency, we promote an overall professional atmosphere and an understanding of the importance of treating all customers with dignity and respect. We also recognize that not every customer is going to indicate satisfaction with the customer service they have received, particularly when the response is not the outcome for which they were hoping. While, ideally, MSDE management would like to see 100% of our customers indicate some level of satisfaction, we believe a goal of 80% was reasonable and attainable. That being said, we do not plan to “rest on our laurels” because we have achieved the goal of an 81.1% satisfaction rate to date. The customer service surveys have helped us to identify areas where additional training and support is needed. With our training plans for FY 2020 focused on those areas, we hope to be able to move the needle and are setting a goal of 81.5% customer satisfaction for FY 2020.
Customer Service Training

All employees completed Customer Service Training in FY 2017. For new employees who started after the training initiative was launched in 2017, we provided training during new employee orientation. New employees are briefed on the Customer Service initiative and the Customer Service Promise, and provided with specifics on how to access The HUB training they need to complete. The Office of Human Resources sends periodic reminders to emphasize the importance of customer service and to promote The HUB training. MSDE hired 199 total new employees (regular and contractual) during Fiscal Year 2019. During FY 2020, all new employees will continue to receive Customer Service training as part of new employee orientation.

In FY 2019, MSDE provided new, enhanced training to more than 200 employees on handling more complex customer interactions. Based upon Customer Service survey results, this enhanced, targeted training will continue to be provided to staff on an as-needed basis in FY 2020.

Customer Inquiry Response Times and Overall Time-to-Resolution

Customer Contact Centers

The agency has multiple call centers throughout the Department. This year’s report will focus on the Office of the Ombudsman, Educator Certification, and the Office of Child Care.

- The Ombudsman responds to requests for information and works to resolve constituent concerns received by phone, direct emails, and emails to the MSDE Info Box. The Ombudsman responds to phone calls and to emails in the general MSDE Info box. In FY 2019, the Ombudsman responded to 812 constituent phone calls, more than 2,000 emails, and 281 pieces of written correspondence. On average, the Ombudsman responds to 16 phone calls and 40 emails each week. In many instances, the constituent concerns need to be addressed by local school systems and the Ombudsman facilitates those communications.
  - The Certification Assistance Line responds to customer questions related to educator certification. It is staffed by support staff responsible for providing direct certification assistance. Complex certification questions are forwarded to a certification specialist.
  - The Certdocuments Email account is designated to receive all documents necessary for applying for an educator certificate. This includes applications, verification of employment forms, test scores, and transcripts. This feature has
allowed candidates to have their official transcripts sent electronically. This email is monitored by the certification branch support staff and emails are processed on the next business day.

- The Educator portal is for the use of educators who hold or wish to hold a Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) educator certification and allows users to apply for certification, print their certificate, update demographics, and view the status of submitted requests.

- Official Certificate Request: When an educator experiences difficulty printing their certificate, they may complete an official certificate request form online and an MSDE support staff will print and email the individual a PDF copy.

- EIS Help Desk: When an EIS user experiences technical issues with the EIS, questions and issues are directed to this desk. Issues are handled by the certification team.

- This year, the Division of Early Childhood has established a dedicated ombudsperson to respond to customer service inquiries. Additionally, in the Office of Child Care, Child Care Subsidy unit, the customer service responsibilities for child care subsidy case management and payment processing are handled by a third party, through a CCATS+ task order. The Customer Service unit serves both child care providers and child care subsidy customers. Calls are received through an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system which answers basic questions, such as, Have you received my invoice?, Have you processed my invoice?. If necessary, calls are transferred from the IVR to a customer service representative. The customer service unit is also responsible for all e-mail correspondence. Due to an increased call volume in response to recently increased Subsidy Program Income Guidelines and increased provider reimbursements, if the customer service unit cannot immediately get through to a customer service representative and the customer wishes to leave a voice message, CCS Central will return calls within 48 hours.

**Timeliness of Responding to Customer Inquiries**

The timeliness of responding to customer inquiries varies depending on the type and complexity of the request.

For the Office of Child Care - Child Care Subsidy, a third-party vendor contract requires that a caller does not wait more than five minutes once they are transferred from the IVR. This requirement is consistently met. In June 2019, the average speed of answer was 34 seconds.

In the area of educator certification, it is the policy of the Division to respond to calls and emails within 48 hours. If assistance cannot be provided within 48 hours, the staff member will respond and indicate that the request is being researched. Certification requests are processed within six weeks of receiving a complete application, as a complex verification process must be followed.
Veterans and their spouses received expedited processing; their requests are processed immediately following the receipt of a complete application.

Best Practices

- **Office of the Ombudsman** - The Office of the Ombudsman has proven to be an effective and successful strategy for fast tracking requests for information and resolving constituent concerns. The Ombudsman responds to phone calls, emails in the general MSDE Info box, and written correspondence. In FY 2019, the Ombudsman responded to 812 constituent phone calls, more than 2,000 emails, and 281 pieces of written correspondence. On average, the Ombudsman responds to 16 phone calls and 40 emails each week. In many instances, the constituent concerns need to be addressed by local school systems and the Ombudsman facilitates those communications.

- **Child Care Subsidy Quality Assurance** - For the Child Care Subsidy third party contractor, the goal is one-call resolution. Part of their quality assurance is to review the cases of callers they needed to call more than one time for resolution. The contractor’s quality service department listens to a set number of calls per representative, to ensure accuracy of information given and overall professionalism of the representative. Data collected is used to coach individual representatives and to enhance the overall training of incoming representatives. The MSDE has the ability to listen to any call and to provide technical assistance or coaching to improve future services.

- **Educator Certification and Program Approval** - As part of an effort to enhance the recruitment of teachers in Maryland, the Educator Certification and Program Approval Office is currently working with the Office of Communications to establish a recruitment website designed as a "one-stop-shop" for prospective teachers interested in working in Maryland public schools. The website will provide information regarding educator certification, incentives, employment, and the benefits of living in a state that offers mountains, beaches, and everything in between.

Plans for Improvement

The **Office of Child Care** - Child Care Subsidy office and the third party vendor work together to ensure representatives have the most current policy and procedure changes available. The provision of continuous feedback to the representatives ensures quality service improvements. Use of quality assurance reviews and the incorporation of past experiences into trainings ensures new representatives are prepared as soon as they begin taking calls. Additionally, the Division of Early Childhood recently assigned an additional staff person to respond to customer service inquiries regarding the new federal background check clearance process, as there seem to be many questions. The Division of Early Childhood and the third party vendor will continue to work together to address the increased call volumes due to programmatic changes or related to CCATS system.
changes and to develop strategies for reducing or addressing messages requiring a returned call.

Improving the Customer Experience from Multiple Perspectives

Making Agency Services Available Online

MSDE offers customers an online option for almost all services. Examples include completion of applications for educator certification and uploading required supporting documents; applications for child care center licenses; applications for child care subsidy; and applications for disability determinations.

This year, the Division of Early Childhood created a new website to provide customer service to parents and providers: marylandchild.org. This consumer website provides customers with access to any information they may need in three clicks or less.

The Division of Educator Certification and Program Approval continues to maintain an electronic Educator Information System (EIS) that maintains documents and data for over 300,000 educator records. The EIS external web portal is accessible to Maryland educators for online applications, fee payment, status checks, and downloading their educator certificates. Educators have the ability to check certification status, update information, request renewals, pay fees online, and download their respective certificates via the internet. Additionally, the Certification Website provides information regarding all steps in the certification process. Further, each branch in the Division has a dedicated website with information regarding the services offered, pertinent regulatory information, and access to commonly used forms.

Processing Times for Customer Transactions

During FY 2018, an office that was struggling with significantly extended processing times dramatically improved their processes. The Educator Certification Branch of the Division of Educator Certification and Program Approval had experienced a significant backlog in responding to initial applications for certification, renewal requests, and general customer service. To better meet their constituents' needs and improve customer service, in May 2017 the certification specialists were given an aggressive goal to reduce the certification processing backlog to six weeks or less by September 30, 2017. The goal was met and has been maintained throughout FY 2019.

Adjusting Hours to Meet Customer Demands

The Division of Educator Certification and Program Approval responded to customer demand by extending the hours of the Educator Certification Assistance line. Last year, the phone line was operated from 8:15 A.M. to 4:00 P.M each weekday. This year, the hours have been extended to 5:30 P.M. on Tuesdays and Thursdays to meet the needs of educators working in classrooms who are unable to call during the regular school day. It is staffed by support staff responsible for
providing direct certification assistance. Complex certification questions are forwarded to a certification specialist.

In FY 2019, the Division of Early Childhood held nine regional Town Hall meetings with 18 sessions. The meetings were held to provide an opportunity for MSDE to connect with the community, provide updates from MSDE and hear feedback from the field and from families. The information gathered at these meetings will inform the state’s needs assessment and strategic plan for the PDGB-5 grant. There were morning and evening sessions at each location to provide opportunities for more families, teachers and providers to attend.

Social Media Usage to Improve the Customer Experience

The Office of Communications and Partnerships oversees and implements Statewide multimedia communications with an emphasis on cultivating stakeholder and media relations. The Office helps to provide the public face of MSDE and is responsible for creating stronger partnership with the Maryland Public Schools Community. The Office:

- Issued 80 press releases spotlighting the work of the MSDE and Maryland Public schools, resulting in hundreds of media placements.
- Handled 1,295 press contacts, working with regional and national reporters and highlighting the strengths of Maryland students, educators, and schools.
- Maintained and upgraded the MarylandPublicSchools.org website, building scores of new and accessible pages. Completed and aired 25 videos geared toward the general public. Videos were viewed 11,168 times via MSDE’s YouTube channel, plus 21,665 times over other MSDE-branded social media. Additionally, developed eight videos solely for instructional purposes.
- Added 4,653 new combined followers to MSDE’s social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) for a total of 21,850 followers.

The Division of Early Childhood used Twitter to inform the public of the availability of Maryland’s draft Child Care Development Fund State Plan and the Public Hearing. The Division also sends out updates about the fingerprinting process to providers who have signed up to receive ‘Tuesday Tidbits’ emails. They also use the MD Families Engage Website, Facebook and Twitter to share updates and information including articles, resources, and events. They also electronically deliver a quarterly Family Engagement “Toolkit in Action” E -newsletter to highlight programs and family engagement practices across the state. Further, they use govdelivery to share updates and announcements. Moving forward they plan to use more short videos and podcasts, rather than articles, and will be partnering with MPT using Bright by Text to share family engagement updates.
The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) has a Facebook page which is primarily used to disseminate information to their consumers, workforce partners, and the business community.

Posts to the page include information about: jobs and hiring events, Division events, workforce partners’ events, and numerous articles about employment, disability, best workforce practices, soft skills, etc., and DORS’ consumers employment success stories.

DORS schedules posts to the page to go live two to three times per day. Posts on the weekends have a significantly higher engagement rate, and posts with a human interest angle tend to be the most popular. DORS also receives posts and private messages through the Facebook page, with consumers and others inquiring about DORS’ services, and they strive to respond to these promptly.

A year ago, the DORS Facebook page had 1,947 followers. As of the end of June 2019, DORS has over 2,400 followers. Considering how focused the DORS mission is, this growth is significant and indicates more interest from the business and workforce development communities, both of which are essential to the success of DORS’ dual-customer model and mission.

During FY2020, DORS will continue to evaluate its social media insights to find ways to improve its reach and to better engage Maryland businesses that are seeking qualified, job-ready employees.

**Licensing and Permitting from Multiple Perspectives**

The MSDE issues licenses in two areas: teacher certification and child care facilities. In FY 2019, the MSDE issued 28,185 teacher certificates. Maryland currently has more than 8,000 licensed child care programs, including 5,234 family child care homes, 137 large family child care homes, and 2,455 child care centers. In FY 2019, 546 new child care programs were licensed.
MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION

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