Georgia Department of Education

Office of School Improvement

THE UNFORGETTABLE JOURNEY

Educating Georgia's Future May/June 2021

On the Road with Dr. Stephanie Johnson and the Office of School Improvement: Georgia is on the move!!!

School districts in our state continue to "Reimagine Education During COVID-19 and Beyond" as we close the second semester of 2021 after engaging in a complete year of educating students during a pandemic. Our goal remains to support school districts with reducing variability in student learning with a focus on access and opportunity for all. We reflect on lessons learned and important next steps for all school leaders and educators in response to supporting each school district's strategy for delivering instruction to students and continuing relevant professional development and support for school staff as we move toward August 2021. The goal continues to be serving the needs of the whole child and providing maximum opportunities for each child and staff member to experience optimal success in a safe and orderly environment conducive to learning.

In preparation for the upcoming school term, it is time to begin planning and budgeting for opportunities to address potential learning opportunity loss. A reduction in learning time has possibly impacted student learning and interfered with support for serving the whole child in some districts. Our schools must make up for this time by increasing the amount and quality of learning time through after school opportunities, extended school schedules, summer enrichment opportunities, and personalized instruction. Additionally, our leaders must promote creative staffing strategies to reduce class sizes and ensure our highly credentialed educators have resources and support needed to feel supported and safe in their work environments. We do NOT want to lose our excellent teachers and front-line workers.

My school district visits this month were extraordinary. My visit to Dougherty County with Superintendent Kenneth Dyer provided an opportunity to observe commitment to student learning supports and addressing non-academic barriers impacting student learning at a very high level of success.

Dougherty County Public Schools

From free school-based optometrists, dentists, pediatricians, social workers, mental health professionals, free insurance for students, and facilities renovated to accommodate these comprehensive healthcare services on both elementary and middle school campuses with access for high schools, I can say with full confidence that Dougherty County is on the move! Please commend Superintendent Dyer for building a district that truly supports the needs of the Whole Child. Dougherty County is leading the way with comprehensively supporting the needs of the Whole Child and engaging in the Georgia School-Based Health Center Initiative.

Albany Middle School-Based Dental Center,
Dougherty County Public Schools

I was honored to speak at the Southwest RESA Superintendent's Meeting this month. Not only is RESA Director Tim Helms well-respected and admired among his peers, district personnel, and with community partners across the state, he is leading the way with a principal mentoring and leadership development program provided through

On the Road

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Southwest RESA Superintendent's Meeting, May 2021

Southwest RESA and so much more! From enhanced professional development, leadership development, and a laser focus on teacher retention, Southwest RESA School Districts are on the move!

Randolph County is proof that small and rural districts can and will perform at the rate of larger districts when they are given the right resources and support to provide equity in service to their school communities. Kudos to passionate Superintendent Dr. Tangela Madge and her team for the work they are doing to increase resources, focus on instructional practice, enhance technology, increase community engagement, and so much more. A focus on removing academic barriers and enhancing educational opportunities for students makes Randolph a district to watch.

Randolph County School System

The purpose of the content provided in this newsletter is to help educators across Georgia explore how to best work with and leverage evidence-based resources and support available at GaDOE and our partners to increase capacity, build coherence, and expand opportunities for all students. In the sections that follow, the articles present relevant information about opportunities to increase school and district effectiveness, links to resources addressing wrap-around support, instructional practice, and leadership for schools and districts. This includes examples of promising practices that school districts throughout Georgia are currently employing to provide the greatest level of support for their staff and students successfully.

Randolph County School System

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

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.

Morris Innovative High School

North Area News

Martha Jo Johnson, Interim Program Manager

Morris Innovative High School (MIHS) opened as a credit recovery option for Dalton Public Schools' students and will be closing its doors forever in May. Morris also houses the Newcomer Academy for 6-12 students to acquire English as a second language when they enter the district.

MIHS provides a small, nurturing environment with individualized learning opportunities. The typical MIHS student faces a multitude of challenges, including language and cultural barriers, chaotic family situations, and even full-time jobs to support their families. Additional community involvement and extra-curricular opportunities also help students connect to school and enrich their lives at MIHS. The administrative team, faculty, and staff truly live up to the school mission statement: "Whatever it takes." They are very proud to have met the needs of the system, the community, and their students for so many years!

The Office of School Improvement (Georgia Department of Education) and NW Georgia RESA have partnered with and supported MIHS every step of their journey. Throughout the past few years, MIHS made tremendous strides in every area of CCRPI. Climate and culture improved dramatically, which permeated every aspect of student services and student achievement. Teaching and learning progressed through the implementation of best practices in class-room instruction and management, community and family engagement, professional development, collaborative planning, and leadership team governance.

Morris Innovative High graduated over 600 students since its inception! As Dalton looks back on MIHS's rich decade of history and achievement with pride and nostalgia, we celebrate their successes and accomplishments along with them!

Top left: Highlights from 2020-2021.

Top right: Students participating in a social studies group activity.

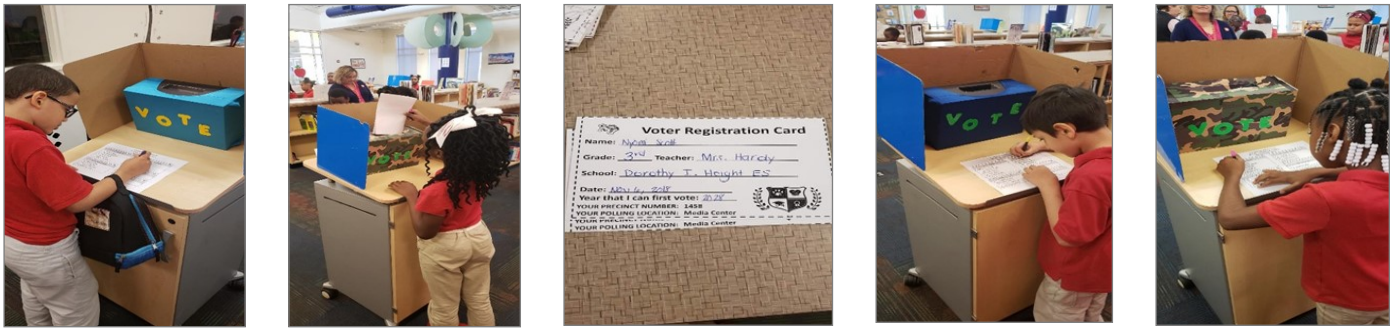
Bottom left: Assistant Principal, Pam Massingale (left), a graduating senior, and Principal Hunt participating in the individual graduation ceremony for the graduating senior and his immediate family during the pandemic.

Dorothy Height Elementary School

South Area News

Janie Fields, Program Manager

Students at Dorothy Height Elementary School (DHES), Muscogee County School District, marched to the polls under the leadership of Dr. Lamont Sheffield, principal! Students voted for officers of the DHES Student Council. Each candidate created a campaign video via Flipgrid. The students scanned each candidate's QR code to view their speech in their bid for president, vice president, secretary, or treasurer. The theme was "Your vote is your voice!" Students learned that by utilizing the opportunity to vote, they were using their voices and standing up for their school community. DHES strives to create a culture in which students begin and continue talking about voting and become civically engaged.



Election 2018 (Pre-COVID). Students at Dorothy Height Elementary School in Muscogee County becoming civically engaged and exercising their "right to vote."

> Students learned that by utilizing the opportunity to vote, they were using their voices and standing up for their school community.

Election 2020. Students at Dorothy Height Elementary School in Muscogee County becoming civically engaged and exercising their "right to vote."

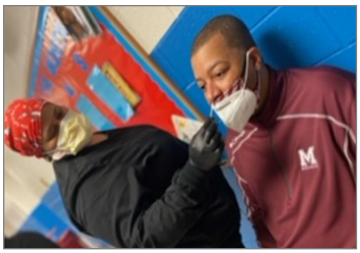
Focusing on Teaching & Learning in the Midst of a Pandemic

Metro Area News

Susan Patrick, Program Manager

The COVID-19 pandemic has lasted over an entire school calendar year. Like many schools across the nation, Finch elementary of Atlanta Public Schools is one of the many schools experiencing these growing pains amid the pandemic. With that said, as educators, they experienced an Unforgettable Journey. As you know, educators' lives have been filled with uncertainty, which impacted their in-person instructional delivery and high levels of student engagement. Many days created anxiety and distress that administrators, staff, students, and parents never anticipated. However, the courage exhibited by Forestella Taylor, principal, and Gerald Johnson, assistant principal, along with the staff, created a new way of doing business to provide students with a path to the highest level of learning they could experience amid a pandemic. The journey entailed a new frame of reference regarding what education looks like at Finch Elementary School, as well as other schools in Georgia. This new view of schools included students attending school half-days, experiencing alternating instructional learning days, having small class sizes, learning via virtual lessons, and engaging in non-traditional modes of instruction. Consequently, the administrators and staff at Finch Elementary School continued to exemplify resilience and perseverance during this challenging and tumultuous time.

Forestella Taylor, Principal, Finch Elementary School, Atlanta Public Schools getting tested for COVID-19



Gerald Johnson, Assistant Principal, Finch Elementary School, Atlanta Public Schools getting tested for COVID-19

Photographs provided by Finch Elementary School, Atlanta Public Schools

Finch Elementary School demonstrated and modeled wearing masks, conducting temperature checks, setting up plexiglass dividers to support learning, walking, and being seated 6-feet apart, while also using an overabundance of hand sanitizer and wipes to ensure the health and wellness of all. As part of this coronavirus crisis, educators worked laboriously to pivot between virtual and face-to-face instruction, in addition to framing ways to re-shape and re-imagine education to ensure that students maintained successful learning opportunities. At Finch Elementary School, Wednesdays focused on asynchronous learning, teacher-led PLCs, "double dose" small group intervention time, simultaneous virtual and in-person learning, a plethora of virtual meetings, and classroom observations. Even though schools across our nation will continue to experience the pervasive inequities that exist because of the pandemic, Finch Elementary School's administration remains diligent in completing Short Term Action Plans (STAP). The improvement plans address ambitious goals that strike at the core of eradicating the inequities that students continue to experience as learners. Principal Taylor continued to stay committed to ensuring a sense of urgency to meet the daily needs of her building while also breaking down barriers regarding technology to ensure that educators addressed the digital learning gap. Thanks to Principal Taylor and others that held to having an attitude that allowed them to stay the course to ensure that all students continue to exceed and win with viable learning opportunities and exposure to best practices in education while focusing on continuous school improvement.

Students, Finch Elementary School, Atlanta Public Schools

Taliaferro County School Leaders' Proactive Response to the Pandemic

SIG 1003(g), Cohort 5

Dr. Patricia Rooks, Program Manager

As school leaders seek to meet the significant challenges posed by the recent pandemic, leaders at Taliaferro County Schools (TCS) responded in true "Jaguar" fashion to proactively attend to the needs of all learners. When addressing the topic of learning loss, leaders engaged the Leadership Team in the review of both recent and longitudinal assessment and engagement data. The results of these discussions led leadership team facilitators to revisit a tried-and-true solution to its existing problem: implementing a year-round school calendar.

Leadership team facilitators surveyed leadership team members and faculty to determine their calendar preference for SY22. Survey results were shared with the Leadership Team, and the decision to readopt a year-round calendar was forwarded to the superintendent and board for public review and adoption. The process exemplifies the collective efficacy of TCS's Leadership Team to identify both barriers and solutions to increased student achievement.

TCS's leaders and teachers are springing into action to ensure the additional time afforded by a year-round calendar will reap the desired effects of closing achievement gaps for all students. District and school leaders are examining existing curricula to strengthen their delivery in both the virtual and face-to-face settings. Teachers are provided weekly coaching sessions to ensure instruction and assessment are in alignment with best practices.

TCS's teachers will engage in rigorous summer professional learning. TCS's students will participate in a robust summer program to address learning loss. Leaders are compiling plans to offer remediation, enrichment, and acceleration both during and beyond the school day for SY22.

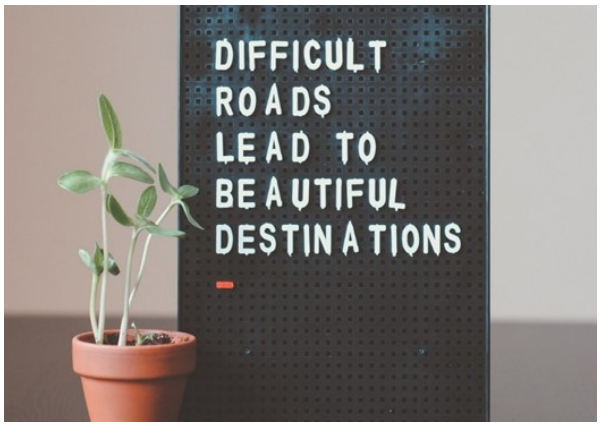
We congratulate the TCS's leaders and teachers for proactively providing opportunities for all students to excel!

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

Focusing on Student Learning

Area Program Assessment Specialist News

Georgia School Assessment of Performance on Systems (GSAPS)



What a year this has been for public education. When reflecting on this past year, the most positive result from the COVID-19 pandemic was a greater appreciation for public schools and teachers. During this unforgettable journey, schools developed new ways to engage students and parents, addressed needs from different perspectives, and grew the collaborative spirit of school leadership and staff, all while keeping safety and the health of students and staff at the forefront of every decision. As the current school year is ending, it is essential for school leaders to take a deep dive into all lessons learned and use the hard-earned knowledge as leverage to make informed decisions to ensure schools come out stronger than ever before. The first key is leveraging all supports and partnerships gained for public education. The second key is to continue those in the coming years to support students and their families.

The APAS team looks forward to serving and working with school leaders virtually and face-to-face next year in implementing the Georgia School Assessment of Performance on Systems (GSAPS). The GSAPS helps schools determine areas of focus for the school improvement journey and create essential action steps to address identified needs. We look forward to working with you and being a part of the roads leading to beautiful destinations for Georgia students!

Visit www.gadoe.org/SDEreview 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

The Alternative Education Advisory Group is in its second year. The group, consisting of K-12 and higher educational leaders, business industry leaders, and community stakeholders across the state, meets to discuss issues and topics related to alternative/non-traditional education. The Advisory Group offers advice or provides key information on topics related specifically to alternative /non-traditional education in Georgia. The Advisory Group does not have any formal authority to govern the organization.

The Advisory Group, during its first year, addressed four major findings identified through conducting statewide focus groups. The four major findings were: work-based learning, college and career readiness, facility and safety management, and an accountability framework ("second look") specifically designed for alternative school settings.

The Advisory Group, in its second year, worked hard in researching and talking with practitioners at the school and district levels to discuss possible objective measures that can assess and evaluate the performance of alternative/non-traditional schools and how well they are preparing students for college and career readiness. The Advisory Group plans to complete a draft of possible “second look” measures that will constitute an accountability framework for alternative/non-traditional schools this summer.

Current Advisory Members:

Local Education Agencies

- **Dr. Morcease Beasley**
  Superintendent, Clayton County Schools
- **Dr. Joe Cash**
  Assistant Superintendent, Mountain Education Charter High School
- **Dr. Judy Gilreath**
  Superintendent, Whitfield County
- **Brian Howell**
  Principal, Former Moore Street School
- **Dr. Jason Moore**
  Principal, RPM (Richmond County)
- **Barry Peppers**
  Principal, Chattooga Academy
- **Dr. Christopher Ray**
  Principal, Gwinnett On-Line Campus
- **Lamar Thomas**
  Principal, Delta Innovation School

University System of Georgia and Technical College System of Georgia

- **Dr. Adrian Epps**
  Interim Dean, Bagwell College
  Kennesaw State University
- **Dr. Anthony Parker**
  President, Albany Technical College

Organizations

- **Dr. Pam Bruening**
  Former National President, NAEA
- **Dr. Keith Hose**
  President, GAAE
- **Rashada Tedder**
  Board Member, GAAE
- **Mark Warren**
  National Consultant
- **Jackie Whitt**
  Executive Director, NAEA

Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) and Department of Juvenile Justice

- **Tim Helms**
  Director, Southwest RESA
- **Zane Shelfer**
  Deputy Superintendent, Department of Juvenile Justice

Georgia Department of Education

- **Billy Hughes**
  Program Manager, Agriculture Education
- **Shawn Keim**
  Area Program Assessment Specialist, School Improvement
- **Kerry Pritchard**
  Manager, Flexibility and External Affairs
- **Anita Smith**
  Area Program Assessment Specialist, School Improvement
- **Paula Swartzberg**
  Director, Accountability and Assessment

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

Title I-A School Improvement Grants

FY22 Title I-A School Improvement Grants will be submitted for approval by the State Board of Education at the June 17, 2021, State Board meeting. Notification letters including allocations will be sent to selected district superintendents soon thereafter.

For further information please contact
Dr. Gary C. Wenzel at gwenzel@doe.k12.ga.us.

GaDOE Community

District and school leaders are invited to join the Office of School Improvement Community!

Step 1: Register

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

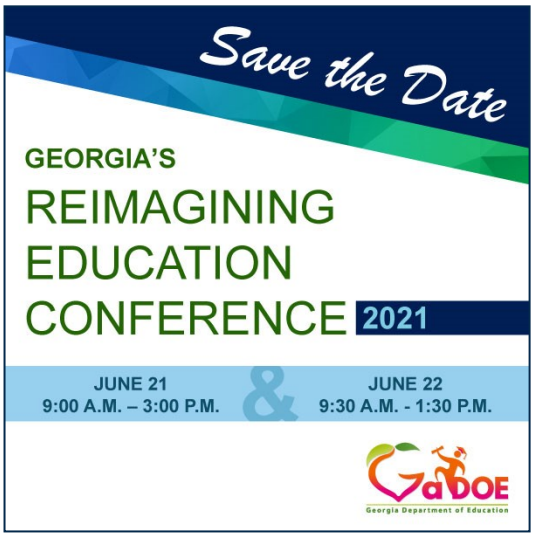
Step 2: Complete Profile

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.



Save the date! The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) is hosting **Georgia's Reimagining Education Conference,** a two-day virtual event providing resources and best practices from divisions across GaDOE.

Recommended Audience:
District Level
superintendents, assistant superintendents, and curriculum directors

School Level
principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, school improvement specialists, and teacher leaders

Dates and Times:
June 21, 2021
9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

June 22, 2021
9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Registration Information:
Registration information will be released on the School and District Effectiveness Events and Conferences webpage and shared via email on June 1, 2021. There are no registration costs associated with this conference.

Questions:
Please direct any questions to Dawn Ashmore dawn.ashmore@doe.k12.ga.us

We hope to see you virtually on June 21 and 22!