

The Georgia
Family-Friendly

PARTNERSHIP SCHOOL AWARDS



PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP BY



Congratulations from Georgia's State School Superintendent



It is a privilege and an honor to announce the five Title I school winners of the 2017 Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School Awards. Families, schools, and communities work together to create meaningful relationships that ultimately lead to significant gains in student achievement and success. It is the school's responsibility to take the lead to develop and sustain this essential relationship by nurturing welcoming environments throughout the school and community.

The schools honored today are environments where families and community members feel they belong and, in turn, play an important role in supporting their school and their students' success. These schools have spent time and effort evaluating and refining their physical environments, communications, personal contacts, and school policies and procedures to ensure that all families feel included and welcome. They are models for engaging families and making parents feel welcome the moment that they walk in the door.

These schools represent the best in customer service for Georgia families, whether it's on the phone, in the front office, or online. These schools have welcoming staff members, comfortable waiting areas, clear signage, and engaging displays of student work on display throughout the building. They have easy-to-navigate websites that foster strong partnerships with parents to help improve student achievement. The schools also provide unique and innovative parent and family engagement programming that successfully reaches all families in the school. Most importantly, families are respected and seen as an integral part of every student's education.

It is my hope that other Title I schools will learn from these schools and participate in Georgia's Family-Friendly Partnership School initiative to ensure that all parents and the community are welcomed into their schools. Through these small but influential changes, we will continue educating Georgia's future.

Congratulations to our 2017 Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School Award winners!

Sincerely,

Richard Woods



About the Awards

The Georgia Department of Education launched the Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School initiative in the summer of 2010 to assist Title I schools, families, and communities in working together to create welcoming environments that lead to increased student achievement. A welcoming environment increases family engagement, which, in turn, helps students earn better grades, graduate from high school, and enroll in post-secondary education. This award takes the initiative a step further by recognizing Title I schools that have gone above and beyond to create an environment where families and community members feel that they belong, and where they play an important role in supporting their school's student success.

All Title I schoolwide schools that have not received the Family-Friendly Partnership School Award within the last five years are invited to submit a written application for the award. A panel of educators, parents, and community members from across the state evaluate the applications and select up to twenty finalists.

School principals are notified of their finalist selection, and then judges conduct school site visits over a three-month period. Site visits are not announced in advance. During the site visits, judges conduct surprise walk-throughs and interview school staff and visitors to assess each school's welcoming environment. Following the school visits, the judges select the Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School Award winners. Up to ten schools may be honored with the award each year.

From the award announcement date, each school that is honored with the Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School Award is designated as a Family-Friendly School by the Georgia Department of Education for five years. The school receives a special visit from the State School Superintendent to celebrate and honor its designation, a welcome mat to display at the school's front entrance identifying its family-friendly award status, and a special professional learning opportunity provided by The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center. This opportunity is designed to further enhance the winning schools' ability to provide welcoming environments to increase parent and family engagement to help improve student academic achievement.



The State School Superintendent presents each winning school with a plaque, commemorating their success in creating a Family-Friendly environment.

Four Factors for Assessing a School's Welcoming Environment

Environment

The physical appearance of the school building and surrounding areas, such as the main entrance, halls, parking lots, signage, and landscaping. For virtual schools, the ease of navigating the school website and parent portal.

Personal Contact

The visible interactions between school staff and families or community members, such as acknowledging parents or guests in the school, friendly greetings from front office staff, or public recognition for parents and community members who volunteer and contribute to school and student success.

Communication

The way that the school keeps families and the community informed through sources like welcome letters, up-to-date school calendars of events and holidays, staff directories, announcements on social media websites, or school maps for visitors; information for parents should be provided in various languages and easy to understand.

School Practices and Policies

The opportunity for families and community members to provide feedback, actively contribute by serving on committees that address policies and procedures, or participate in parent organizations that are inclusive of the entire school community.

In addition, schools must address how they are implementing the six National Parent Teacher Association Standards for Family-School Partnerships by creating welcoming environments to increase parent and family engagement throughout the school. Prior to applying for the award, schools are encouraged to examine their welcoming environments through the Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School initiative materials which include a self assessment, parent survey, walk-through, and virtual module. Completing the initiative before applying for the award provides a more complete picture of what is expected to be an award-winning Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School.



Characteristics of a Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School Award Winner

- Outstanding customer service with families, whether by phone, email, or face-to-face meetings, that goes above and beyond to make all families feel welcome and to equip them with the information needed
- An overwhelming feeling of a positive school climate immediately upon entering the school building
- Engaging displays of student work throughout all parts of the school
- Placing welcome desks and signage, as well as comfortable, living room-type environments for visitors in the front office or in the school foyer
- Showcasing the school's diverse student and family population through pictures, artwork, and murals in foyers, classrooms, hallways, and online
- Forging non-financial partnerships with community and faith-based organizations to impact student achievement and success
- Displaying directional and informational signage in multiple languages aligned to the school's student and family population



- Providing parent and student information in easily accessible areas in the school office, at the school entrance, or on the school website
- Showcasing fun themes in the lunchroom, gym, and other common areas
- Showing evidence of parent support, parent pictures, and thanks to parents and community partners throughout the building or on the school website
- Providing a designated, comfortable space for parents to meet with each other, as well as with staff, to discuss or receive information regarding student achievement and success
- Ensuring school grounds are well-kept and the school's name is easily recognizable from the road, as well as at the entrance to the building
- Providing an engaging, easy to navigate, up-to-date and relevant website with important school information





Bear Creek Middle School
BARROW COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

Bear Creek Middle School has a warm, friendly front office staff with gracious smiles and helpful attitudes. They provide resources and materials such as campus maps to make families feel at home.

The school has an inviting environment that was clearly developed and designed with warmth and cheerfulness for middle schoolers.

The school features a welcoming and attractive Parent Resource Center that is prominently placed in the main entry area. It's easily accessible and offers academic resources in English and Spanish, materials for college preparation, and the parent and family engagement plan.

Parents are allowed to spend as much of a school day as they want, permitting them to experience a day along with their children. The campus features attractive signage in English and Spanish to help students and parents navigate the hallways.

As a part of fall orientation, the school allows rising sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders and their families to visit for a half day before the school year starts to get a feel for the upcoming school year. For rising sixth-graders, the school provides an opportunity for students to learn how to change classes and open their lockers.

Bear Creek's staff members are friendly, helpful, and confident; they are consistently knowledgeable about academic opportunities for students and parents and they have a clear understanding of the school's mission and goals.



Bear Creek Middle School emphasizes the importance of a college career with colorful displays. Photos of staff members are displayed in the entryway. Outside, the school's community partners are prominently displayed.





East Fannin Elementary School

FANNIN COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT



At East Fannin Elementary School, not all parents in the school population have smart phones or computers, so the school helps develop their digital literacy by connecting parents and scheduling time for them to meet one-on-one to share their knowledge of the Class Dojo application. Where parents do not have access to technology, the school goes above and beyond to make direct phone calls and in-home contacts. To enable parents of Special Education students to take an online survey, the school provides computers and iPads at parent meetings and in the drop-off/pickup line, yielding a high rate of participation.



Examples of student work, colorful murals and bulletin boards, and garden areas enhance the school climate.



Teachers and staff rode a school bus through the community to develop a better understanding of their population and the barriers they face outside of school. Equipped with this understanding, teachers were able to address students' specific needs, ultimately yielding academic gains.

East Fannin Elementary has gone to great effort to welcome families into the school to ensure they are comfortable being there. The school has hosted grade-level family engagement nights, a movie night and a car show, which generated a massive response.

Community organizations and businesses partnered with the school and donated funds to help financially disadvantaged students to go on an overnight trip to the Georgia Capitol or Zoo Atlanta.



The school is a community center that acts very much like a family. The school has even helped parents fill out Medicaid and food stamp applications to ensure they have resources of which they may be unaware.





Elm Street Elementary School
ROME CITY SCHOOLS

The school staff at Elm Street Elementary School has clearly bought in to the importance of family engagement. On the day we held our surprise visit, the principal was at an offsite meeting, but key staff members and parent volunteers gathered and presented a clear and cohesive family engagement strategy.

The school has developed strong relationships with local businesses such as Mohawk, The Home Depot, and Lowe's, among others, and collaborated with them on a variety of STEM projects including a "Tiny Home" project and vegetable gardens. The Tiny Home project drew on the skills of the parents who worked with the students to build a home for a homeless veteran and his family. Additionally, vegetables from the gardens were given to the homeless veteran.



In the fall, the classroom teachers go on "home visits" to deliver a school-branded tee shirt and a goody bag for the student. Students and family members enjoy the visits and it helps develop positive relationships going into the school year. For the students, having a tee shirt helps create a sense of belonging.

The school has a welcoming and inviting entry way, staffed by a bi-lingual parent liaison. The entryway is furnished with a wealth of Spanish and English informational materials for parents and a clearly marked parent suggestion box to receive their feedback.

The school has a well-resourced Parent Center, a friendly suggestion box, and helpful literature in English and Spanish. Community businesses and organizations, who help with the school's robust STEM program are recognized the the hallways.





Garden Hills Elementary School ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Garden Hills Elementary School has done a remarkable job maintaining and updating an older facility to ensure a welcoming and warm environment for students and families.

With a population that is 55-60% Hispanic, some families do not get out into the community very much. To ensure students are registered for the school year, the parent liaison and principal take registration

packets to the students' homes.

The school partners with the neighboring private school, Atlanta International School (AIS). AIS helps with transportation, a summer program, and provides academic support for families each Tuesday.



Garden Hills Elementary School proudly displays photos of their population, which builds community and a sense of belonging. For the diverse population, the school offers literature in multiple languages. Colorful and inspirational artwork is shown all throughout the campus, adding to an already positive school climate. Sponsors are prominently displayed in the school lobby in multiple levels of participation.



Garden Hills works to make sure that disparate communities come together to form one school community through an English-Spanish dual immersion program.

Each year a parent volunteer is designated to be in charge of tours and schedules time with prospective parents who would otherwise move their children to private school. The parent volunteer hosts 5-10 parents per month to show them all that Garden Hills has to offer as a public school option.

The school partners with Passion City Church, which makes repairs to the physical plant and donates book bags and snack packs for students, and Peachtree Presbyterian Church, which sods the soccer field each summer.





Mossy Creek Elementary School
WHITE COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

Mossy Creek Elementary School provides academic opportunities for parents with conferences twice per year and Thursday take-home papers, which indicate where the student stands academically and provides ideas for academic activities in the home, such as labeling bottle caps with letters for the student to construct words.



The school provides 400 unlimited-access online books in the library and resources are sent home to teach parents how to access and download the books through the internet. Parents may also visit the school for face-to-face instruction. The school building is even open all summer so that families and students can visit the library to learn how to access e-books by scanning QR codes.

As a service to the community, the principal has visited students' homes to deliver lice kits, picked up students to bring them to school, performed wellness checks, helped with a death in the family, and delivered food, firewood, and blankets.



The school hosts a Dental Bus, which comes three times per year. Students are able to receive dental care with a parent's permission.

During College Spirit Week, each room adopts a college and learns about it. Teachers post photos of themselves as elementary school students along with two pieces of information: what they wanted to be when they grew up and what college they attended. The College Spirit Week helped students think about what college they want to attend.



To keep their students focused on a college education, a colorful hallway display showcases photos of teachers when they were in grade school along with details about what they wanted to be when they grew up and where they went to college. The school features comfortable and inviting furniture and meeting spaces, a welcoming storytelling theater in the library, and historical photos of grade-levels through the years.





East Jackson Elementary JACKSON COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

The administration at East Jackson Elementary School is committed to holding 100% of parent-teacher conferences twice per year and supplies interpretation services when necessary. Teachers make themselves available as early as 7:00 a.m., and as late as 7:00 p.m., to accommodate parents with differing schedules. The administration ensures transportation services to make sure parents can get to the school for the meetings. If parents are simply unable to go to the school, the administration makes in-home meetings possible.

At the 2016 Family Engagement Conference, the school’s staff learned about the Watch D.O.G.S. program, which is specifically oriented toward engaging fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and other male figures. East Jackson Elementary set about implementing the program, and had 51 men signed up at the program’s launch. They were able to schedule a male role model for each school day in the 2016-2017 school year.

The school has a very inviting campus with attractive displays and murals throughout. The eagle-themed mural shown above is a prominent feature of the school’s cafeteria.



Georgia Cyber Academy K-12 VIRTUAL SCHOOL

The outward-facing, public website for Georgia Cyber Academy (GCA) is attractive, easy-to-use and provides excellent resources for parents to engage in their child’s academic life.

The parent portal portion of the website offers superior tools to parents for viewing their child’s class schedule, observing assignments for each class, and tracking the student’s progress throughout the school year.

Because the innovative, online education model may be new to parents and families, all new enrollees participate in GCA’s exceptional “Strong Start” program, an onboarding and orientation program that eases parents and families into new ways of communicating with teachers and finding resources online.

GCA places an extra emphasis on communication methods with parents and families, including email, text messages, automated and personal phone calls, and district-wide town hall meetings, community events, and workshops, all working in concert to build a strong online learning community.





Sand Hill Elementary School
CARROLL COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

Upon entering Sand Hill Elementary School, families are immediately greeted by a friendly and welcoming office staff, which sets the tone for their entire visit in a positive climate. The school staff happily receives parents and continuously seeks out their support with their child’s education throughout the school year.

Sand Hill strives to ensure that parents have the opportunity to be advocates for their children, that the children are treated fairly, and that they have access to learning opportunities. They do this in part by providing all written materials in English and Spanish and utilizing a bilingual staff member to assist Spanish-speaking parents when they attend events, conferences, and meetings.

The school works to connect students and families with community resources to strengthen and support the students’ learning.

Community members participate in the school’s annual Career Day, exposing students to potential future professions such as firemen, veterinarians, and meteorologists. Another active community program is “K Kids”, sponsored by the local Kiwanis Club. The program exposes the children to service projects which develops and expands their leadership skills.



South Columbus Elementary School
MUSCOGEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

South Columbus Elementary School provides many opportunities for families to be engaged in their students’ education beginning with Meet Your Teacher Night, when families and students have an opportunity to see their classroom and meet their teacher face-to-face. Thereafter, the school hosts monthly parent nights to address any concerns or questions the parents or guardians may have.

The school communicates at a four-to-one ratio, where for every negative contact with a family member, they receive four positive contacts. This ensures that parents and guardians know of all their child’s successes in addition to any challenges the student may face. These positive contacts come in the form of Good News postcards and phone calls at the child’s home.

As a Title I school, South Columbus understands that they must support their families in areas other than academics. A community liaison donated a washer and dryer so that parents may clean their children’s clothes to attend school. The school has a social worker, a psychologist, translator, and community health organizations that provide services to the students.





Vineville Academy of the Arts

BIBB COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Vineville Academy of the Arts is a magnet school where students are exposed to music, dance, art, drama, STEM education, and Chinese-language instruction.

The school has no shortage of evidence of their students' successes, as artwork and accolades are displayed in the entryway and throughout its halls as a veritable art gallery.

The welcoming and friendly atmosphere makes families feel right at home as they attend the numerous opportunities that are offered to them such as Muffins with Moms, Donuts with Dads, Literacy on the Lawn, Family Literacy Night, STEAM Day, Math and Science Family Night, Parent Academy, and Grandparents' Day.

Vineville works in partnership with Mercer University, a local university that is a pillar of the community. Mercer University supports Vineville by providing student tutors on a daily basis during regular school hours and during the after-school program. Student tutors work with teachers to ensure students make gains in reading, language arts, and mathematics.



