


“Educating Georgia’s Future”

PARENT ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2015

“FREE DIGITAL BOOKS AVAILABLE TO INSPIRE SUMMER READING AND FUN”



As students approach the end of the school year and the upcoming summer break, I encourage you to make summer reading a priority – and find ways to have fun while doing so. We know that when students continue reading during the summer, they avoid the potential “summer slide” in their reading skills. As children’s first and most important teachers, families play a major role in keeping reading fun and motivating children to read during the summer months.

Summer is a time when children can read what they please, when and where they please. You can help your child find new items to read by visiting the library and making sure you have plenty

of reading material available, whether it be books, newspapers, magazines or informational material to spark the interest of a young reader. Books that teach kids how to make or do something are a great way to get them reading and keep them occupied.

To help parents support their child’s summer reading, the Georgia Department of Education has partnered with the Get Georgia Reading Campaign to provide access to digital books over the summer. The campaign’s purpose is to ensure that all children in Georgia learn to read proficiently by the end of third grade so they can read to learn throughout school and life. In order to ensure that families

have access to books over the summer, the Get Georgia Reading Campaign has partnered with myON reader to provide every child in Georgia with FREE access to a library of more than 8,000 enhanced digital books. The digital book format brings the stories to life and provides audio support that creates a magical experience for children of all ages. You can learn more about this partnership at the following link:

<http://tinyurl.com/pqfxpd6>

Summer leaves extra time for children and families to enjoy fun activities, and it is my hope that all Georgia’s children grow up knowing the magic of a book!

-MR. RICHARD WOODS, GEORGIA’S SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN THE FIELD: STORIES OF SUCCESS

“Involvement Matters”

Parent involvement matters - from the fresh-faced Kindergarten student who walks nervously to his classroom or to the senior who has worked hard for years, with the help of his family, to make it one step closer to achieving his dreams. Beginning the day your child is born, involvement matters.

I have found that when working with families, simple incentives make a difference. By giving parents something to work toward, they are generally more motivated to participate in a variety of involvement opportunities around the school. My school, Cumming Elementary, created a successful parent engagement program based on this idea. With the charge, ‘Involvement Matters,’ parents are encouraged to play a positive role in their child’s education in a variety of ways. Some ideas of the ways parents can be involved include chaperoning field trips, volunteering at the school to assist teachers in the classroom or by attending academic events held at the school. Our school also invites parents to visit the Parent Resource Center where they are able to

check out educational materials to use at home with their students. If parents are unable to make it during the school day due to work schedules, they can fill out a request form and materials will be sent home with their student. Engaging with your child at home through educational books or games is a great way to be involved in your child’s education without necessarily having to be at the school to do so. Regardless of the manner in which each family chooses to be involved, we provide red paper tokens to parents each time they are engaged with their student. When ten red tokens are earned, the parent trades them in for a special t-shirt for the student. The students are also eager for their parents to be involved so that a red token will be earned. Receiving a t-shirt is always a reason to celebrate!

It’s not the tangible prize, though, that is most important. The time spent building connections within the school community and with their children is the biggest reward of all. The more often parents are engaged, then the more

committed they are to the school and to the teachers. A successful partnership is established when families feel welcome and comfortable within the school, and it is with this joint effort that academic progress is seen among all children. I encourage all parents to explore the opportunities for involvement available at their child’s school. It will be an investment of your time that always results in great gains.

*-by Katy Gunter
Parent Involvement Coordinator
Cumming Elementary, Forsyth County*

For more blog posts, videos, and engaging discussions visit the Georgia PIC Network blog at: gadoeparentengagement.edublogs.org

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School Climate:

Why it matters

Did you know that your child's comfort level at school and feelings of safety can actually shape their learning and development? These aspects of school life along with the relationships that students form with peers and teachers work together to form a school's climate. The National School Climate Center defines school climate as the quality and character of school life. According to research, The National Center reports that schools with positive climates statistically have higher test scores and graduation rates than schools with negative school climates where students may feel unsafe or part of a hostile environment.

In response to this profound research, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) created the School Climate Star Rating. The School Climate Star Rating is a diagnostic tool to determine if a school is on the right path to school improvement based upon the school's climate. "Students cannot learn in environments that do not support them," Superintendent Woods said. "Georgia is committed to measuring the quality of its learning climates from preschool all the way through 12th grade."

Georgia is the first state in the nation to include school climate as an early indicator within its College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI). The CCRPI is an academic accountability

system that communicates to stakeholders how a school is doing with regard to preparing Georgia students for college and career readiness. The School Climate Star Rating does not affect a school's CCRPI score, but serves as an additional informational tool for schools, administrators and parents.

The School Climate Star Rating utilizes a star rating scale, with 5 stars representing an excellent school climate and one star representing a school climate most in need of improvement. A school's final rating is determined by using a multitude of data. Data is collected from the Georgia Student Health Survey, Georgia School Personnel Survey, Georgia Parent Survey, student discipline records from each school, and attendance records for students, teachers, staff and administrators. All information that is collected from these sources is compiled into four components that are reported as the School Climate Star Rating. These four components are: School Climate, Student Discipline, Safe and Substance-Free Learning Environment and Attendance.

The 2014-2015 School Climate Star Rating for each public school in Georgia is located on the GaDOE website at:

<http://tinyurl.com/q9lghtx>

Please take time to review your child's School Climate Star Rating as this is an important tool that can help you to better understand the impact of school culture on student achievement. The GaDOE encourages parents to be part of school improvement efforts by partnering with teachers and principals to build a strong family-friendly school climate. These efforts are a direct way for parents to be engaged in creating a school climate that promotes high student achievement and happiness.

Georgia School Climate Star Rating



Through the Looking Glass:

STEM, Achievement, Students and Beyond

Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education is based on the idea of educating students in these fields using an integrated approach where learning becomes meaningful through real-world applications. In a STEM school, student learning and achievement undergoes a transformation from the ordinary to the extraordinary, as students enter and engage in a world of their own imagination. Under the lens of STEM, 21st century learning is combined with content and practice, as schools seek new ways to prepare students to thrive in a new world. STEM education shifts from teaching students to remember and recall isolated facts and skills to having students experience learning as evolving young scientists, engineers, and mathematicians. By providing a hands-on, student-centered curriculum interwoven throughout the STEM fields, learning becomes a powerful and more meaningful way to capture and keep students' attention. STEM activities can take the form of many subjects, such as learning how geometric shapes can be applied in bridge building, making the pages of the book, *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss, come alive by developing real world solutions to pollution and extending the principles of magnets by designing and building a MAGLEV train that will take students to new field trip destinations.

Activities such as these are the essence of STEM and encourage students to become active creators of their education, rather than passive learners. The STEM curriculum integrates rigorous content that captures the curiosity of students while establishing a foundation for their success at the next level, whether that level is middle school, secondary education, college, or a career. As a STEM teacher,



I expect every one of my students to want to learn and even more importantly to understand. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experiences." I look at my students with the firm belief that I can support them as they explore a multitude of possibilities that their lives have to offer. I frequently find myself crafting STEM instruction that will not only awaken the minds of my students, but also inspire their passions. Providing students with a solid foundation in STEM education is just one way that I can inspire my students to eagerly seek new experiences and show them that achieving their goals and dreams is clearly within their educational reach. STEM education can kindle a flame of curiosity that will propel them into new and exciting worlds that they have yet to imagine.

*-by Dr. Judy Wright
K-5 STEM and Aquaponics Lab Specialist
Canton Elementary STEM Academy
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STEM Resources

Parents, check out these great resources to help you and your student learn more about STEM education.



STEM Georgia website:
<http://stemgeorgia.org/>

Girls and STEM:
<http://tinyurl.com/nqk6dtp>

Brain POP: educational videos to help explain STEM concepts
<https://www.brainpop.com/>

Searchable database for STEM Education and Careers:
<http://www.stemconnector.org/>

Free quality K-12 STEM resources:
<http://sciencenetlinks.com/>

The 2015 Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School Award Winners!

CAMPBELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Fulton County Schools

CENTERVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Houston County Schools

CHESTATEE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Forsyth County Schools

HARRIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Gwinnett County Schools

WARE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL
Ware County Schools

Five Georgia schools were selected as 2015 winners of the Georgia Department of Education's Family-Friendly Partnership School Award. The winners were selected because they represent the best in customer service for Georgia families, whether it's on the phone, in the front office or online. The schools have welcoming staff members, comfortable waiting areas, clear signage, and engaging student work throughout the building.

They have easy-to-navigate websites and are forging partnerships with parents to help improve student achievement. The schools also provide unique, engaging, and innovative parent engagement programming that is successful in reaching all families in the school. "The schools that won this award are truly models

for the entire state regarding parent engagement," said Georgia's School Superintendent Richard Woods. "They open the door for other schools to see the positive results that can be achieved when families are seen as true partners in their child's education. I offer my congratulations and thanks to all of the winners and finalists."



To read the award booklet and learn more information about the winning schools, please visit: <http://tinyurl.com/lpuxkqk>

MAY 18 - JUNE 18, 2015

National Smile Month

Build on the theme of this month by asking students to take a picture of themselves with their biggest and brightest smile, then write about one event they experienced during the school year that made them smile.

JUNE 5, 2015

World Environment Day

This day is used by the United Nations to stimulate worldwide awareness of environmental issues and encourages preventative action to keep our environment clean and sustainable.

Save the Dates

JUNE 14, 2015

Flag Day

This is a day of patriotism, so parents can take the opportunity to hang or display their native flag on their lawns with their children and discuss with them what patriotism means



JULY 1, 2015

International Joke Day

This day gives parents and children an opportunity to share laughter together by telling their favorite jokes.

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Vision Statement

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

Have a Question?

AskDOE

404-656-2800 ❖ askdoe@doe.k12.ga.us

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www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/AskDOE/Pages/Parents.aspx

www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Pages/Parent-Engagement-Program.aspx

