

# Building Parent Leadership

Today's Parent Leaders



A Manual for Parent Leadership Month created by the  
Georgia Department of Education

## INTRODUCTION

The month of February has been declared Parent Leadership Month and every year various events and activities that recognize, respect, and celebrate parents for their leadership in their homes, communities, and schools take place across Georgia. Parent Leadership Month is designed to highlight the various opportunities afforded to parents, professionals, policymakers, and community members to engage in partnerships with the goal of building and supporting strong and lasting roles for parents as leaders in the school environment.

This manual was created to assist you and your parent leaders in organizing, planning, and implementing events, activities, and outreach programs to promote parent leadership in your school and community. We are happy to provide you with a framework and tools to help guide your efforts with the hope that you will be able to utilize some or all of the information at your school.



The Table of Contents provides detailed bullets for the events and activities provided throughout the manual. In addition, please visit the Georgia Department of Education Parent Engagement Program website where you will find an abundance of information, resources, and ideas for more family engagement events and activities. We want to also recognize and show our appreciation for all involved parents, family-friendly schools, Parent Involvement Coordinators, Parent Mentors, and Special Education for helping the Georgia Department of Education continually promote parents in the important role they play in our schools. Working together provides an invaluable opportunity to achieve positive outcomes.



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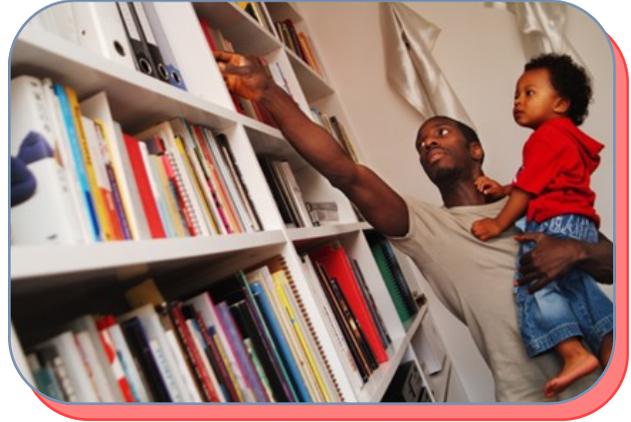
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## PARENT LEADERSHIP

Below are some strategies that you can use to discuss parent leadership with parents, staff, and community members. These resources can be used to create handouts, flyers, and/or brochures to describe Parent Leadership Month.

### What is parent leadership?

Meaningful parent leadership in schools occurs when parents gain the knowledge and skills to function in meaningful leadership roles and represent the "parent voice" to help shape the direction of their schools' programs and student achievement outcomes. Parent leadership is successfully achieved when parents and professionals "Build Effective Partnerships" and share "Responsibility", "Expertise," and "Leadership" in decisions being made that affect student success, families, and communities. The parents involved in these collaborations are called **parent leaders**.



### Who are parent leaders?

A Parent Leader...

- May be a parent, grandparent, relative, guardian, foster parent, or anyone else who may be in a parenting role
- Has experience or knowledge about using resources and/or services to strengthen his or her family
- Speaks and acts from his or her perspective as a parent



# PARENT LEADERSHIP

## How can I identify and train parent leaders?

There are several reasons parents may want to become leaders in your school. It could be that they want to help other parents overcome challenges similar to their own and are eager to volunteer, or they just want to "give back" to their school or community.

Below are some of the signs that a parent may be ready for a leadership role in your school.

Look for parents who:

1. Participate in conferences, workshops, and meetings regularly
2. Participate in your school's needs assessments
3. Acknowledge and respect your school's policy and procedures
4. Advocate for and encourage other parents
5. Participate in focus groups
6. Are members of your school's Title I planning team
7. Continue to take action when he/she receives feedback
8. Recognize the need for growth and change
9. Participate on the School Advisory Committee
10. Have a sense of commitment
11. Are strong and confident
12. A role model for other parents
13. Participate in quality improvement and evaluation activities
14. Assist with grant writing
15. Are spokespersons for your school and/or district



In addition, it is important to establish a process that includes all parents, especially those who may be apprehensive or shy. Leadership doesn't come easily to all; therefore, some parents may need to be groomed or mentored to become parent leaders.

## PARENT LEADERSHIP

Develop and implement the role of your **parent leaders** by empowering them with the skills and knowledge they need to become more actively engaged in the educational lives of their children. In turn, they can also become role models and mentors for other parents. This can be accomplished through:

1. Providing access to training/book studies
2. Creating opportunities to contribute to academic program development, implementation, oversight and evaluation as well as policymaking, training and technical assistance, public awareness, and outreach
3. Providing support such as assistance with child care and transportation
4. Promoting leadership opportunities to work with staff and professionals in organizations that address key issues related to the parent leader's area of interest and commitment
5. Providing concrete leadership roles (start small)

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### When do parents become parent leaders?

Parents are more likely to become parent leaders when they...

- Feel accepted, encouraged, and supported by other parents and professionals
- Are recognized for their successes and contributions
- Receive positive feedback and reinforcement
- See other parents like themselves taking on leadership roles



## PARENT LEADERS = STRONG ADVOCATES



**Parent leaders** are strong advocates for themselves, their children and other families in their community. Many times in schools, **parent leaders** support the ideas of other parents, faculty, staff, and community members, or help to seek clarification on issues and concerns.

The following questions will help you identify if your efforts encourage parent leaders to become strong advocates.

1. Do you support parent involvement by empowering parents with the skills and knowledge they need to become more actively engaged in the educational lives of their children?
2. Do you encourage and promote student achievement by supporting and developing parental skills that increase social and academic student performance?
3. Do you provide leadership opportunities for ALL parents, especially to the underrepresented, and seek to change parent attitudes toward becoming involved in their child's school and educational career?
4. Do you communicate, collaborate, leverage resources, and dedicate your actions to the business of improving schools?
5. Do you create opportunities for parents to become informed, organized, and work actively as a parent advocate for ALL children?
6. Do you gain the knowledge and tools to respond, guide, and support, the increasing needs of your counties diverse and special needs families?
7. Do you create community awareness regarding the various barriers (language, disabilities, environment, income, etc.) affecting students and student achievement?
8. Do you advocate for continuing education and/or ongoing training, so parents and educators can be full partners, informed decision-makers, and effective advocates for children?

Answering "yes" to any of these questions, means that your parents are leaders and strong advocates for education.

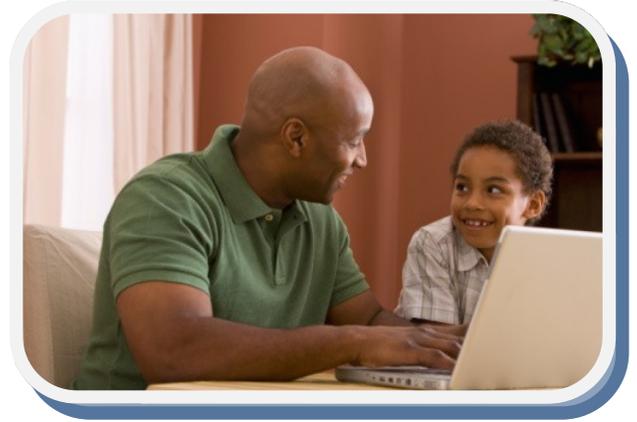
## PARENT LEADERS = STRONG ADVOCATES

### Benefits of parent leadership

Often schools limit the parent role, viewing parents as "them" and the school as "us". This way of thinking needs to be changed to create the role of "partners". By accepting the value parents offer as full partners in their child's education you are allowing them to take ownership in their child's learning.

Active participation in policy development, budgetary decisions, parent, student, and community advocacy, focus groups, and decision making build knowledge and skills, increase a sense of personal achievement, open doors for employment, offer a leadership role model for other families, and provide a model of community involvement and empowerment for the parent's children and family.

Parent leadership is a strengths-based approach to family support founded on the belief that parents are most knowledgeable about their families and communities. They can provide valuable insight into programs and community efforts that will benefit all children and families. Parent leadership begins when schools support the development of leadership skills in parents and promote active participation in the school's programs, projects, policy, budgeting, and continuous quality improvement activities.



Parent leadership is meaningful when parents and staff throughout the school work together as equal partners to:

- Make decisions about the school's policies, programs, and practices that affect students, families, and community, and
- Share responsibility, expertise, accountability, and leadership

# PARENT LEADERSHIP MONTH

## Purpose of parent leadership

Parent Leadership Month was created to honor and celebrate the role of the parent leader. Parent leadership is an essential and effective way to strengthen student achievement.

## Promoting parent leadership

February is designated as Parent Leadership Month in our schools. During this time, we honor and recognize parents for their leadership roles in their schools and communities at the local, state, and national levels.

Parent leadership is a vital family strengthening agent and strategy where...

1. All parents have the potential to become parent leaders.
2. Parent leadership strengthens families and promotes children to be successful on multiple levels and creates positive change in the systems that serve and support children and families.
3. The experience of having influence on issues of personal importance helps parents who take on leadership roles expand their strengths and their ability to develop and implement plans to reach specific goals.
4. Often, parents who take on leadership roles in their homes, communities, and other settings become more confident and assertive, transferring their leadership skills to other areas of their lives, such as advocating for their child's education.
5. Parents who are parent leaders are modeling positive, productive behaviors for their families, and this can have a positive impact on all family members, as well as generate increased respect for the parent leader in his or her own family.
6. Often, children of parent leaders begin to take on leadership roles appropriate for their age group, based on their parent's modeling and ability to provide increased guidance about these new behaviors.
7. Health, education, social service and any other systems that affect children and families will achieve more positive results, utilize resources more effectively and expand their ability to create change when they partner with parent leaders to plan, implement, oversee, and evaluate their services.



## PARENT LEADERSHIP MONTH

The following suggestions are designed to assist you with promoting Parent Leadership Month in your school and community. Use this opportunity to work closely with your parent leaders, faculty, staff, media, public officials, and community.

- Publicize Parent Leadership Month and planned activities on/in your school's website, newsletters, and other publications.
  - Disseminate information about Parent Leadership Month through newspapers, apartment and community bulletin boards, churches, community organizations, and businesses.
  - Promote opportunities where parent leaders can participate and/or serve in meaningful parent leadership activities at the school such as: School Advisory Council and Title I Planning Team.
  - Spread the word to business and community members about the benefits of partnering with your school's parent leaders through such means as: 1) creating more visibility and referrals; 2) advocating for specific needs or services; and 3) participating in new or expanded collaborations among community partners to maximize effective use of resources.
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### Roles for Parent Leaders

Some parents may not see themselves as leaders; therefore, you may need to encourage them to take on a leadership role. Below are suggestions you can use when trying to determine the role of a parent leader within a program:

Ask a parent to volunteer taking on a specific role that is compatible with what you know about his/her individual experiences, expertise, or skills.

- Take calls and/or talk with parents when they come to the school.
- Introduce new families at meetings, workshops, and/or classes.
- Provide new families with information about the school and academic programs.
- Take responsibility for setting up a conference room, meeting place, or event.
- Meet and greet parents who come to meetings, workshops, classes, or events.
- Start a group activity with icebreakers or other "get acquainted" activities.
- End a group activity by summarizing what happened or setting dates or times for the next meeting, class, workshop, and/or event.
- Take attendance or notes/minutes.
- Share responsibility for student programs.

## PARENT LEADERSHIP MONTH

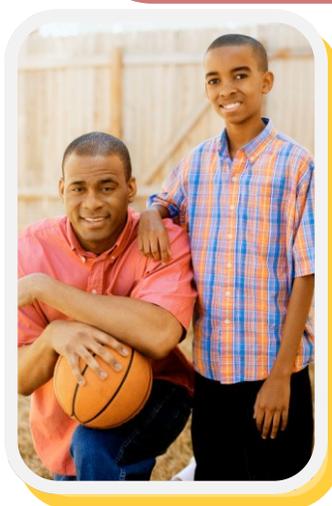
- Assist with drafting, reviewing, and providing input for development of parental materials.
- Contribute to the design of new programs, classes, workshops, focus groups, etc.
- Take part in training parent leaders and volunteers.
- Participate in outreach to families within the school.
- Mentor and become advocates for other families and students.
- Act as members of academic task forces and advisory councils.
- Participate in school committees and teams.
- Ask parents to talk to and elect other parents for leadership roles.

### Tips from a Parent Leader

*If parents are to feel valued and respected, the culture of the organization must allow their ideas to be seriously considered.*

*Without this, they will know parent leadership is not a genuine opportunity for them and they will lose interest. It can sometimes seem like parents come up with "off the wall" ideas, or in strengths-based language, they think "out of the box." Everyone's careful consideration of new and fresh ideas creates a positive flow of energy and may lead to changes in an original idea that satisfy everyone. The atmosphere of the conversation must be supportive for all members of the partnership.*

*Meaningful Parent Leadership: A Guide for Success*



## BUILDING PARENT CAPACITY

Within the school, parent leaders represent the needs and perspectives of other parents and community members without speaking or acting as a faculty or staff member. Parents become leaders when they actively participate in developing and implementing programs or services that are designed to help them in their parenting roles. Typically, parent leaders draw from their own experiences when they were in school or from their children's experiences and couple it with their desire to "give back". They serve as a "parent voice" to help shape the direction of support for other parents and families. Parent leaders may consist of biological parents, stepparents, grandparents, foster or adoptive parents, community members, or others who are in primary care-giving roles for children.

Building lasting and successful partnerships takes time and is based on effective communication and trust. The strategies below will help keep parents involved and committed to sharing school leadership with you:

1. Provide childcare, transportation, translated materials, and interpreters for meetings, workshops, classes, or other activities.
2. Encourage and/or engage more than one or two parents on a committee, task force, school council, so that parents have immediate access to other parents for support during their involvement.
3. Be clear and honest in your commitment to parents, making sure those commitments are in writing and are upheld over time.
4. Avoid overloading parents with more assignments, tasks, and/or responsibilities than they can handle.
5. Hold initial orientation and ongoing training on the leadership program's mission, vision, and goals.
6. Use strategies and techniques that engage parent leaders in the process of expanding a meaningful and authentic partnership with your school.
7. Hold meetings at a convenient time for all parents. This may require you to hold the same class, workshop, or meeting more than once. Or meet at times other than typical school hours.
8. Ask parents if they have e-mail access and how often they check it. If parents do not check e-mail daily, make a phone call to let them know about upcoming meetings, focus groups, etc. Also, let them know you will be sending the agenda with handouts via e-mail, mail, or they can come by and pick the items up.
9. Be available prior to the upcoming meeting or event for questions, suggestions, and comments.

## BUILDING PARENT CAPACITY

10. Reassure your parent leaders that their voice counts and they are being heard by documenting their input.
11. Use terminology that is common and understandable for parents. Avoid using acronyms, short cuts, and phrases that may only be familiar to your school staff.
12. When parents stress they are angry or unhappy with a program, meeting, system, school, etc., do not take it personally. Parents should be able to trust you enough to express their concerns. Take this as an opportunity to correct a misconception about the situation, or to reflect on the program or activity's effectiveness.
13. Meet with parent leaders in groups or one-on-one to get their opinion and feedback on the effectiveness of academic support programs and activities. Pay attention to feedback and use it to improve performance.
14. Be sensitive to and accommodating to your parents' unique communication and learning styles/abilities at all times.
15. Be cognizant of your leader parent's confidentiality. They may not want others to know their personal story.
16. It is important that you know and are aware of what is going on in your parent leaders' lives. This will affect their ability to participate at your school. Allow your parent leaders the space and time to work through their issues. Offer resources as you would with any other parent or employee. Encourage your parent leaders to remember that everyone faces challenges, even you. A major key to maintaining a relationship with parent leaders is by developing a relationship built on mutual respect and trust. Let parents know that you value them as partners in your school operations.
17. Help faculty and staff understand the importance of understanding, embracing, and implementing the principals of parent leadership.

### TRAINING FOR PARENT LEADERSHIP

Training is imperative to the success and development of parent leaders. It is critical to obtain and retain parent leaders in your school. Parent leadership training should be aligned with your parents' learning styles, knowledge, strengths, and the stage and level of their involvement. Both formal and informal training needs to be provided at a place and time that makes it easy for parents to participate.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF PARENT LEADERS

It is important for schools to recognize the contributions parent leaders make to decisions about program planning, implementation, and evaluation activities. There are many formal and informal methods that can be used to recognize these contributions:



- Give parent leaders an opportunity to speak at a school meeting.
- Listen carefully and restate to ensure understanding. Many times the faculty and staff hear what they want to hear, not what the parent is actually saying.
- Follow up on what the parent leader says. Voice support for a promising suggestion and engage in discussions for alternative solutions. Explain why an idea will or will not work.
- Maintain an open mind. In order for a parent to feel valued, the faculty and staff must allow their ideas to be considered. Everyone's consideration of new and fresh ideas creates a positive flow of energy and may lead to changes in an original idea that meet the needs of everyone. Keep a supportive atmosphere.
- Invite your parent leaders to workshops, classes, meetings, conferences, and other educational opportunities in order to stay updated and learn new things.
- Educate parent leaders about community resources that support student achievement; this will help develop their leadership even if they do not use the information immediately.
- Establish leadership roles that parent leaders can progress towards and move into. As your parent leaders grow they should have opportunities to speak publicly, present at conferences, serve on committees or task forces, participate in staff development, and plan special events.
- Encourage parent leaders to "tell their story". A parent's passion has a powerful effect and many minds have been changed after listening to a parent presentation. However, before the parent presents ensure he/she is trained to speak publicly by providing opportunities for the parent to practice in front of a friendly audience.
- Evaluate your parent leaders by using positive feedback and constructive criticism.
- Plan an event to recognize your parent leaders. If your school recognizes volunteers who contribute their time at your school, include a special recognition for your parent leaders.
- Recognize and include the families of your parent leaders.
- Recognize the contributions of your parents often. If an idea is originated by a parent or group of parents, ensure that the parents get the credit and share the results. Parents need to learn from the successes and failures of their contributions. This empowers the parents and encourages a long-term commitment to your school.

# PARENT LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

## Parent Leadership Strategies Sheet



To encourage family-school-community partnerships, PTA has developed the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. These standards can also be used to develop parent leadership, higher teacher morale, and greater student success. The attached handout provides strategies that promote parent leadership based on each standard. The two forms should be copied front and back, then cut into six individual pieces. These cards will remind parents how they can become leaders by practicing certain behaviors that will define and refine their leadership abilities.

## Parent Leadership Development Guides for Parents and Administrators

**FOR PARENTS**

**What is a Parent Leader?**

A parent leader is defined as one who is able to provide support to parents, students, teachers and constituents in their community with the objective of obtaining positive outcomes for everyone. They also encourage other parents to take on leadership roles in education. This individual passionately represents the needs and perspectives of all parents, improves the direction of their families, and acquires the knowledge and skills needed to have a meaningful voice without being in a staff role at the school. Parent leaders become role models for parent engagement, advocating not only on behalf of their own children, but for other families as well.

**How Can I Become a Parent Leader?**

**FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS**

**How Can I Build and Sustain Parent Leaders?**

Developing parent leaders is a progressive process. Each academic year schools experience a new influx of parents who are at different stages of involvement, awareness, and acceptance of responsibility. As a parent becomes empowered and accumulates the skills to make positive changes, he or she will emerge as a parent leader, taking on leadership roles within the school and community. Utilizing parent leaders effectively will greatly contribute to the overall success and progress of your school and its mission.

**What Steps Can I Take to Develop Parent Leaders in My School Community?**

The Georgia Department of Education, Parent Engagement Program, developed a parent leadership guide for parents and administrators to provide parents with steps to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to have a meaningful voice in their child's education. The guide also assists administrators with developing parent leaders in a progressive process to greatly contribute to the overall success of the school and its mission. The two forms can be copied front and back for distribution and a limited number of hard copies are also available by request.

**Parent**

Welcoming  
**All**  
Families  
Standard 1

**Leadership**

Communicating  
**Effectively**  
Standard 2

**Strategies**

Supporting  
**Student**  
Success  
Standard 3

Speaking Up  
for  
**Every**  
Child  
Standard 4

Sharing  
**POWER**  
Standard 5

Collaborating  
with  
**Community**  
Standard 6



### *Supporting Student Success —*

Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

- Make sure your child goes to school prepared to learn everyday
- Work with the school to establish and monitor career and academic achievement goals with your child
- Learn about the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards and student tests

### *Collaborating with Community —*

Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

- Seek community partners who are able to serve on school committees
- Develop community partnership activities that link to learning
- Help host community forums that enable parents and other community partners to learn about school initiatives and develop a shared vision for student success

### *Communicating Effectively —*

Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.

- Respond to communications sent home from the school
- Sign up and interact with teachers using the parent portal
- Ask questions when unclear about topics such as homework assignments and standardized testing
- Facilitate connections and conversations among educators and families

### *Sharing Power —*

Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.

- Attend school board meetings, which are open to the public
- Learn how your child's school system operates
- Participate in Title I parent meetings and provide input on parent activities that can help increase student achievement

### *Welcoming All Families —*

Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

- Regularly participate in school events
- Make your presence known by visiting your child's classroom and school often
- Personally introduce yourself to teachers and staff
- Inform teachers and the school leadership team about your talents, skills and abilities

### *Speaking Up for Every Child —*

Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

- Learn about areas where your school needs to improve and then mentor students in the subjects areas you are comfortable teaching
- Advocate for Title I academic programs that will benefit all children
- Empower other parents to become leaders in their child's education

# FOR PARENTS

## What is a Parent Leader?

A parent leader is defined as one who is able to provide support to parents, students, teachers and constituents in their community with the objective of obtaining positive outcomes for everyone. They also encourage other parents to take on leadership roles in education. This individual passionately represents the needs and perspectives of all parents, improves the direction of their families, and acquires the knowledge and skills needed to have a meaningful voice without being in a staff role at the school. Parent leaders become role models for parent engagement, advocating not only on behalf of their own children, but for other families as well.

## How Can I Become a Parent Leader?

- 1 Provide support and leadership through active engagement in your child's education.
- 2 Work collaboratively with your school's principal, teachers and parent liaison to learn about all aspects of the school's structure and share this information with other parents.
- 3 Remember T.E.A.M. — Together Everyone Achieves More. Continue to support your child's learning at home by working with their teacher's to help them develop good homework and study habits.
- 4 Ask questions and "speak out" to have a powerful voice in the decision-making that directly impacts every component of your child's education.
- 5 Help create opportunities for community members and stakeholders to support school efforts through meaningful collaboration related to curriculum and school improvement.
- 6 Talk with your child's teacher and school principal to learn about opportunities to get involved in your school's advisory councils as a method to make your talents, skills, and availability to assist known.
- 7 Work with other parents at your school to develop a plan of action for engaging all parents with the goal of helping your school's administrator improve learning for all children.



*Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent*  
*"Making Education Work for All Georgians"*

# FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

## How Can I Build and Sustain Parent Leaders?

Developing parent leaders is a progressive process. Each academic year schools experience a new influx of parents who are at different stages of involvement, awareness, and acceptance of responsibility. As a parent becomes empowered and accumulates the skills to make positive changes, he or she will emerge as a parent leader, taking on leadership roles within the school and community. Utilizing parent leaders effectively will greatly contribute to the overall success and progress of your school and its mission.

## What Steps Can I Take to Develop Parent Leaders In My School Community?

- 1 Develop a structure or system that is designed to educate parents in your school about the function of the school board, school and district policies, test score interpretation, and parental rights and responsibilities related to education.
- 2 Offer quality parent engagement opportunities for parents to acquire the tools they need to effectively implement parent engagement strategies at home and at your school.
- 3 Ask parents at the beginning of the school year about their interests to allow adequate time for those interests to be developed and utilized throughout the school year.
- 4 Include parents in the school's mission writing process and highlight the important role they play in the school-family-community partnership alongside the faculty and staff.
- 5 Set a goal to engage in meaningful conversation with the parents at your school and ask for their input on the decisions that directly impact school improvement and student achievement.
- 6 Reinforce confidence in your parents and their ability to be credible and worthy educational stakeholders, capable of acting on behalf of all students.
- 7 Make sure parents feel welcomed and cultivate a school community of trust, where both teachers and parents believe that each one has the other's best interest in mind as they both strive to make positive changes within the school and community.



*Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent*  
*"Making Education Work for All Georgians"*



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