

The 2015 Georgia Parent Leadership Award Winners

February 2015



Many Talents. One Purpose. Student Success.

Congratulatory Message from Georgia's School Superintendent



On behalf of the Georgia Department of Education and our collaborative partner, Georgia PTA, it is an honor and privilege to announce the six winners of the 2015 Georgia Parent Leadership Awards. This annual statewide award is an opportunity to recognize outstanding parents and thank them for their work on behalf of our schools and children.

Children of all ages benefit academically when parents, schools, and communities work together to create meaningful partnerships. The parents honored today have spent countless hours strengthening our public schools and enhancing the lives of all children in their school community by serving as role models, parent-teachers, advocates, organizers, learners, decision-makers, motivators, and liaisons. It is truly remarkable to witness the positive outcomes that can be achieved when schools

and parents work collaboratively and share responsibility toward reaching the common goal of educating Georgia's future.

Through their outstanding leadership and selfless dedication, these parents have created a foundation of support for student achievement and success. I know this award does not signify an end to their great work; instead it validates the continuation of strong family and community engagement they bring about in their schools. Their achievement is an inspiration for parents across the state – it exemplifies the way parents can use their various skills and talents to strengthen our schools and positively impact the lives of all children.

Congratulations to our Parent Leadership Award Winners!

Sincerely,

Richard Woods

Georgia State Board of Education

Helen Odom Rice, Chair

Mike Royal, Vice-Chair

Mike Long

Lisa Kinnemore

Kenneth Mason

Barbara Hampton

Sandra Reed

Kevin Boyd

Brian K. Burdette

Scott Johnson

Allen C. Rice

Mary Sue Murray

Larry Winter

About the Georgia Parent Leadership Awards

The Georgia Parent Leadership Awards are annual awards that recognize parents for their outstanding leadership in creating a foundation of support for student achievement and success.

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and the Georgia Parent Teacher Association (GA PTA) created the award to recognize parents across Georgia who utilize their various skills and talents to strengthen our schools and positively impact the lives of our children. The award also hopes to inspire all parents to use their unique talents, no matter how big or small, to lead the way in building positive outcomes for all children.

The award recognizes the many skills and talents of Georgia's parents, particularly as they exhibit their leadership through any or all of the National PTA Standards for Family - School Partnerships found on the following page. Parent Leadership Award winners are chosen not only based on their demonstrated talents, but also on how their work has benefited the entire school community on behalf of all children.

Parent leaders are nominated each November during Georgia's Parent Engagement Month by Georgia's public school personnel. Any caregiver who assumes the responsibility for nurturing and caring for a child's entire well-being consisting of educational, emotional, spiritual, and physical health can be considered. Six Parent Leadership Awards are given each year, and parents representing both Title I schools and Non-Title I schools are eligible to be nominated. While the six state winners for 2015 represent only the elementary level, schools are encouraged to nominate parents from all school levels: elementary school, middle school, and high school as research shows parents make a difference in student achievement no matter the age of their child.

Winners of the Georgia Parent Leadership Award are afforded opportunities throughout the year to share their many recognized talents by promoting and assisting with parent engagement activities at the state Title I level.



The essence of parent leadership is that the work is SUSTAINABLE.

It will continue to impact the school, its children, and their families once the initial parent leader is no longer at the school leading the way.

Winners of the award are parents or caregivers who have contributed to the school community in a way that is bigger and beyond themselves.

leadership
education
volunteer
purpose
community
friendly
drive

What is Parent Leadership?

The National Standards for Family - School Partnerships



National PTA. (2008). National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. Washington DC.

awards
parents
family
friendly
together
success
volunteer
community
teacher
partners
leader
act
partn



The Many Skills and Talents of Our Parents

A parent exhibits leadership through any or all of the following National Standards for Family-School Partnerships:

- 1. WELCOMING ALL FAMILIES** - Welcomes all families into the school, recruits others to be a part of the life of the school, participates in school events and activities, and connects to what students are learning and doing in class.
Examples: Develops personal relationships, creates a welcoming environment, provides opportunities for all to volunteer, removes economic obstacles to school participation, respects all families and sees the value in what they can offer...
- 2. COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY** - Engages in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning and other events in the school community.
Examples: Facilitates connections among school families, provides information on current issues, uses multiple communication paths to reach all...
- 3. SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS** - Collaborates to support student learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and takes advantage of regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.
Examples: Develops families' abilities to strengthen learning at home, helps families to become engaged in the classroom, uses school and student data to mobilize parent action and student support, shares school progress...
- 4. SPEAKING UP FOR EVERY CHILD** - Empowers others to be advocates for their own and other children to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.
Examples: Helps others understand the school district in addition to parental rights and responsibilities, builds families' capacities to be effective advocates...
- 5. SHARING POWER** - Participates in decision making that affects children and families and informs, influences, and creates policies, practices, and programs within the school or educational community.
Examples: Inspires other parents to be leaders, has a voice at the table in school and community decisions that affect children...
- 6. COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY** - Collaborates with community members to connect students, families and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services and civic participation.
Examples: Partners with community groups to strengthen student support, organizes support from community members, links to resources...

Crystal Eplin

W.C. Britt Elementary School, Gwinnett County Schools

“Crystal is a role model for parents in Georgia to follow in supporting their child’s school.”

***- Doris Jones
Principal, W.C. Britt
Elementary School***

On any given day at W.C. Britt Elementary School, you can find Crystal Eplin with a welcoming smile and a helpful attitude. “It’s all for the kids!” is her motto, which is evident through the time and energy she dedicates to supporting the school.

As PTA Vice President, Crystal has showed that she is a true leader by spearheading multiple school events and activities such as the PTA Reflections Contest, the annual talent show, and various academic activities. These events have brought the school community closer together and helped school staff build relationships that extend beyond the classroom.

Due to Crystal’s track record as a successful leader, her fellow parents elected her as a Local School Council representative to ensure that W.C. Britt Elementary implements the Local School Plan for Improvement with fidelity. Although Crystal holds a leadership role on almost every school committee, one of her biggest contributions has been helping to boost Britt’s student achievement by leading academic centers that provide immediate feedback on students’ reading and math skills and mentoring at-risk readers.

Always readily available to support and help her fellow parents, Crystal keeps in constant contact with parents of students with serious medical needs. Because of this, Crystal took the necessary training to become a substitute for the school clinic. Crystal has also been instrumental in creating more community involvement opportunities for the school. She coordinated with the Georgia School Nutrition Association to host an annual community health fair for the Snellville area. She also works with the school counselor and local businesses and government to host Britt’s Career Day and Red Ribbon Week.

Thanks to Crystal’s helpful attitude and effective leadership, W.C. Britt Elementary School is a place where parents, students, and teachers will continue to succeed!



Melinda Gittleman

Marietta Center for Advanced Academics, Marietta City Schools

“Without the work of Mrs. Gittleman and her investment in all members of our school and community, we would not have achieved what we have.”

*- Dr. Jennifer Hernandez
Principal, Marietta Center
for Advanced Academics*

At Marietta Center for Advanced Academics (MCAA), Melinda Gittleman is known for her big heart, generosity, and willingness to help. Whether she is coordinating events such as the World Night cultural diversity celebration, greeting new families in the front office, or supporting the Spanish speaking Moms' Coffee Club, her passion for making parents and students feel welcome has helped build a connection between teachers, community members, and students.



Within her son's first two weeks at MCAA, she began serving as a room parent and helping his teacher organize academic and social enrichment events. A natural leader, it was not long before Melinda took the reigns to lead several PTSA and school committees. Melissa coordinated hearing and vision screenings for every student in the school, chaired a committee that collected snacks and drinks to donate to area after-school programs serving underprivileged children, and devoted many hours on the Teacher Appreciation Committee. Melissa also solicits local businesses and corporations to partner with MCAA, her most prominent being her assistance with coordinating the annual Engineering Design Expo which connects Marietta City Schools with local professionals and businesses.

Melinda is a strong advocate for parent participation in education, which, among other things, is evident by the annual New Parent Night Reception that she organizes and hosts every year. This event welcomes new parents with refreshments and information, while encouraging parents to be actively involved in the school. Additionally, Melissa mentors first year parents and works with the PTSA Hospitality Committee to help support parents' needs, such as assisting Spanish speaking parents.

Due to Melissa's tireless efforts, MCAA's school community has taken on a familial feel and parents feel more connected to the staff. Melissa's time, effort, energy, and passion have made an impact that will be felt for many years to come!



Antwan McKee

Beecher Hills Elementary School, Atlanta Public Schools

“Mr. McKee is an outstanding, dedicated community leader, who possesses personal integrity and a thoughtful communicative style.”

***- Crystal M. Jones
Principal, Beecher Hills
Elementary School***

Known as the go-to person, Antwan McKee is most likely the first face one sees upon entering Beecher Hills Elementary School. Whether he is welcoming new families at open houses, organizing a book donation, or planning special events, Antwan is hard at work every day helping students and families realize the value of parental involvement.

As PTA President, Antwan has helped parents see that playing a role in their child’s education does not have to be intimidating or complicated. Following Antwan’s example, more dads are present for PTA events, career day, and dad’s reading initiatives as well as many other school events. Antwan even organized a summit for male students, teachers and parents to commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday. This event focused on the importance of male role models putting forth their best efforts to make positive contributions to society. Antwan has championed male involvement at Beecher Hills and because of his efforts, other male leaders are beginning to emerge in the school, which ultimately helps foster student achievement.



Under Antwan’s leadership, Beecher Hills’ PTA built a strong team of parent and school leaders who work together to execute PTA programs and events. Antwan spearheaded multiple parent communication efforts such as re-establishing the homeroom parent mode of communication and creating a PTA Facebook page, which resulted in a higher increase of parent attendance at various parent meetings. Antwan has also helped plan such popular school events as the Father-Son Tailgate Cook-off, the Mother-Son Dance, the Mother-Daughter Tea, and the always popular Father-Daughter Dance.

Thanks to Antwan’s exceptional parent leadership, he has not only inspired more fathers to get involved, but he has encouraged all of Beecher Hills’ parents to take on a more active role in their children’s education!



Lori Rowe

G.O. Bailey Primary, Tift County Schools

Lori Rowe understands that parents are the most important stakeholders in a child's educational success, and that's why she prides herself on being an advocate for both the parents and the children of G.O. Bailey Primary.

Born and raised in Tift County, Lori believes in the importance of giving back to the community which is apparent by her service on the Tift County Foundation for Educational Excellence Board, Tift County School PTO boards, and various volunteer efforts.

Although Lori was diagnosed with a chronic health condition when she was 19, instead of letting her disability become an obstacle, she chose to turn it into an opportunity to be a role model for her children and others. A true fighter, Lori has never missed a parent involvement opportunity and with her friendly smile and humble spirit, she is an inspiration to both the parents and staff at G.O. Bailey.



As a School Liaison for both of her daughters' schools, Lori is known to go above and beyond the call of duty. Taking a special interest in meeting the physical needs of children, her biggest contribution has been coordinating "Backpack Blessings", a program that for the past five years has been feeding economically disadvantaged students throughout Tift County. Lori organizes, coordinates, purchases, and delivers backpacks of food every week to ten different schools in Tift County. She also coordinates this endeavor during the summer months with the assistance of churches in the community.

Recently at a "Family Fun Night" Lori proudly signed her *I CAN Play A Role* card, pledging to volunteer even more of her time. Lori's dedication to student and parent success has made an irreplaceable impact in Tift County, and she will continue to make a lasting difference in her community!



“Not a week has gone by where I haven’t personally seen Ms. Rowe supporting our students. She has been an influential representative of our school system and G.O. Bailey in particular.”

*- Jim Torell
Assistant Principal,
G.O. Bailey Primary*

Towana Walker-Miller

Mamie Lou Gross Elementary School, Camden County Schools

“Mrs. Walker-Miller’s wisdom, compassion, and commitment make her an exceptional parent leader. Mamie Lou Gross Elementary would not be the same without her.”

***- Dr. Darlene Bruce
Principal, Mamie Lou Gross
Elementary School***

With a smile on her face and skip in her step, Towana Walker-Miller has set the stage for building relationships among students, parents and faculty at Mamie Lou Gross Elementary School (MLGES). Throughout the week, one might find Towana reviewing educational materials for the media committee, planning the next school fund raiser, or doing her part to make the building a more welcoming environment for parents and families.

Towana takes on projects no matter how big or small, whether it is filling in as a substitute teacher or helping a child learn how to tie their shoe. If the end result benefits the students of MLGES, then Towana will be there. For example, when the visual arts program was cut due to a lack of budget, Towana sprang into action by raising the necessary funds to keep the program alive. Towana is also especially instrumental in supporting the school-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports Program (PBIS). By assisting with the setup and continued support of the PBIS rewards program, she has helped create a positive school culture for the students and teachers.



A member of multiple school committees, Towana constantly advocates for MLGES parents. By providing a welcome breakfast for families, holding parent meetings at flexible times, setting up an informational table at various school events, and creating a school Facebook page, Towana makes sure that all of MLGES’s parents are able to get involved no matter how busy their schedules. Due to Towana’s efforts, family engagement has increased and parents and school faculty have formed stronger relationships. In addition, Towana serves as a parent leader outside of the school walls by volunteering for numerous community organizations such as Justin’s Miracle Field, an organization that honors a late MLGES student.

Towana has touched hundreds of lives in both her school and the community as a whole. There is little doubt that under Towana’s watch Mamie Lou Gross Elementary School will continue to thrive!

Tyesha Whitely

Shuman Elementary School, Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools

“There are so many ways that Mrs. Whitely supports student achievement and the staff at Shuman. She is proof that one person can make a difference.”

*- Janeen McAbee
Second Grade Teacher,
Shuman Elementary School*

Every morning, like clockwork, one can be sure to find Tyesha Whitely in the front hall of Shuman Elementary School. Whether she is inviting parents to the Parent Center or simply welcoming them into the school, Tyesha’s giving and selfless nature is evident by her dedication to the school.

As chair of the school council, Tyesha not only participates in all aspects of decision making regarding programs, fund raisers, and student activities, but she also empowers other parents to do so as well. An effective communicator, Tyesha serves as PTA Treasurer and goes above and beyond to support and educate her fellow parents. Whether she is creating flyers to inform parents of school and community events, encouraging them to attend Parent University, or bringing parents into the school decision making processes - Shuman’s parents can always depend on Tyesha’s help and support.



One of her biggest contributions to Shuman has been organizing a “Uniform Swap”. To help with the cost of school uniforms, parents were able to swap their children’s uniforms when they no longer fit. Moreover, she personally reached out to a local department store that sent volunteers for the swap shop as well as made a donation to Shuman’s PTA. Tyesha also works with community volunteers on the weekends to help students plant, organize, harvest, and prepare foods grown in the school garden. This past year, Tyesha also reached out to several local businesses to sponsor Shuman’s first Fall Festival, which served as an excellent catalyst to encourage more parents to participate in school activities. Additionally, she also took it upon herself to write and apply for a sizable grant that helped buy books and materials to support the school’s reading program.

Tyesha’s willingness to constantly support staff, parents, and students makes her a true asset to her school and community. With Tyesha’s help, Shuman will continue to reach greater heights!

What are your talents?



For more information about the Georgia Parent Leadership Awards please visit the Georgia Department of Education's Parent Engagement Website at:
http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_title.aspx?PageReq=ParentEngagement

