

From the Desk of the Deputy Superintendent

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, Georgia experienced great success in closing achievement gaps, increasing graduation and college admission rates, and embracing technology as an essential tool for instructional delivery. We learned how critical it is to integrate technology into our curriculum when COVID-19 forced us to swap our traditional face-to-face interaction for a digital learning environment in March 2020. This past year has been challenging. However, this crisis has made one thing clear – we will do “Whatever It Takes” to ensure students receive the quality education they deserve and the vital sustenance and support they need to overcome even the most unexpected barriers.

As we head into spring and prepare to close the year, this is a great time to look at formative data and other essential information, see what’s working so far, as well as what you might need to change before the end of the school year, and reflect on the past year and plan for the future. Many of you are already doing this, and I am excited to hear about the progress happening across the state. I encourage you to communicate with us consistently regarding strategies leading to improvement in your schools so we can spread the word and celebrate your successes. I believe the practices of sharing with colleagues and building communities of practice are critical to the success of continuous improvement and to the success of meeting the needs of the whole child.

We will do “Whatever It Takes” to ensure students receive the quality education they deserve and the vital sustenance and support they need to overcome even the most unexpected barriers.

I want to thank you all for the work you are doing to support schools and provide positive outcomes for all students with equity, access, and opportunities for optimal learning experiences.



As you know, we believe working to reduce variability in student learning among schools is a win for our students, families, and entire communities. This is extremely difficult work. But it can be done, and we are committed to supporting you every step of the way.

Please enjoy the newsletter and remember to check our website www.gadoe.org/SDE for the professional development calendar, evidence-based resources, and the archive of video presentations from our instructional leadership workshops and conferences.

Dr. Stephanie Johnson
Deputy Superintendent

Office of School Improvement Professional Learning Needs Survey

As the 2021—2022 school year approaches, the GaDOE Office of School Improvement is seeking input on the professional development needs of school and district leaders across the state. District leaders, principals, assistant principals, and teacher leaders are welcome to submit responses. Information collected will be used to provide tiered and tailored supports through our ongoing professional development offerings. The survey window is March 20 — May 1.

[Professional Needs Survey Link](#)

Ballard-Hudson Middle School – Data Day

North Area News

Martha Jo Johnson, Interim Program Manager

Ballard-Hudson Middle School (BHMS) in Bibb County Schools is maximizing teaching and learning – and doing it well during these unprecedented times. Data Day 2021 was without exception. This year, Bibb County Schools partnered with the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI) to engage in data collection and analysis of school-level continuous improvement plans (CIPs).

After an introduction and the expectations from Bibb County district leaders, BHMS staff and GLISI collaborators reviewed school data using a data protocol called “Taking Action – Controlling the Controllables.” BHMS staff members, led by Dr. Latrina Pennamon-Nash, principal, engaged in a short-cycle implementation plan of one of their action steps from their continuous improvement plan. Some of the guiding questions used during Data Day were: *How are you collecting implementation data? What are we learning from our data collection? What action do we need to take from these data points?*

BHMS’ data team was thoughtful, purposeful, and data-driven in their work. Furthermore, the data team continues to collaborate with and receive support from the North Area team to actively engage in the process of implementing school improvement efforts at BHMS. Go Tigers!



Permission for use given by Dr. Latrina Pennamon-Nash, Principal of Ballard-Hudson Middle School, Bibb County School District

Baconton Community Charter School

South Area News

Janie Fields, Program Manager

All across Georgia, the COVID-19 pandemic presented schools with numerous challenges. However, the very rural nature of the districts served in the South Area magnified these challenges—a chief challenge being adequate access to the internet. Yet, teachers and staff at Baconton Community Charter School worked tirelessly to ensure their students received access to the virtual instruction required due to the virus's community spread. Despite the ongoing challenges of virtual instruction in an impoverished area, Baconton Community Charter School leaders reported their students are actually performing better than school/district staff originally expected. Baconton students' first day back to face-to-face instruction following the holidays was February 2. The superintendent requested the school board continue students' virtual instruction during January due to a surge in COVID-19 cases in the community. Although they were receiving instruction virtually, students in one of the targeted groups—a self-contained third grade EIP class—improved their academic performance and almost caught up with their grade-level peers in the areas of math and reading. These outcomes attest to school/district staff's ongoing efforts in ensuring students continue to receive quality instruction despite the challenges faced by the pandemic. These gains are indicative that Georgia's educators continue to rise to the challenges they face.

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Moving the Mountain with the Fantastic Four at Stone Mountain Elementary School

Metro Area News

Susan Patrick, Program Manager

The most productive teams consist of individuals with a variety of strengths and skills that complement one another. The Stone Mountain Elementary Instructional Leadership Team, respectfully, the Fantastic Four, are always seeking to establish excellence and more. Like the Marvel characters, they rely on one another to “Move the Mountain!” The team consists of Dr. Char-Shenda Covington, Principal; Jamica Brown, Assistant Principal; Dr. Charnita West, Reading Specialist; and Crystal Pounds, Academic Coach. Dr. Covington is an analytical visionary with strength in data analysis. Mrs. Brown is a compassionate leader and a listener. Mrs. Pounds is a critical thinker saturated with instructional knowledge and is an asset to the teachers.

Dr. West brings to the team a unique set of skills and experience. Her ability to build teacher capacity and evoke a love for literacy is second to none. Their collective experiences create a progressive narrative for teaching, leading, and learning. The glue that binds this team is trust and mutual respect. Every team member has a platform to share his or her perspectives and ideas. These established relationships foster an environment to create lasting connections and move the needle of student achievement. The Fantastic Four consistently models a system of one team with one dream for all Stone Mountain Elementary stakeholders. Moving the Mountain requires a concerted effort built on the strength of collaboration, consideration, and celebration.



The Fantastic Four, Stone Mountain Elementary, DeKalb County School District

The Fantastic Four showed if better is good, then best is more! They do what heroes do; they “Move the Mountain” with excellence at the core.

Just Roll With It!

SIG 1003(g), Cohort 5

Dr. Patricia Rooks, Program Manager

When deciding how to reopen schools this year, Superintendent of Wilcox County Schools, Julie Childers, jokingly offered the slogan, *Just Roll With It*. The slogan stuck, and **Just Roll With It** became the approach to a positive mindset for safely opening for face-to-face learning. The pandemic managed to make this school year one of the most challenging ever. Many systems had no choice and shifted to distance learning options; however, Wilcox managed to keep approximately 90% of its students engaged in face-to-face learning while providing instruction to over 100 virtual learners and quarantined students.

Knowing face-to-face learning is vital to student success, Wilcox staff agreed to capitalize on unique characteristics as a system to reopen face-to-face and remain open safely. “Every decision made, we considered how to slow the spread of the virus and protect the health and safety of all stakeholders,” said Superintendent Childers. She added that handwashing, checking temperatures, wearing masks, and constant building disinfection have all been key to keeping doors open. However, Superintendent Childers believes the real difference-maker has been the commitment of school staff and community. “Our teachers and support staff work tirelessly to meet the needs of all students. All stakeholders are conscientious and stay home when sick. Community health officials have collaborated with us every step of the way.” No doubt, the school year has not been without its challenges. Regardless, everyone has **Just Rolled with It** to stay the course of keeping in-person learning a successful reality for Wilcox students.

“Our teachers and support staff work tirelessly to meet the needs of all students.”

Visit www.gadoe.org/SIG for more information.

Alternative High School Graduation Round Table Discussion

Alternative/Non-Traditional Education News

Dr. Samuel Taylor, Program Manager

Dr. Debra White, District Effectiveness Specialist

DeKalb County's Office of School Improvement collaborated with the Alternative Education team to conduct quarterly meetings with alternative high school leaders. The purpose of these round table discussions is to bring attention to the importance of alternative education students graduating from high school by engaging these district and school leaders in discussing and sharing successful practices around graduation improvements. The round table initially started between DeKalb County's School Improvement Office and the Alternative Education team. The Alternative Education team shared with the two alternative principals and district leaders some successful graduation practices observed in other alternative schools and districts across the state. These graduation round table discussions were very engaging and focused on the importance of the district and school leaders working together to address the unique needs of students in alternative schools. The round table discussion expanded to eventually include two other alternative school districts in the metropolitan area. These high school graduation round table discussions have really taken off in the sense that they provided networking opportunities for the district and school leaders and the sharing of practices, which benefited all. Because much of the alternative education teamwork is at the district level, the next meeting will focus primarily on district-level leadership and the type of support and guidance the Alternative Education team observed, resulting in improved graduation rates for alternative school students.

The purpose of these round table discussions is to bring attention to the importance of alternative education students graduating high school.

Visit www.gadoe.org/alternative for more information.

Focusing on Student Learning

Area Program Assessment Specialist News

Georgia School Assessment of Performance on Systems (GSAPS)

As more schools return to face-to-face teaching and learning over the next few months, it is vitally important to collect and examine student learning data. Understanding where students are in the learning process, including their mastery of the standards, is key to making informed decisions about how to best close any learning gaps exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Without Georgia Milestones data, the need to effectively use formative assessments during tier-one teaching at the classroom level is more necessary than ever, whether virtually or face-to-face. Effective strategies and tools include:

- **Check for Understanding** – employ any strategy that gives insight into students' grasp of the content in the moment of lesson delivery (admit/exit tickets, self-assessments, discussion boards, "Show Me").
- **Collect Data Over Time** – effective formative assessments show student progress over time. Consider using assessment tools that track student performance (written checkpoints for students, rubrics, self-assessment surveys, videos, screenshots, goal setting).
- **Provide Feedback** – inform students of their progress and give students meaningful coaching support on the next steps to success.
- **Get Feedback** – collect data from students on how effectively they interact with different learning strategies incorporated into lessons and compare the qualitative data with quantitative performance data to make more informed teaching decisions.

One of the many lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic is the need to differentiate teaching and learning to best address student learning gaps. The effective use of formative assessment strategies during instructional delivery, whether virtual or face-to-face, is the key to quality differentiation.

Visit www.gadoe.org/SDEreview for more information.

Teaching and Learning Newsletter

Subscribe to the Teaching and Learning Newsletter to receive updates that support curriculum, instruction, teacher and leader development, and school climate. The March/February newsletter features “learning (opportunity) loss” and much more.

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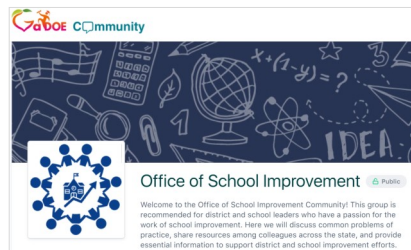
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Visit [Curriculum, Instruction, and School Climate](#) for more information.

GaDOE Community



We are pleased to announce our new Office of School Improvement Community! This group is recommended for district and school leaders who have a passion for school improvement. Our group will share success stories, discuss common problems of practice, provide resources, and offer essential information to support district and school improvement efforts. We encourage district leadership, school leadership, instructional coaches, and teachers to join our group. Please see the directions for joining Community .

Step 1: Register

Go to community.gadoe.org. Create an account using your professional, work-provided email.

Step 2: Complete Profile

After you log in the first time, take a moment to complete your user profile so others can connect with you.

Step 3: Join Group

Search available groups hosted by GaDOE departments. Some groups allow for public access and others require access to join.

Please submit any comments or concerns on the site or to gadoecommunitysupport@doe.k12.ga.us.

FY21 Student Wellness Survey

The Georgia Student Health Survey will not be administered during the 2020-2021 school year. Instead, we have developed a brief Student Wellness Survey, which will be administered to middle and high school students. The administration window will be open from February 1, 2021 through April 2, 2021. Student Wellness Survey questions and passive permission letters are provided using the link below. Before using the passive permission letter for the 2021 Student Wellness Survey, please be sure to consider virtual learners and modify the form, if needed, on how to return the form to the school.

Visit [GSHS](#) for more information.

MTSS Overview Training

May 6, 2021 | 9 a.m.- 2 p.m.

Presenter: Dr. Tessie Rose Bailey, Principal Consultant for American Institutes for Research (AIR), Director of the PROGRESS Center (Promoting Progress for Students with Disabilities), Director of the National Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students is excited to offer an overview of Georgia's MTSS framework. Please join us on May 6, as Dr. Tessie Rose Bailey discusses what a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) is, how it benefits Georgia's schools and students, and how it differs from response to intervention (RTI). Dr. Bailey will also help district and school teams self-assess their current implementation of the essential components of MTSS. Registration is coming soon and will be posted at www.gadoe.org/mtss.

School Improvement Listserv

We are excited to share our new Office of School Improvement listserv. It will provide pertinent and timely information to subscribers, including upcoming professional learning opportunities, quarterly newsletters, resources, annual conference information, grant opportunities, and other statewide school improvement information. To join, send a blank email to join-schoolimprovement@list.doe.k12.ga.us.