



*“Successfully Engaging Georgia’s Parents”*

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2014

## *“FINAL STEPS TOWARD NEW BEGINNINGS”*

As the end of the school year approaches, several annual traditions are observed in schools across the state. It starts with the ritual of taking down bulletin boards, followed by the collection of textbooks after final exams, and of course, the much-celebrated high school graduation ceremony. It is an exciting time of year for the entire family to reflect upon accomplishments and look forward to new opportunities.

For many parents, the high school diploma represents countless nights studying flashcards, unexpected

trips to the store for last minute school supplies, and valuable advice about the benefits of an education. It also represents the teacher who stayed after school to tutor students who were not even in her class, the principal who fought to offer more college and career courses, and the counselor who encouraged students to discover their true passions. When students walk across the stage to receive their diplomas, they are taking the first steps toward exciting opportunities and the beginning of a new chapter in their lives. For the accomplishments it represents

and the possibilities it provides, that high school diploma is priceless.

As we continue to make education work for all Georgians and watch more high school seniors walk across that stage every year, I applaud the proud parents and families as well the outstanding teachers and staff who make those moments possible. Please enjoy this time with your family, and I wish everyone a safe and refreshing summer.

*-DR. JOHN D. BARGE, STATE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT*



## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN THE FIELD

*This is a series of articles written for parents by parent involvement coordinators.*

*Stories of Success*

### *“Listening with Understanding”*

While sorting through a box of old photographs, I discovered a newspaper article from 1981 that featured a former student from one of my kindergarten classes. The article referred to me as a teacher and parent coordinator, which made me remember how much I have learned from parents and students during my 27 years in education. Over this period of time, my dedication to them sparked during my first year of teaching and the flames have continued to burn brightly.

One lesson that I have learned from parents is the importance of sincerely listening to families’ needs, opinions, and concerns. A good listener can be more valuable than all the parent engagement strategies and educational acronyms combined. While parent programs and activities are extremely important, listening

first always provides me with helpful information to better assist families. Their input allows me to address their individual and often specific needs concerning their child’s education. If schools and parents are to be true partners, then why are we always talking? After all, two-way communication is not just about creating opportunities for parents to share, but ensuring that schools are listening.

Listening to parents with compassion and understanding does not always mean that you will be in agreement, but it does mean that you want to recognize and appreciate their story. Parents want schools to value their children and to believe that they are capable of learning. Based on words and sometimes more importantly, body language, parents know

immediately if this is true or not. While I will always be fascinated by what students share, my socks have also been knocked off by what parents tell me. Since my first year, I continue to learn what parents really want from teachers and schools. After listening with understanding, I have been educated by the best, parents.

**Linda Cooke**  
Parent Involvement Coordinator  
Snelson Golden Middle School  
Liberty County

*Are you a family engagement professional interested in sharing your story with parents? Please contact Nate Schult, Parent Engagement Specialist, at [nschult@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:nschult@doe.k12.ga.us)*

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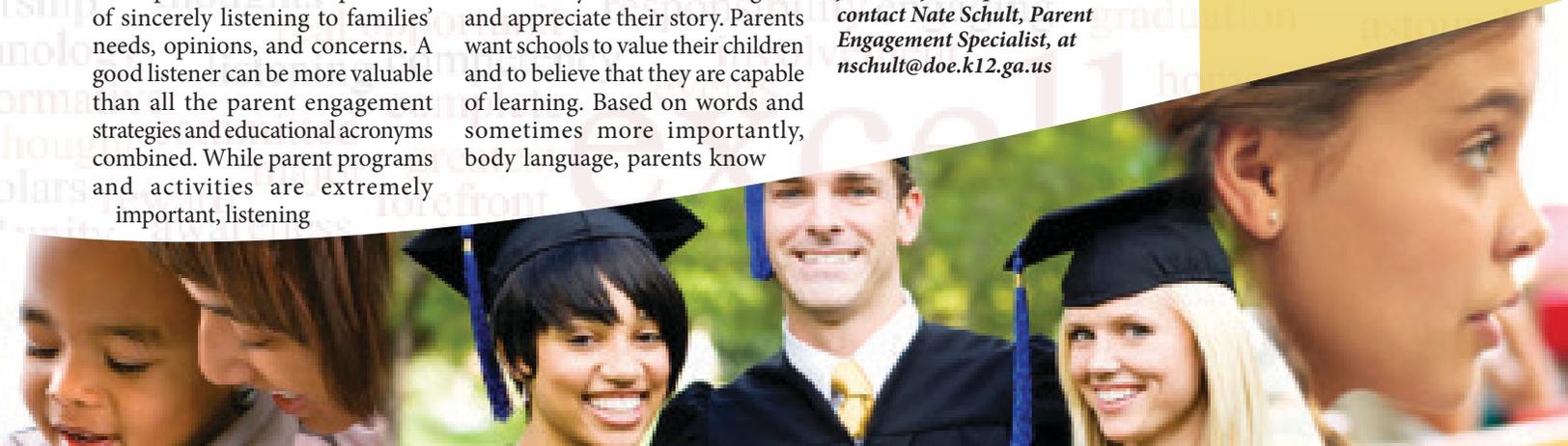
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## Why A Break From School Shouldn't Mean A Break From Learning

Summer vacation. There are few other American traditions that are as cherished. By just uttering those two words you can watch your child's eyes instantly fill with gleeful thoughts of endless days at the beach or riding their favorite roller coaster at Disney World. But if you think that for students summer should be a time filled with all play and no work, you may want to listen to the following facts.

- According to the U.S. Department of Education, children lose as much as 25% of their reading skills during the summertime.
- According to the Johns Hopkins University Center for Summer Learning, on average students lose approximately 2.6 months worth of math skills each and every summer.
- According to the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) students score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer vacation than they do on the same tests at the beginning.

This phenomenon is known as the summer

learning loss or "summer slide".

Students who fall victim to the summer learning loss slip further and further below their grade level year after year and most likely continue to lag behind their peers throughout high school, college, and even into adulthood.

These troublesome facts reinforce the importance of keeping your child engaged and mentally stimulated throughout the summer.

According to Gary Huggins, current CEO of NSLA, "summer is a great break from school," says Huggins, "but not a great break from learning."

Parents are oftentimes the deciding factor on whether or not their child will be affected by summer learning loss. By ensuring that your child makes the most of their summer vacation – you can dramatically decrease, eliminate or even reverse the summer learning loss.

While summer camps and programs are always a good idea, here are some free ideas

and tips from Gettingsmart.com that you can use to support and aid in your child's summer learning.

**TALK** to your child's teacher before the end of the school year. Teachers will have good ideas about workbooks, activities and even online resources that children can use to maintain their skills over the summer.

**READ** to, and with, your kids. Take advantage of your local public library and their summer reading programs. You'll get all the books you want for free and your kids will enjoy a field trip that's likely to help instill a love of reading.

**TURN** everyday activities into learning opportunities. For example, take your kids on a shopping trip and challenge them to add up prices at the store and see if they can tally up the final bill. Going on a drive? Ask them to look out for certain shapes, colors, letters or words on billboards and signs.

**ESCAPE** the TV, couch and fridge by getting out and about for neighborhood walks and outings to local parks, playgrounds, zoos, community centers and other local resources that are enjoyable, educational and keep everyone moving.

*"We expect that athletes and musicians would see their performance suffer without practice, well, the same is true of students."*

**- Ron Fairchild,  
founding CEO of The  
National Summer  
Learning Association**

It's no secret that obtaining a college degree can grant a person access to a greater assortment of opportunities and resources. According to a study done by Georgetown University in 2011, on average college graduates earn 84% more during their lifetime than those with a high school diploma alone. Aside from that, college is often a great opportunity for personal growth and exposure to new people, places, and ideas.

These days, most colleges look for more than just good grades and high-test scores when accepting applicants. Colleges also place a great deal of weight on other factors such as community service, leadership skills, and extra curricular activities.

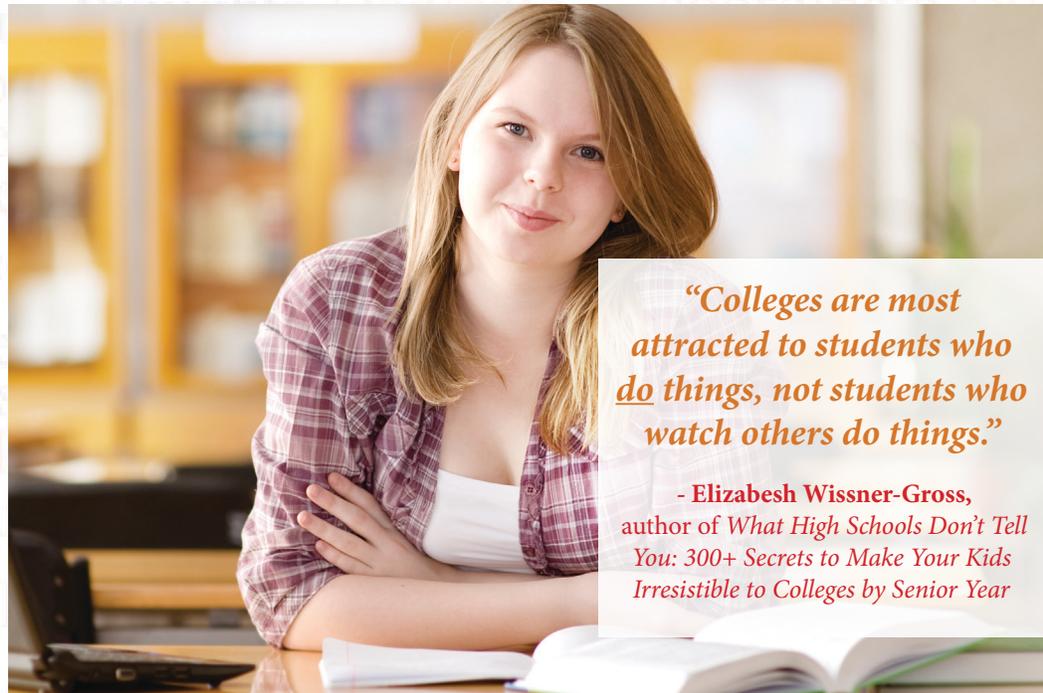
Parents that aspire for their children to attend college should make sure that their teen is on the proper trajectory for acceptance- and this includes participating in various activities. However, finding the time to do so during the school year can be stressful and hectic on your teen. As a result, savvy parents are also utilizing summer vacation to involve their teens in activities that can improve their college marketability.

Lisa Sohmer, a member of the National Association for College Admission Counseling's Board of Directors encourages teens to use summer break to develop their interests and strengths, while finding ways to stand out. "Colleges want students to use their free time wisely and well," she states. "The best summer experiences are the ones that allow teens to explore their academic and career passions through exciting, engaging experiences."

By strategically making good use of their summer break, a teen can acquire those special elements that enable them to emerge from the pack and make any college admissions director take a second look!

## Parents!

**Have an idea to contribute to the newsletter? Send your parent involvement ideas and articles to us through your parent involvement coordinator or e-mail us directly. If your idea or article is published, your name will appear in the newsletter!**



***“Colleges are most attracted to students who do things, not students who watch others do things.”***

**- Elizabesh Wissner-Gross,**  
author of *What High Schools Don't Tell You: 300+ Secrets to Make Your Kids Irresistible to Colleges by Senior Year*

## 8 Fun Activities to Keep Your Teen Productive During Summer Vacation

*via teenlife.com by Stephen Friedfeld, formerly the Assistant Dean of Admissions at Cornell University, Associate Dean at Princeton University, and independent college consultant.*

### 1. Start a blog

Writing impresses admissions officers – it shows creativity and independence of thought, and it's also interactive and fun.

### 2. Create a website

Creating a website teaches your budding programmer how to use HTML, the backbone to web design language. Your son or daughter might even make a bit of spending money!

### 3. Volunteer

Volunteering time to a worthy cause is not only impressive to admissions officers, but also can be one of the most rewarding activities this summer.

### 4. Learn a new language

Learning a second language promotes educational development and allows students to better appreciate their world. Learning another language will add a golden star to college applications.

### 5. Recycle

Students can research the steps their town takes to go green and find out if there is a recycling plant nearby. They can even get

paid to recycle! Your child should record how much money he/she makes or how many hours he/she spent recycling to include it in college applications.

### 6. Make a movie

Your child can film a whole movie around your hometown – all on a budget. Directing a movie impresses admissions officers because it shows initiative, creativity and leadership. They can write a script, direct a cast and edit the movie together into a cohesive story.

### 7. Find a pen pal

A pen pal can expose high school students to different cultures, and interacting with a pen pal hones reading and writing skills – and it's a whole lot more fun than writing an essay for class. This can lead to a very cool college essay!

### 8. Read at the public library

The public library is a free resource, and being well-read makes your student a more interesting, in-depth candidate when applying to college. Applicants should even include "reading for pleasure" as one of their summer activities.

Congratulations to the four schools selected as the 2014 winners of the Georgia Department of Education's Family-Friendly Partnership School Award!

These schools were selected because they represent the best in customer service for Georgia families, whether it's on the phone, in the front office or online.

They have welcoming staff members, comfortable waiting areas, clear signage, and engaging student work throughout the building. Additionally, they have easy-to-navigate websites and are forging partnerships with

# THE GEORGIA FAMILY FRIENDLY PARTNERSHIP SCHOOL AWARDS

Congratulations  
**Cumming Elementary School**  
**Golden Isles Elementary School**  
**Midway Elementary School**  
**Moreland Elementary School**

parents to help improve student achievement.

These four schools provide unique, engaging, and innovative parent engagement programming that is successful in reaching all families in the school.

The Family-Friendly Partnership School Award is sponsored by the GaDOE, along with the Georgia Foundation for Public Education, Georgia Association of Educator and the Ritz-Carlton. This award is given out annually to up to 10 schools that go above and beyond to make families feel welcome and work to engage parents in their children's education.

## JUNE 5, 2014

**World Environment Day** – this day is used by the United Nations to stimulate worldwide awareness of environmental issues and encourages preventative action to keep our environment clean and sustainable.

## JUNE 14, 2014

**Flag Day** – this is a day of patriotism, so parents can take the opportunity to hang or display their native flag on their lawns with their children.

## JUNE 18, 2014

**International Picnic Day** – this day encourages everyone to break out the blankets and Tupperware containers to enjoy a family picnic!



## JULY 1, 2014

**International Joke Day** – this day gives parents and children an opportunity to share laughter together by telling their favorite jokes.

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## Vision Statement

*The Parent Engagement Program believes that parents, schools, families, and communities working together can create meaningful partnerships that ultimately lead to significant gains across the board in student achievement.*

## Have a Question?

AskDOE

404-656-2800 ❖ askdoe@doe.k12.ga.us

## We're on the Web!

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