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### The Parent Mediation Program – A Pathway to Cooperative Parenting

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# The Parent Mediation Program – *A Pathway to Cooperative Parenting*

Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration (MOPC), UMass Boston in partnership with the Department of Revenue CSE Division and five Community Mediation Centers across the state

## The Program

The Parent Mediation Program is a community-based program for parents who are no longer able to live together but still want to co-parent. The Program partners with five Community Mediation Centers. Funding is provided by the MA Department of Revenue Child Support Enforcement Division through a child access and visitation grant from the U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services.

## Goals and Objectives

The Program was established in 2008 as a state-local collaboration to raise awareness of mediation as a viable option for creating workable parenting plans and to mediate parenting issues in never-married, separated, divorced or separating parents across the state.



In the fiscal year 2012, the program aims to provide educational and mediation services to a minimum of 220 parents experiencing conflicts.

## Approaches & Methods

Mediation is a process where a mediator assists disputing parents come to mutually acceptable solutions by facilitating their communication so that their concerns, needs, and interests are heard and considered. Grant funding allows the parties several hours of free mediation.

Mediation has a long history in Massachusetts of being community-based through Community Mediation Centers. The Centers are non-profit organizations with a public service mission and provide a range of free or low cost mediation services in their local communities and courts.

Partnering with established Centers was the best way to achieve state-wide program coverage, secure quality mediators and continuity of services over time.

Cases are typically referred to mediation by parents who contact the local community mediation center directly and through referrals by the Probate & Family Court and community-based family-service organizations.

## Results/Impact

The Program conducts quarterly monitoring & evaluation by surveying the Centers, the mediators and the parents. Below are a few Program highlights.

From July 2008 through December 2011, the Program has provided educational and/or mediation services to over 500 parents.

A subset of mediators asked to rate the co-parent level of conflict responded that about half were found to be in moderate conflict and about 20% indicated high conflict between the parents.

Although agreement is not the only indicator of success, the Program has an agreement rate of 75% or more.

Through mediation participant surveys, the Program has learned that the most frequently cited reasons for parents to seek mediation were to improve communication and to reduce conflict between them.

Working on a parenting plan was chosen most often as a mediation achievement (77%), followed by improved communication (59%) and reduction in court involvement (50%).

## Next Steps

In recent years, the Program has seen an increase in the need for community-based mediation due to the recession and slow economic recovery.

The Program will need to seek additional funding from state and federal sources to accommodate the increasing demand for services numbers and also grow its number of community mediation center partners.

## Program Partners & Funder

- MA Department of Revenue CSE Division
- Community Dispute Settlement Center
- MetroWest Mediation Services, Inc.
- North Shore Community Mediation, Inc.
- Quabbin Mediation, Inc.
- The Mediation & Training Collaborative

## Additional Information

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