

*“Successfully Engaging Georgia’s Parents”*

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

FALL 2014

## **“ESTABLISH A ROUTINE”**

It’s that time of year again. School is back in session! Whether this is your student’s first year attending school or their last, the first few weeks can be a lot to take in. (Especially for us as parents, when we realize how quickly the time is rushing past – my daughter just began her freshman year of college!)

As your student settles back into his or her routine, or begins a new one, it is equally important for you to establish a routine of a different sort: a routine of communication with your student’s teacher.

While juggling work, parenting, and all your other obligations, I

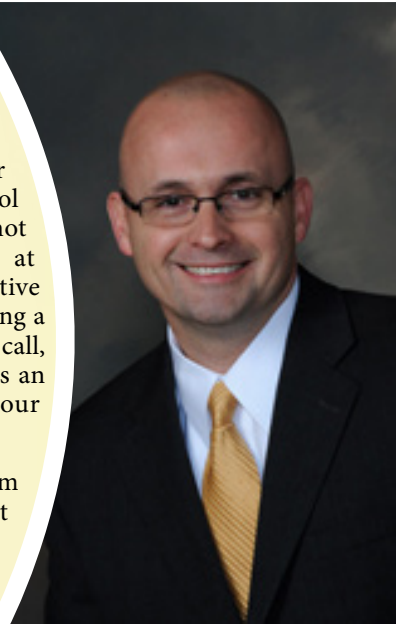
know it can be difficult to find enough hours in a day. Fortunately, you have an ally in your efforts to remain actively involved in your student’s education – their teacher. By maintaining open, honest, and regular communication with him or her, you can always play an active role in your student’s education.

If you feel as though your student needs help grasping a particular topic, express that to their teacher. Likewise, make sure it is easy for them to approach you with any concerns they may have. Listen to your student’s teacher, take their suggestions and advice, and expect the same respect in return.

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

As the school year progresses, I encourage you to maintain weekly or monthly communication with your student’s teacher and stay up to date on school events. Remember, you do not always have to be present at the school to maintain effective communication. Simply sending a text, making a weekly phone call, or writing a monthly email is an important investment in your student’s education.

Enjoy the start of the year. I am wishing you and your student the best year yet!



## **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN THE FIELD**

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

### **“Listening for Change”**

Sometimes the most significant and meaningful family-school partnerships are those sparked by a simple thought from a parent or guardian. Too often schools focus on their own interests instead of listening to families in order to understand their needs and develop genuine partnerships to support student learning.

As the parent involvement specialist at an elementary school, I planned a variety of informational meetings and events for parents and guardians. Among the regular attendees at these events was a grandmother who served as the primary caregiver for her two grandchildren. During a particular meeting held to gather ideas to help parents and guardians support student success, this grandmother shared that she would enjoy the opportunity to meet with other grandparents from the school.

With more grandparents playing an active role in the lives of their grandchildren, she thought it would be helpful to create a group for grandparents to share ideas and experiences in order to learn from each other about supporting their grandchildren in school.

Thanks to her input, a new group was established at the school, “Parents Who Are Grand”. The group met regularly to receive information and resources to help grandparents assist their grandchildren’s academic success. Perhaps the most meaningful result of these meetings was the ability for grandparents to connect with each other and provide support and inspiration for one another as they raised their grandchildren.

One grandparent had an idea, which led to a new opportunity for

### *Stories of Success*

other grandparents that positively impacted the children in their care. Therefore, I encourage all parents, guardians and grandparents to please remember that your suggestions and feedback, big or little, are needed to establish effective, meaningful, rewarding family-school partnerships and produce significant results in our schools!

**Karen Aylwin**  
Parent Involvement Specialist  
Paulding County School District

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

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### Decades of research show that when parents are involved students have:

- ✓ Higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates
- ✓ Better school attendance
- ✓ Increased motivation, better self-esteem
- ✓ Lower rates of suspension



## How can I increase Parent Engagement at my school?

In the animal kingdom, species who raise their young as a community, such as lions, have a stronger survival rate than species that do not, such as cheetahs. The reason for this is simple: there is strength in numbers - and this is true for humans as well.

When parents and families come together for the betterment of a school, it creates an environment that is conducive to student success. Still, successfully engaging all parents and families continues to be a challenge that most educators face.

Although almost every school has a small core group of parents who are actively engaged, it can be a struggle for teachers and school staff to reach out and engage harder to reach parents and families. However, as a parent, there are ways that you can do your part to motivate other parents to get involved.

Here are a few suggestions on ways that you can help more parents become involved and engaged this year at your school.

### **Collaborate with school staff**

Before you begin mapping out your parent engagement plan of attack, it

might be a good idea to talk with your parent liaison or principal. Let them know that you are available and would like to help with any parent and family engagement initiatives. Not only will they be thrilled to have you as an ally, they will also most likely be able to point you in the right direction by telling you when and where your efforts will be most effective.

### **Reach out to parents you already know and encourage them to start with something small**

Reach out to parents that you already have a relationship with and ask them if they would mind helping you with an event or activity. Often, parents are available and willing to help - it is just that no one has ever asked them! It also helps to encourage them to start small. Lisa Richardson, 2014 State School Superintendent Parent Advisory Council member states, "Start small when you ask a parent to do something. [Their engagement] will start to build and then they will start to advocate."

### **Spread the word**

Just because you know the benefits of parent engagement doesn't mean everyone else does. Before you ask

parents to get involved, you have to make sure that they know *why* they should get involved. Whether you make a speech at back to school night or casually mention the positive impact that you have seen in your child since becoming more engaged - do your best to get the word out as much as you can.

### **Put your talents and skills to work**

Do you know how to edit video? Are you an excellent seamstress? Are you a great public speaker? Whatever your talent or skill-set is, figure out how you can use it to reach out to other parents and encourage them to become more involved. Perhaps you can film and edit a video on the benefits of parent engagement, create personalized shirts to promote your parent group, or help teach a class on how parents can become empowered and get involved for the benefit of Title I parental involvement. Whatever your talent is, you have something valuable that you can use to foster parent engagement at your school.

*Do you have a story about how you increased parent or family engagement in your school? Contact Keisha Jeffries, Parent Engagement Communications Specialist, at [kjeffries@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:kjeffries@doe.k12.ga.us).*



As the school year begins again it is important to remember how much you matter. While making sure your child has a healthy breakfast and a good night's rest are key components of success, your help and support in their education is just as important. It has been proven time and time again that a parent who takes an active interest in their child's education is one of the biggest contributors to that child reaching their full academic potential.

Parents and teachers are truly partners, and when they work in conjunction with one another, they provide the greatest chance of academic success in a child. Here are four things to keep in mind when thinking about how you can support your child's teacher this year.

### Educate yourself

Learn about your child's school and curriculum. Ask your child's teacher what the students will be learning this year and familiarize yourself with the subject matter. Find out if there is a class website, blog, or Facebook page that you can join to stay up to date. There are also many free resources available online such as The U.S. Department of Education's 'Helping Your Child Series' which offers free booklets in different subject areas, such as science and

## 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!

mathematics, that are filled with lessons and activities that you can do with your child. To download this series and other helpful resources visit [www2.ed.gov/parents](http://www2.ed.gov/parents).

### Be available

One of the biggest ways to support your child's teacher is to simply keep in contact with them. Whether it is via telephone, e-mail, or face-to-face conversation - teachers appreciate when parents care enough to keep in contact. However, be sure not to overdo it. Your child's teacher often has dozens of students and it may be unrealistic for them to touch base with you every day. Aim to have a conversation with them once a month.

### Forget your baggage

Parents can sometimes carry the negative experiences they have had with education

and unknowingly pass these feelings and attitudes onto their children. Regardless of whether you look back at your school experience fondly or look back and cringe, be sure to impress a positive attitude about school onto your child. For example, instead of saying, "Wake up! You *have* go to school today," it may be better to say, "Wake up! You *get* to go to school today." The positive outlook your child has on school and education prompts them to come to school ready and excited to learn.

### Encourage learning at home

Whether learning about different cultures at the grocery store, calculating the tip at a restaurant, or discussing what they are working on in school, make learning a constant part of your child's everyday life. The more your child practices these skills at home the better they will do in school!

## Five Hot Homework Tips for Parents

via the official blog of the [U.S. Department of Education](http://www.ed.gov).

By Margaret Yau

Learning doesn't stop when the last bell rings at school. When students bring work home, it is a great time for parents to play a role in their child's education. Homework has many benefits, such as providing extra time for research or practice, helping students develop study skills and teaching time management skills. Here are five tips to help your child benefit by the time spent on assignments and maximize their learning.



- 1. Study space:** Set up a quiet, well-lit area for your child to complete his or her homework. Try to remove any distractions from the surrounding area, like televisions, computers (unless used for the assignment) and loud conversations.
- 2. Imitation:** Children imitate their parents. When your child is focusing on homework, join them in a similar, focused activity. Crack open a favorite novel while they complete their reading assignment, or balance your checkbook while they work through their multiplication tables.
- 3. Time management:** Teach your child how to manage their time. Schedule events, homework, and tasks at home. For instance, after school, set a specific time as "homework time" and for tasks at home give them time limits.
- 4. Encourage independence:** Some homework assignments are meant to be done by the student alone, and hovering can take away from the child's learning process. Try to step back, and if intervention is really needed, make sure to provide guidance, not just answers.
- 5. Tackle a challenge:** Teach your child how to identify the difference between the "hard" homework questions and the "easy" ones. Have them set aside the easier questions for later and tackle the hard ones first.

Don't forget!

# November is Parent Engagement Month!

Every year the state of Georgia recognizes the month of November as **Parent Engagement Month**, and schools across the state highlight the role parents play in a student's education. Additionally, the third Thursday in November is **National Parental Involvement Day**. This is a day for all parents to consider how they can get more involved in the education of their children.

To assist parents in the process, the Georgia Department of Education provides **Get the facts...get connected...GET INVOLVED!**

resources for parents and schools to encourage parent engagement. Each year, we also release an updated **Parent Engagement Month calendar** that provides specific activities for parents to do with their children at home each day in November to support learning and academic achievement. While we encourage parents to use these materials particularly during Parent Engagement Month, parents can also utilize them to engage in meaningful conversations and positive interactions with their children throughout the year.

Every student in Georgia should have a strong support system that values and encourages educational achievement and there is no one that can support this effort better than parents.

Be sure to visit our Parent Engagement Month page ([tinyurl.com/nhhzpw6](http://tinyurl.com/nhhzpw6)) in mid-October for updated 2014 materials. And check out the Parent Engagement Program's Twitter and Facebook pages every day during November for Parent Engagement facts, activities, and ideas!

**SEPTEMBER 20, 2014**

**National Family Day** –

This day encourages families to make “family dinner” a regular and important feature in their lives.

**OCTOBER 23, 2014**

**Lights on Afterschool** – This day calls attention to the importance of afterschool programs for America's children, families, and communities so children are not left unsupervised at home.

## Save the Dates

**NOVEMBER 1, 2014**

**Family Literacy Day** – This day calls on families to read with each other in order to showcase the importance of family literacy programs.



**NOVEMBER 20, 2014**

**National Parental Involvement Day** – This day is a call to action for parents to commit to being an active part of their child's education.

## Program Staff

**Michelle Sandrock,**  
Parent Engagement  
Program Manager  
[msandrock@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:msandrock@doe.k12.ga.us)  
404-232-1148

**Nathan Schult,**  
Parent Engagement  
Specialist  
[nschult@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:nschult@doe.k12.ga.us)  
404-463-1956

**Keisha Jeffries,**  
Parent Engagement  
Communications Specialist  
[kjeffries@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:kjeffries@doe.k12.ga.us)  
404-656-2633

## 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](mailto:askdoe@doe.k12.ga.us)

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