

Parent Engagement Newsletter



Parent Leadership Month is February, 2014!

This month is dedicated to supporting individuals who passionately represent the needs and perspectives of all parents. Parent leaders become role models for parent engagement, advocating not only on behalf of their own children, but for other families as well!



Have a Great Idea?

Parents, see if your school has a program for parents to welcome and connect with other parents before enrolling their children in school. Consider partnering with the school counseling office to create an outreach program and develop a network of parent representatives.

Creating a Buzz



**Dr. John D. Barge,
State School Superintendent**

Dear Parents,

There are many buzz words used in education these days that are eye-catching and conversation starters. Recently, I thought about one word in particular that is used almost every day – Accountability. We hold each other accountable to ensure that the job is done properly and expectations are fulfilled. At the Georgia Department of Education, there is an entire

team of professionals that is responsible for producing accountability reports, including the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). This team serves to improve communication between all Georgia public schools and our various stakeholders.

Consistent and reliable communication is critical for good accountability. Limitless amounts of information are accessible at our fingertips, which create a new level of transparency in education. I encourage parents to not only review and follow the latest news from the state and your child’s school, but also to provide feedback and input. One way parents can play an active role in their child’s education is by reviewing the proposed Career Cluster/

Pathway courses and share your thoughts on the development of these high school courses at <http://tinyurl.com/p5kruw9>. I believe the Career Pathways initiative will provide a level of relevance that we have not seen in our high schools for some time.

We all share an invested interest in the future of our children and know that a quality education is the best vehicle for them to become college and career ready. To that end, let’s continue to hold each other accountable and work together to keep moving forward this school year and achieve our goals.

Sincerely,

Dr. John D. Barge
State School Superintendent

Family Engagement in the Field: Stories of Success

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

“School Tours: A Win-Win”

In August 2011, a new charter school opened up just a couple of miles from our school. What did this mean for us? Rather than look at it negatively, we chose to see it as an opportunity to better showcase our strengths and to start building relationships with prospective students and their families.

We have always had a very open and welcoming school, but now, because the families had a choice as to where to send their children, instead of five or six families per year requesting tours, I was now giving multiple tours every week.

Rather than offer group tours, I tailor the tour to individual families as far as day, time, or which grades they are interested in and anything else they specify. We visit all parts of the school and the visits are unannounced. The faculty and staff at our school are, without fail, exceptionally cordial, welcoming and professional. Parents never leave unimpressed.

As a perspective parent you should feel comfortable asking for a tour of your school, even if you don’t have the option of a charter academy down the road. In some schools it may not be the Parent Involvement Coordinator who gives the tours, perhaps it is the counselor or even a parent volunteer! But a tour will give you a good feel for the school

and also give you the opportunity to meet some of the teachers and other personnel at the school.

The school benefits because families who take a tour tend to be more vested in the success of the school, more likely to champion the school and more likely to volunteer at the school. Overall, tours promote an open, welcoming and collaborative school environment. Call your school today to set one up!

Jessica Ruiz,
Title I Bilingual Parent
Involvement Facilitator,
Woodstock Elementary

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

Point. Click. Graduate?



Inspire Your Artist

From improved motor skills to refined cognitive thinking, there are many benefits of arts education for children. Nurture your children's interest and build their confidence to strengthen their artistic skills.

- Explore poems, plays and songs
- Provide a sketchbook and drawing materials
- Visit art museums
- Encourage practice
- Enroll in performing art clubs or activities at school
- Interview local artists, musicians or actors



Online classes are no longer reserved for college students as the last option when the regular class is already filled. A recent study of students at Stanford University showed that most college students elect the online class over the traditional option when given the choice. Many public schools and districts have also embraced the benefits of technology to offer online or virtual learning options for their students. Virtual courses deliver several advantages for schools, parents and students but also create unique learning situations that should be considered before clicking the mouse.

Thanks to an expanded library of online classes, schools can offer more options for students in addition to the regular

schedule. Virtual learning could be perfect for students seeking advanced classes that the school may not be able to include in the schedule if not enough students are interested. Or online courses could be ideal for a credit recovery option. Another useful application of online classes is for the transfer student who needs a particular class that the school schedule does not include. Both students and parents will appreciate and enjoy the flexibility and rigor provided by virtual classes.

Before rushing to the computer lab to sign up for a full schedule of online classes, take a moment to consider some expectations for virtual learning. Aside from the obvious technical requirements associated with digital learning, students should also expect to be

independent and motivated learners. While most students are comfortable in front of the computer, not all students may be used to setting their own schedule for completing course work. Online learning requires students to have excellent time management skills and be well organized to stay on schedule and not fall behind in the class.

Overall, virtual learning opens more possibilities and can potentially challenge learners to develop new skills. The Georgia Virtual School is a state program that partners with middle and high schools in Georgia to offer virtual courses. Talk to your school counselor about online learning options or visit the following website for more information:

<http://tinyurl.com/gavirtual>

News You Can Use: Student Growth Model

Data is not only a powerful tool for schools but also for parents. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) continuously seeks ways to improve student learning and the quality of instruction through analyzing and sharing data. The latest method to collect and share data that schools and parents can use is the Georgia Student Growth Model (GSGM). While the calculations behind the development of the GSGM can be complicated, the end result is a useful report that indicates students' progress relative to academically similar students, and how much progress students need to make to meet or exceed expectations on future state assessments.

As the name suggests, the GSGM describes the amount of growth a student has made over a period of time. Similar to the growth charts and percentile ranks used by pediatrician offices to illustrate a newborn baby's weight and size, the GSGM will use growth percentiles to compare students' growth to their academic peers.

As part of this new tool, parents will receive a Georgia Student Growth Report that will contain the traditional student achievement data with the new Student Growth Percentiles. The report pulls data from prior years and compares this data with students with similar academic backgrounds and history. Using this data, the report will show parents

where the student's growth ranks in relation to academic peers and also illustrate the amount of growth necessary to reach different achievement levels in the future. This report will add layers of information to enable better understanding of student performance and history. Parents can use this report to determine if their students are on track to reach or exceed proficiency. For example, parents can monitor their student's academic growth even if the student has not yet reached proficiency levels.

The GaDOE website shares detailed information on the history and development of the GSGM, which can be accessed on the following link: <http://tinyurl.com/lr4oyy6>

Catch Us at the 2014 Georgia Family Engagement Conference

The hotels are booked. The workshops are scheduled. The tote bags are filled. The programs are printed. We are ready. Are you? The 2014 Family Engagement Conference is almost here. There is less than one month remaining until educators, parents, communities members and stakeholders from around the state meet together in Athens for what is shaping up to be a memorable and exciting conference.



The goal of this conference is to serve as a catalyst to create connections between schools, parents and communities that are strengthened by the shared goal of increasing student achievement by engaging families. Throughout the conference, the theme of shared responsibility for student success will remain at the forefront. Participants will be able to learn innovative ideas as they stroll through the "Hall of Difference Makers", share best practices as they visit the "Inspiration Station" or collaborate with colleagues during the "Quick Connect Session". Around every corner promises to be an opportunity to engage in rich conversations and gain knowledge about issues that affect family engagement.



The workshop sessions will surely captivate your attention and leave you feeling energized with inspiration and ideas. The conference will feature over 40 workshops, including keynote and featured speaker sessions. These dynamic and engaging workshops will provide valuable information about Parental Involvement Compliance Requirements under Title I, Research-Based Best Practices for Family Engagement, Parent Leadership & Skills Building, and Student Support & Achievement Results. Participants will leave the conference with new tools and resources to improve their family engagement programs and practices, particularly in our Title I schools.



There is certain to be plenty of workshops for everyone as sessions range from building parent leaders to increasing male involvement in schools to using technology as a tool to improve parent engagement. Participants can also learn first hand knowledge from the 2014 Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership award winners, enjoy stories of success from an expert panel of Title I directors or listen to a professor from the University of Georgia discuss exemplary best practices on talent development. Some of these sessions will be repeated to accommodate what is sure to be a large

crowd, but don't forget to start highlighting which sessions you want to attend so you don't miss out on any of this great information. To learn more about these fascinating speakers and their sessions, visit our website:

<http://tinyurl.com/na65gmo>



While this does not cover all the activities and events that are scheduled for this year's conference, it does paint an enriching and engaging picture. Of course there are still a few surprises and treats planned that will remain a secret until the conference. Although regular registration will close on December 20th, we will offer on-site registration for those who would still like to join us. From the welcoming remarks at the Opening Session to the call to action during the Closing Session, the 2014 Family Engagement Conference is sure to be one that people will be talking about for awhile. Since this conference is only offered every other year, you will have to wait until 2016 for the next opportunity - so join us this January! To learn more about the conference and registration, please visit our website:

<http://tinyurl.com/qj97hnf>



Enjoy a Healthy Holiday

- Find time to exercise
- Avoid skipping meals
- Create arts and crafts instead of cookies
- Get plenty of rest
- Park farther away from the store when shopping



Tips for Parent Teacher Conferences

- Involve your student in the conversation
- Clearly identify the expectations for the conference
- Keep the focus on student objectives
- Share ideas and suggestions
- Listen, learn, respond and review
- Bring a list of questions and samples of homework
- Leave with a clear plan in place
- Follow-up after a determined period of time to evaluate progress

Learning in a Standards Based Classroom

When you walk into a standards based classroom, it may appear like any other classroom at first glance. But something is different. Looking around the room you begin to notice clear and helpful information that is posted for the students to easily read. Most visible will be the standards being taught during the lesson for the day displayed with an essential question guiding students towards the overall objective. From posted student work to displayed learning rubrics, the whole classroom and lesson is designed to remove confusion and provide clear connection linking the standards, learning and goals.

There is more than just visual aides in the classroom to

direct student learning. The teacher aligns the curriculum, instruction and assessments to effectively impact student learning. Teachers clearly communicate expectations and goals to encourage and enable students to be more responsible for their learning. The focus is placed on students mastering the standards as opposed to simply covering the material in a timely manner. In order to accomplish this objective, teachers consider the students' interests, previous achievements and development levels when planning the instructional methods. This approach creates a cooperative learning environment that

encourages students to develop critical thinking and reasoning skills.

Another aspect of a standards based classroom that is noticeably different is the flow of the lesson and instruction. After introducing the lesson, teachers will encourage additional in-depth conversations by pairing students with their peers or assigning small group activities. Students will also receive ongoing feedback through formal and informal assessments connected to the standards.

This type of learning can be seen in classrooms all around Georgia. Visit your child's classroom soon to enjoy a standards based classroom experience.

Refocus After a Break

Following a school holiday - students, parents and teachers can use ideas to recharge and avoid the post-holiday slump.

- Create simple to-do lists to prioritize and avoid feeling overwhelmed
- Review goals for the rest of the school year
- Plan a fun family event for the near future
- Get involved at the school to stay active



Program Staff

Michelle Sandrock,
Parent Engagement Program Manager
msandrock@doe.k12.ga.us
404-232-1148

Nate Schult,
Parent Engagement Specialist
nschult@doe.k12.ga.us
404-463-1953

Outreach Programs Division
1862 Twin Towers East
205 Jesse Hill Jr. Drive, SE
Atlanta, GA 30334



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.



Calling All 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!

Remember to block off these important dates!

Visit the Zoo Day
December 26

National Card Playing Day
December 28

National Trivia Day
January 4

Universal Letter Writing Week
January 8 - 14

African American History Month
February

Bicycle Safety Day
February 13

World Thinking Day
February 22

We're on the Web!

<http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/AskDOE/Pages/Parents.aspx>
<http://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Pages/Parent-Engagement-Program.aspx>