Richard Woods, Georgia's School Superintendent
"Educating Georgia's Future"

Spring Region PIC Meeting Minutes – Region 2

March 24, 2015

I. Welcome

Nathan Schult, Parent Engagement Program Manager, opened the meeting by welcoming all in attendance, introducing the Georgia Department of Education staff and thanking Henry County for hosting the meeting. After introducing the Parent Engagement team, he stated that that today he wants to capitalize on the wealth of knowledge Parent Involvement Coordinators (PICs) bring to the table. To achieve this, there will be ample time allotted for networking to learn from each other and leave the meeting with ideas and strategies. Nate then went over announcements starting with the 2016 Family Engagement Conference being held from February 4 – 6, 2016 in Athens GA. He advised the PICs to start planning and budgeting now and informed them that they can use their Title I funds for registration costs. Registration will open in August and he expressed his great desire for everyone to attend. He then announced a new conference partner, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). Lastly, he directed the group to the Conference Organization Committee form located in their folders. And he encouraged people to participate and volunteer on the conference organizing committee to help plan and organize the 2016 Conference. He asked them to fill out a form and they will know shortly if they have been selected for the committee.

Nate switched gears and briefly discussed the Parent Engagement Program's Facebook and Twitter pages, before discussing the Georgia PIC Network Blog. He informed the PICs of the many resources that are currently available on the Blog. He instructed everyone to take out the Georgia PIC Network Quick Review Sheet for the spring updates. He reminded the group to sign up for the PIC listserv to receive parent engagement updates. He then encouraged everyone to join his or her respective LLC group. He explained that LLCs are smaller, sub-regions of the PIC Network that are led by a school or district PIC who works in that region. These small regions allow PICs who work in closer proximity to communicate with colleagues who work with similar populations and face similar challenges.

He then went over housekeeping and transitioned into the mix mingle networking event.

II. Mix, Mingle and Share Networking

This portion of the meeting lasted approximately 15 minutes and was used for the PICs to network and share best practices. The group discussed the following questions:

- What has been your greatest success in working with families this year?
- What is one thing that you have you done differently since the last PIC meeting to develop high-impact strategies to build family-school partnerships?
- What is one thing that you hope to accomplish this year?

At the conclusion of this section, Nate Schult then introduced Henry County's presentation.

III. Learning from Each Other: Henry County Schools

Henry County kicked off their presentation with a student musical performance and then showed a short video that showcased parent involvement in Henry County Schools. The Assistant Superintendent of Henry County Schools then came to the podium to thank the Parent Engagement Program and welcomed everyone at the meeting. He stated that in Henry County they truly view parent involvement as a partnership and constantly strive to strengthen it. He stated that they believe that every school is different and a result of each unique community. In the past, Henry County attempted to standardize the experience for students, now they believe that it is more important to focus on their individual needs and strengths. He shared that they use to measure parent involvement by how many parents showed up, but have since realized that just because a parent does not come to school does not mean they aren't involved. They shifted their focus to keeping those parents involved and also involving the community. He wrapped up by stating that parent involvement is part of the district's vision of what a school should look like and expressed his excitement to share Henry County's ideas today.

Sandra Moore, Federal Programs Coordinator, then introduced herself and stated that Henry County has 19 Title I schools - all of which has a parent professional. She then introduced Communications and Community Relations Coordinator, J.D. Hardin, who began the "Uncharted Waters" presentation, which would discuss navigating parents through the new Georgia Milestones testing system. He stated that their journey began with the yearly CRCT which parents, teachers, and students became complacent sailing easily through waters. They then encountered rough seas when they started traveling on the uncharted waters of Georgia Milestones. They stated their mission is to inform and empower parents to confidently support their child in preparing for the Georgia Milestones Assessment and they began to plan math and literacy workshops.

In order to successfully navigate the course they knew they needed all hands on deck to build parent involvement. He stated that the following individuals are crucial:

- Principal
- Instructional Staff
    - Math and Literacy Coaches/Lead Teachers
    - Teachers from all grade levels
- Curriculum Coordinators
- Testing Coordinators (school or district level)
- Students
- Parents!!!!

He stated that they knew before setting sail, it would be important to chart the course. Each school used their Annual Title I Meeting to stress the importance of parental support as well as provided a overview of their upcoming workshops so that parents could make plans to attend.

To prepare for the journey they started at the beginning of the year and throughout the year, workshops focused on ways that parents could support their child in Math and Literacy by modeling Common Core strategies. Parents who were once frustrated with the "new math" left with a sense of empowerment to support their child at home. District and state support provided websites and Math and Literacy Coordinators to work tirelessly with schools to ensure that parents had all of the tools that they needed. Title I Schools collaborated with district level Title I Math and Literacy Instructional Lead Teachers as well the District's Testing Coordinator to offer parent workshops on Georgia Milestones.

He then focused on how they supported parents as they transitioned to the Georgia Milestones Assessment. They provided parents with the following:

- Testing Schedule
- Norm Reverenced/Criterion Reverenced questions
- Format of the questions that are on the assessment: Selected Response, Constructed Response, Extended Response
- Georgia DOE Question and Answer Guide for parents http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/Georgia-Milestones-Assessment-System.aspx
- Online Testing Experience http://learnoas.ctb.com/GA/

J.D. stated that parents are educators' best allies if they understand what is going on. To help parents support they children in math Henry County has hosted:

- Family Game Nights
- Math in their World (math in grocery store etc.)
- NumberTalks (helped to battle number fluency issues)

To support parents in literacy they have hosted:

- Websites and Apps
- Games
- Everyday Activities
- And encouraged parents to READ!

Sandra Moore returned to the podium and concluded by stating that their goal was to ease parents' fears regarding the Georgia Milestones and due to their planning and teamwork, they have succeeded in educating and involving parents in the process. She thanked the Parent Engagement team and all of the PICs for attending the meeting.

Nate thanked Henry County and dismissed the group for a short break.

IV. Break

V. Gearing Up Your School and Families for a Successful Transition

Nate welcomed everyone back and dove into the *Gearing Up Your School and Families for a Successful Transition* portion of presentation. He began by stating that transition and family engagement are the perfect marriage. He stated that the first thing that pops into a person's mind when they think of school transition are one-time events (open house, etc.), however it is more of a process. He defined school transition as: a **process** - not an event - that prepares all partners - **students, families, schools and communities** - to develop knowledge, skills, and relationships that help students move from one educational setting to another.

One event is not going to adequately prepare students; school transition must involve parents, school personnel, and community partners. He told the PICs to keep that in mind throughout the presentation.

Nate stated that school transition is important because:

- Helps students form a realistic expectation of school
- Provides a positive and successful first impression
- Relieves anxieties for students and families
- Paves the way for a successful school experience
- Bridges the gap between school, teachers and new families
- Provides multi-faceted guidance and support structures
- Demonstrates an inviting, supportive, and safe environment
- Builds a sense of community by supporting meaningful relationships and learning
- Supports school-initiated family and community partnerships

Furthermore, successful school transition alleviates anxiety, helps families, and paves a way for successful school experience. He stated that students that are successful in high school have most likely had a successful transition experience, and educators need to make sure to provide all additional support and services. School transition is also an opportunity for a sense of community; families should be made aware of programs that are available to them. He also mentioned that families who participate in a transition program are more likely to continue to be involved throughout the student's academic career. Nate stressed to the PICs to keep that in mind when looking to strengthen their family engagement programs in their schools or districts.

He then moved onto discussing how exactly school transition is a part of family engagement, stating that is has the following in common:

- Welcoming Environments
- Building Relations
- Communicating Information
- Address New Roles
- Developing Community Partnerships

He also mentioned that as students transition to new grades and new schools (most notably high school), parents need to understand their new roles and how they can continue to be involved.

Nate illustrated what successful school transition programs look like:

- Begin in the school year before students move to the new school
- Ongoing, specially designed programs offer greater support for sustained intervention

- Involve parents and community members in the planning process
- Align with key student milestones throughout the school year

He advised the PICs to consider key milestones (testing, registration, etc.) and provide families with information beforehand to ensure that students are prepared. Additionally, look at key dates on calendar and schedule transition events around that. He then listed things to keep in mind when implementing a school transition program:

- Organize a School Transition Team
- Promote collaboration between feeder schools (ES – MS – HS)
- Involve parents and families in the transition process
- Increase awareness of academic programs
- Increase comfort and reduce anxiety through orientation activities
- Provide resources designed to make transition easier
- Design activities for the first weeks of school
- Continue the use of counseling teams or advisors to maintain support throughout the year
- Develop special interventions for families and students who may need additional support

To better illustrate this, he shared a few real life ideas that a select Georgia schools have implemented. He first discussed Ware County High School, which he remarked had very intentional school wide transition initiatives. One event was a Back to School BBQ, which all of the dads brought their grills to the BBQ's for the whole school. The school provided the food and the event was a huge success that set the stage for the school year by getting the whole community involved. This school also hosted school transition initiative called Report Card Conferences, which required every student to have a conversation with an adult community member outside of the school – someone who genuinely cares and has an idea of what it takes to be successful. Another school that is succeeding in providing successful school transition programs is Midway Elementary School, who attributes their success to the various events they do in the beginning of the year. Midway has events such as Kindergarten Roundup and Kindergarten Camp that provides information to parents. They also established a parent-to-parent mentorship program called 'Mentor Me', which serves as a great peer support system and had been helpful with their transient population. Lastly, Nate discussed Ruth Hill Elementary School's innovative and effective transition efforts. One such effort was the school principal driving school staff around the local neighborhood in a school bus and showing them where all the school's families live. He stated that this really opened the eyes of the faculty and the parents and helped to change both of their negative perceptions. Additionally, this school also hosts Welcome Days where parents are able to come into the school to observe a whole day.

Nate then reminded the PICs of the various school transition resources that are available here: http://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Pages/School-Transition.aspx. PICs can order supplies as well as discover the school transition videos. He encouraged the group to continue to use these resources, and announced that the high school transition brochures and video will be released in the very near future. He wrapped up this portion of the presentation by sharing the Job Aid Timeline to help the PICs understand how they can best implement school transition in their job. The group then broke for lunch.

V. Working Lunch

PICs shared best practices and discussed various student and family transition tactics. They also received a sneak peak at the "*High School is Happening!"* school transition video.

VI. Lost Art of Conversation: Engaging Families in Important Topics

After lunch Nate returned to the podium and began the *Lost Art of Conversation: Engaging Families in Important Topics* portion of the meeting. He asked the group why it is important to get parent feedback. To which a few attendees answered:

- To find out what is important to them.
- Are we meeting their needs?
- Are our methods effective?

Nate agreed with the suggestions and stated that not only is parent feedback required by law, but it is also a job evaluation tool. Parent feedback provides a way for parents to invest and get involved and get involved in their child's education and if you listen to parent feedback, they will be more likely to participate. Nate also stressed to the group that even if only one or two parents provide input, sometimes that can be all that you need. To illustrate this point, he showed a video that showcased the power of teamwork and the power of one.

He stated that in Title I there are many opportunities for parents to provide feedback and be involved in the decision making process; with over ten different roles described in the law. Nate urged them to be intentional of how they gather input.

Nate then briefly went over a few reasons why parent input matters:

- Parents work more closely with their children than other adults can
- Parents provide critical input that only they can bring; They know their child better than anyone else
- Involved parents not only help their own child, but all children in a school
- Parents are the only adults in the educational process who have been and will continue to be deeply involved throughout the child's school career
- While parents may not be educators themselves, they bring their years of experience in other professions and aspects of life to the process

He then brought up the task of how educators can go about getting parent input, breaking it down to two components: inform and consult.

To inform the parent educators must simplify and personalize your message. Things to help achieve this:

- Frame information to parents - hook them with a problem in which they are the answer
- Select an issue of relevancy and urgency to parents
- Explain why parents are needed, what their role is and what is in it for them

To consult with parents, educators must mobilize and actualize. Things to help achieve this:

- Seek parent reaction, input and review – listen and discuss

- Utilize conventional and unconventional methods to reach parents
- Seek strategies that engage parents in meaningful, interactive discussion that matters

He urged the group to think outside of the box when considering ways to collect parent input. When planning and marketing parent input events, he also strongly suggested considering the following:

- Time of meeting
- Place of meeting
- Advance notice of meeting
- Marketing of meeting
- Structure of meeting
- Advertisement of meeting
- Childcare, transportation or food at meeting
- Type of meeting

He also reminded the PICs that there is nothing wrong with embedding parent input opportunities with other events, such as sporting events or school concerts. He then advised them to avoid being the only one talking; it is important for parents to be able to voice their opinions. He also warned them against information overload, taking up too much time, talking down to parents, and simply showing them a document to approve without getting genuine feedback.

To demonstrate an effective parent meeting, Nate showed the group a video which highlighted a Parent Input Meeting in Cave Spring Elementary School in Floyd County that successfully engaged parents and allowed for authentic parent input. Nate stated that there were some great ideas shared, the parents asked challenging questions, there was a lot of healthy discussion amongst the parents and educators.

Nate suggested presenting the information in a family-friendly context and urged them to do the following at their next parent input meeting:

- Share information in a family-friendly context
- Present data to ignite a sense of urgency
- Use words and graphics, try graphic recording
- Split sections up, only focusing on big picture ideas that matter
- Provide guiding handouts as well as engage group discussion
- Ask targeted questions, moving from broad to more specific

He stated that one way to acquire parent input is through the Parent Café model. The Parent Café model was adopted by the World Café model, which was unexpectedly created by professors as they waited for a meeting inside a café. While waiting, they talked in rotating small groups and soon realized that they learned much more with this activity than in a standard meeting. They soon perfected it and it is now known as the world café model.

Nate suggested that PICs apply this logic to parent meetings and outlined the steps of the Parent Café model:

1. Clarify the purpose – let them know why you are doing parent café.

2. Create a hospitable space
3. Explore questions that matter – though provoking questions that lead to conversation
4. Encourage everyone's contribution
5. Make collective knowledge visible
6. Listen for important themes and share discoveries. What are your take-away points
7. Record ideas – share your outcome, what are your next steps?

He stated that while doing this activity, there were a few things to keep in mind:

- Small groups at café tables.
- Set up progressive rounds of conversation
- Encourage members to draw, doodle, and write ideas.
- Use Table Hosts to welcome guests, briefly share main ideas, link and connect main ideas from prior conversations.

He then went over steps to include before getting started:

Getting Parents on Board

- Consider beginning with a short session
- Find champions to help publicize
- Use all avenues to spread the word

Invitations

- Personal invitations are more effective
- Have parents bring a friend
- Determine best time for parents

Emphasize the Benefits

- Help parents create networks
- Provide a space for parents to share
- Build knowledge and social capital

Nate informed the group that the Café Host was the most important person, with their responsibilities including:

- Work with planning team to determine purpose
- Name your Café
- Create a comfortable café environment
- Welcome the participants
- Explain the Café guidelines and Café etiquette

The Café Host is also responsible for making the space hospitable, explaining the purpose of the cafe, and facilitating the meeting. Additionally, each table has a host who should have a good grasp on the purpose

and procedures of the Parent Café model. He stressed that table hosts should be friendly and good listeners. Their responsibilities include:

- Remind people at table to jot down key connections, ideas and discoveries
- Remain at the table when others leave and welcome travelers from other tables
- Briefly share key insights from the prior conversation so others can link and build on key ideas

Nate then introduced the PIC Café and explained the rules. Each table was color-coded and participants had three different colors on their folders. He instructed that the table hosts will remain at their table while the other members are to stand up and move to a different table each round based on the color on their folders. During each round, he encouraged guests to record their thoughts and conversations on sticky notes and poster paper. At the end of the third round, guests return to their original table to collect their ideas and identify common themes based on the conversations that they had. Each table records their answers to the final questions.

The group actively engaged in the Parent Café with high remarks for this activity. Nate expressed his hopes that this exercise gave them an idea of how the café model works and that the PICs will actively employ it to continue to gain parent feedback. Nate then transitioned in the next portion of the meeting.

VII. Are We Too Schoolcentric? Dissecting the Parental Involvement Language

Nate began by stating that in the law we know that compacts and the like should be written in language that parents can understand, which is often referred to as family-friendly. To take it to the next level, it is helpful to really analyze power of the words we use - whether verbal or written. He shared that in college he was instructed on the importance of framing questions. His professors advised not to start a question with 'why' because that tends to automatically make people feel defensive; it is a better option to start a question with 'how'. He mentioned that in customer service you do not want to start your reply with the word no; rather offer suggestions of possible alternatives. He then shared a video called the power of words that further illustrated this message.

Nate shared with the group that Georgia is seen as leading the charge for family engagement. Recently having the opportunity to attend the National Title I Conference, Nate informed the group that Georgia was chosen to participate in a family engagement panel discussion. He applauded the PICs on their efforts and told them that these accomplishments are really a testament to PICs in the district and school levels. Although educators have been making progress with family engagement, he pointed out that it was not always like this, and shifted gears to take a look back at its evolution.

The Seed

Parent engagement was once just a small seed, which recognized that the parent is involved in the child's life.

The Seedling

It began to grow and soon research found that when parents are involved students' test scores and attendance improve. Once discovering this information, educators still did not know how to turn that data into practice.

The Sprout

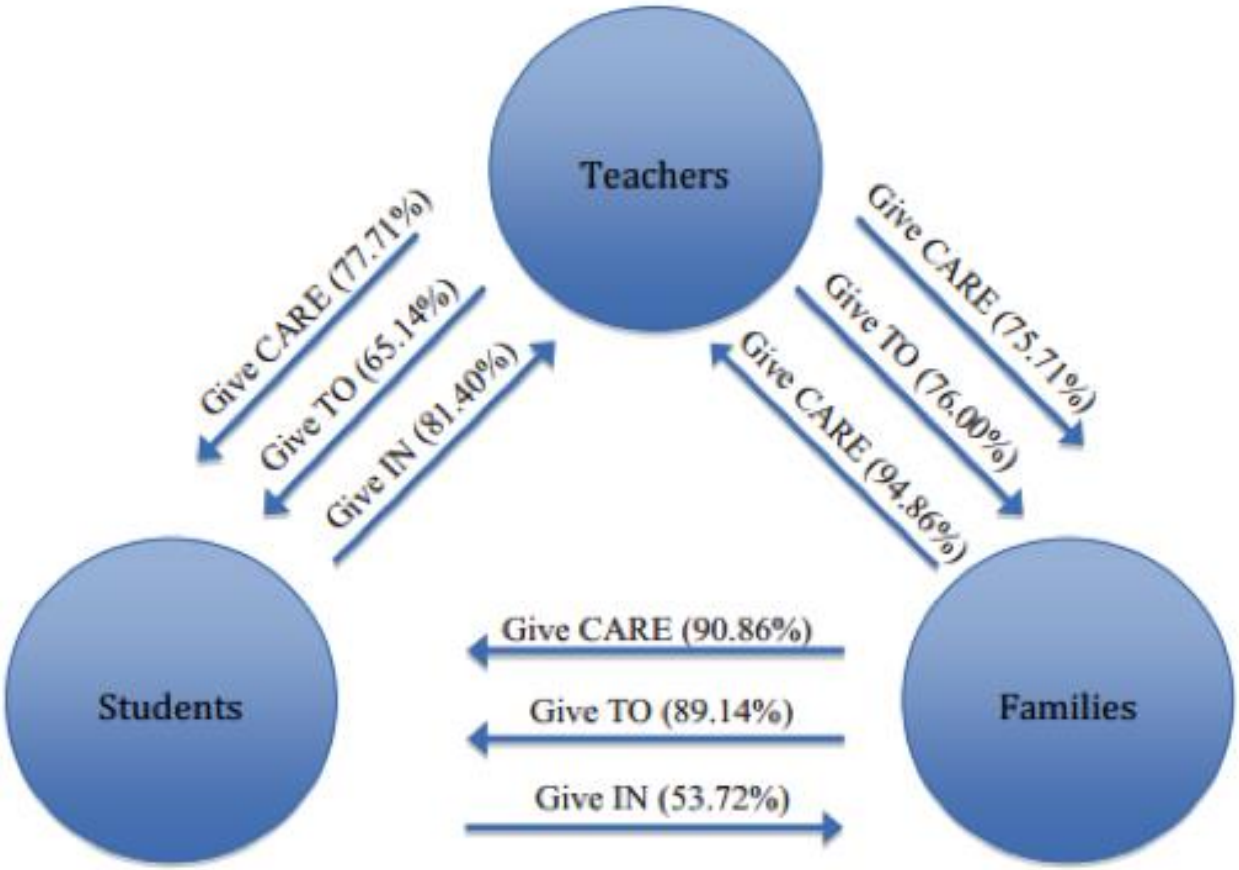
Eventually models were developed, but educators really weren't doing it together and systemically.

The Bloom

Where educators are now - family school partnerships. Emphasizing the bidirectional relationship between families and schools to enhance student outcomes.

He stated that while family engagement has grown, parent engagement professionals are still using the same language that was used years ago before we started emphasizing the importance of partnerships. He then defines family-school partnerships as approaches that are focused on the child where families and educators cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance opportunities and successes for children and adolescents.

A recent study on parent school compacts was conducted to look at the role that parents, students, and schools play. This study examined actual school-parent compacts to better understand how the language in these documents contributes to the framing of family, school, and community partnerships as well as potential implications for the support of authentic family engagement activities. They coded the contacts and determined the compacts reflected the following roles for parents, teachers, and students. Illustrated by the following graphic:



This image indicates that the relationships between actors in the compacts are primarily transactional in nature, and there is little discussion of partnership work. It also shows that students are primarily cast as objects in school–family compacts with little agency in their own education. The study found that most compacts are focused on the school. Instead of all partnerships being equal this model indicated that the school was on a higher level than the parents. He stated that consequences of this model include:

- Teachers see families as obstacles that must be overcome instead of partners with the capacity to help improve the quality of education for all students
- The inherent funds of knowledge that each family can offer to create authentic partnerships remain untapped resources in most schools

To address this problem, he urged the PICs to come back full circle to the seed - families.

One aspect of the family school partnerships are the four C's: capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence. He then explained the four C's as:

Capabilities: Human Capital, Skills and Knowledge – staff need to be knowledgeable about the assets and funds of knowledge available in the communities where they work. They need skills in the realms of cultural competency and building trusting relationships. Families need access to knowledge about student learning and the workings of the school system. They need skills in advocacy and educational support.

Connections: Important Relationships and Networks — Social Capital - Staff and families need access to social capital through strong, cross-cultural networks built on trust and respect. These networks should include family–teacher relationships, parent–parent relationships, and connections with community agencies and services.

Cognition: a person's assumptions, beliefs, and worldview - Staff need to be committed to working as partners with families and must believe in the value of such partnerships for improving student learning. Families need to view themselves as partners in their children's education, and must construct their roles in their children's learning to include the multiple roles described in the Framework.

Confidence: Individual Level of Self–Efficacy - Staff and families need a sense of comfort and self-efficacy related to engaging in partnership activities and working across lines of cultural difference.

Nate then directed the group to the Group Activity Parent Engagement Teaching Case handout located in their folders. He stated it is a story from the Harvard Family Research Project told through the perspective of a parent, teacher, student and administrator. He instructs the PICs to read this story and share perspectives. The parent engagement professionals worked in groups, before Nate brought them back together and stated that this story illustrates how communication affects partnerships. As they go back to their schools, he urged them to consider utilizing this case study to think about ways to spark conversation with staff and administrators. He also reminded them to constantly consider whether they are the building partnerships they want to achieve with parents.

VIII. Closing

Participants were asked to complete their evaluations and Conference Organizing Committee forms and submit them in the appropriate box. Participants were also informed that the minutes and material presented would be available within a few weeks electronically on the Parent Engagement Program website, and certificates were handed out. Nathan Schult thanked everyone for attending and certificates were distributed to all in attendance.

IX. Optional Parental Involvement Compliance Review

Participants were invited to bring questions pertaining specifically to parent involvement compliance regulations and/or documentation. One-on-one technical assistance was provided to those with questions or if they wished to have select documents reviewed.