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

PIC Spring Regional Meeting Minutes – Region 5

April 3, 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 Gwinnett County's presentation.

III. Learning from Each Other: Gwinnett County Schools

Nate introduced Cile Tanner, Gwinnett County Title I Coordinator who began her presentation by stating how honored Gwinnett County is to host this meeting and have been immensely looking forward to collaborating with other parent engagement professionals. Before diving into what they do, she talked a little bit about who they are gave the group a glimpse of what Title I looks like in Gwinnett County:

- SY 2014-2015: Our Schools
    - 56 Title I Schools (Schoolwide Programs)
        - 8 HS
        - 10 MS
        - 38 ES
    - 1 Targeted Assistance School
    - 57 Parent *Instructional* Coordinators
    - 75,774 students served

They have one Title I Director, three Title I Coordinators, and seven Program Specialists who support the PICs in the schools. She then asked everyone to stand and be recognized. Cile then introduced Lori Tucker to elaborate on how the district lends support to schools for parent engagement. Lori began by stating that every school is provided a district level program specialist who is on call to assist the schools whenever they are requested. They provide monthly professional development for the PICs and believe in providing concierge level service. She then showed a short presentation of pictures featuring students and families actively engaged in Gwinnett County School at parent engagement events.

Lori stated that Gwinnett County School's motto is 'connect and engage'. Their goal has been to engage parents in meaningful events and they want to make sure that when parents come in to the schools they are walking away with some sort of skill that can be used to benefit their child's education. She concluded by stating that to accomplish this, they know that it is important for parents to work on strategies at home with their students.

Cile then returned to the podium to talk about Gwinnett's journey in partnering with parents. Their charge is connect, engage, and build parent and staff capacity. Before discussing various parent engagement strategies she stated that she would take them back to the start of their journey. She showed the group the U.S. Department of Education's Dual Capacity Building Framework and stated that they have really been using it as a compass to build their parent engagement, and stated that it has given them guidance on how they can enhance parent engagement strategies. The dual capacity framework clearly states what conditions have to be in place in order for parent engagement to be successful. As schools develop goals for a parent program they need to fit within the four C's (capabilities, connections, cognition, confidence). The framework underscores the need to move away from feel good parent involvement to that results based.

She stated that her team found it to be a daunting task, so they boiled it down to its most simplified terms.

- Who? Families and all school staff.
- When? The time is now!
- Why? We need "all hands on deck" to support student achievement. We can't afford to miss an opportunity to form these valuable partnerships

Cile stated that they conducted a needs assessment, then examined their events and asked what they could do to make them better. After careful analysis, they knew they needed to improve in the area of dual capacity. She stated that it cannot just be about parents, and it is very important to build up your staff capacity as well. They now have ongoing staff meetings for parent engagement.

She then stated that they know that connecting parents and school in a true partnership drives up student success. But they needed to take a closer look at how they can make it happen which they found out was to focus on high impact strategies, such as Academic Parent Teacher Partnerships (APTT). Cile stated that APTT employs all of the impact strategies and shared that one of Gwinnett County's school is an APTT school. APTT is rooted in teachers training parents on skills they can use to help their children at home. She explained that there are three elements of APTT that they have decided to adopt in Gwinnett County to increase student achievement:

- Icebreaker
- I Do, We Do, You Do
- Staff Training

She then introduced Megan Roedl to elaborate on these high impact strategies. Megan began by expounding on icebreakers and explaining why they are essential. Icebreakers are a key component in building a community of teamwork between parents and staff. Stating that when you have relationships, the work gets done. She suggested doing a quick Google search to find icebreakers; get parents to talk about something they are passionate about such as their children.

She then elaborates on the 'I Do, We Do, You Do' and stated that educators cannot expect parents to know how to help their child unless we teach them the strategies. She explained this tactic with the following chart:

	Teacher	Student
I do it *Direct Instruction*	▪ Provides direct instruction ▪ Establishes goals and purpose ▪ Models ▪ Think aloud	▪ Actively listens ▪ Takes notes ▪ Asks for clarification
We do it *Guided Instruction*	▪ Interactive instruction ▪ Works with students ▪ Checks, prompts, clues ▪ Provides additional modeling ▪ Meets with needs-based groups	▪ Asks and responds to questions ▪ Works with teacher and classmates ▪ Completes process alongside others
You do it independently *Independent Practice*	▪ Provides feedback ▪ Evaluates ▪ Determines level of understanding	▪ Works alone ▪ Relies on notes, activities, classroom learning to complete assignment ▪ Takes full responsibility for outcome
You do it together *Collaborative Learning*	▪ Moves among groups ▪ Clarifies confusion ▪ Provides support	▪ Works with classmates, shares outcome ▪ Collaborates on authentic task ▪ Consolidates learning ▪ Completes process in small group ▪ Looks to peers for clarification

She stated that because of this model, parents are able to implement skills with fidelity. However, she noted that not every teacher is at the level of comfortable doing this and advised that they need to make sure to allow for professional development and training with teachers. She stated how proud she was of the Parent Involvement Coordinators in Gwinnett County. By hosting school wide events, workshops, observations and putting the "I Do, We Do, You Do" into action, they have really empowered parents.

She then shared a few examples of a few Gwinnett County schools putting these high impact strategies into action. At Alford Elementary School a PIC took "I Do, We Do, You Do" and ran with it. This school took a traditional literacy night event that was very passive and implemented this model, which enabled parents to practice reading comprehension skills as teachers taught it to them. She then shared how another school, Magill Elementary, was implementing these strategies by holding math workshops where math teachers and parent instructors were teaching parents how to use manipulatives. She stated that these workshops were powerful because it it gives the parents the opportunity to learn the same way their students were learning. She shared one last example at from Benefield Elementary School. This school's PIC implemented a program where students struggling with a skill are brought into the lab classroom and their parents are invited to attend an observation of the PIC re-teaching the skill. The PIC also teaches parents how to use games and activities at home to reinforce learning. During this time parents are able to work with their child directly and can practice what they learned before they leave the observation lab.

Megan then discussed the importance of staff training. She stated that we know we have to build parent capacity, however we also have to build staff capacity in order to make them true collaborators with parents. She urged the group to conduct multiple trainings and come up with innovative ideas.

When they started planning their staff training, they realized they needed to focus on two things: effective communication and working with parents as partners.

- Effective Communication
    - Webinars
    - Princess LEIA
    - PIC newsletters to teachers
- Working with Parents as Partners
    - Sharing data - setting goals
    - Teaching parents strategies, games and activities to use at home

Aside from what they have learned from APTT, she shared other high impact strategies that they have been employing with success.

- Ongoing entry transition: Kindergarten and 1st Grade Series
- Parent Center Brochure advertises resources and materials
- FLP class parent observations on designated days

In conclusion she left the group with a few last tips. She stated that one thing they have learned is that school compacts are a living and breathing document and they need to be used throughout the school year. She happily reported that Gwinnett County PICs are revisiting compacts at events and meetings all throughout the year and are constantly reminding parents of the agreement that

they made at the beginning of the year. She also noted that often educators bombard parents with flyers and she encouraged the PICs to send out personal notes, emails and phone calls because it can make a big difference. Lastly, she mentioned Gwinnett County School's Parent Leadership Academy that develops a network of parents as leaders. They are structured so that parents are there to learn specific things at specific times.

Cile returned to the podium to wrap up the presentation. She stated that she hoped everyone is able to come away with someone.

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 explains 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 Lets discuss how this can effect our day to day lives.

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.