



# Parent Engagement Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 4, Summer 2011

“Successfully Engaging Georgia’s Parents”

## “A New Vision Soaring for Georgia’s Students!”



**Dr. John D. Barge,  
State School Superintendent**

When I took the oath a few months ago to serve as Georgia’s State School Superintendent, I knew my mission was simple: to help Georgia’s students be successful in the classroom. This work has begun, and I am excited about the opportunities that lie ahead.

My vision of *Making Education Work for All Georgians* is focused on providing greater opportunities for Georgia’s students, to graduate with a meaningful diploma that will open doors to their futures, whether in the workplace or post-secondary studies. Parents play a large role in the success of this vision.

Under my administration, the Georgia Department of Education will be a service- oriented organization that provides information, technical assistance, guidance, and other critical forms of support to parents, schools, and school districts. My

focus is on doing what is best for our children and I know it is yours, too. When parents are engaged, students have the ability to overcome various challenges and are inspired to stay in school, resulting in productive young adults prepared for their chosen career or post-secondary endeavors.

Together, if we focus on doing what is best for our children and prepare them to soar beyond our expectations, I am convinced that our state will reap the benefits for years to come.

Sincerely,

Dr. John D. Barge,  
State School Superintendent

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## Highlights: Parent Engagement Program

The mission of the Georgia Department of Education’s Parent Engagement Program is to increase student achievement by engaging and empowering parents to become actively involved in their children’s education across all grade levels.

While your local school and community is the best place to obtain information first, we are excited to inform you about the following events that recently took place to recognize the important role parents play in their children’s education:

•The Kindergarten Transition Toolkit is now available for parents and educators to download from the Parent Engagement website. This toolkit provides parents with all of the information needed to help their child successfully

transition into Kindergarten. Both, parents and educators are encouraged to utilize this information over the summer.

• Georgia’s First Statewide Family Engagement Conference will be held at The Classic Center in Athens, GA, from February 16-18, 2012. This is a new opportunity being launched through a collaborative partnership between the Georgia Department of Education and Georgia PTA for parents and educators, particularly those in Title I schools. The conference theme is: *“Building Connections: Striving for Excellence, Empowerment, and Equity in Education.”* More information on this conference will be forthcoming in the months ahead.

• The Superintendent’s Parent Advisory Council conducted their final meeting for SY 2010 -2011 on May 4, 2011. For detailed information about this council or to review the meeting minutes, please visit the website listed below.

•Check out the “Get Involved!” brochure that lists 15 different ways parents and families can get involved in their children’s education. The brochure is not age specific, so all parents can utilize this resource.

To obtain copies of the brochure or to locate copies of any of the information mentioned above, contact the Parent Engagement Program at 404-656-2633 or visit our website at:

[http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss\\_title.aspx?PageReq=ParentEngagement](http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_title.aspx?PageReq=ParentEngagement)



“Making Education Work for All Georgians.”

## “Obese Children Need Healthier Options” by April Reese Sorrow

### Summer Reminders...



Is your child due for an eye exam? After the age of five, children should have their eyes examined at least once every two years even if there are no signs of vision problems. It would be great to make an appointment this summer.



### The Importance of Dental Health

Routine dental check-ups are important to a child's overall health. It is recommended that children visit the dentist at least twice a year or every six months. Take advantage of the extra time you may have this summer and schedule an appointment!

In the last three decades, the number of obese American adults has more than doubled. The number of children with the condition has more than tripled.

According to official federal numbers, two-thirds of American adults are either overweight or obese. One in every three children is.

More than 30 percent of Georgia's children are overweight, making it the third worst state in the nation for childhood weight, according to a 2009 report by Trust for America's Health.

A University of Georgia expert says children's growth cycles are changing and are setting the stage for long-term obesity. "Children are born with a fair amount of body fat, but as they become more active they slim down around age 2. It is normal for a child to regain some of that body fat again around age 6, but we are seeing it earlier now, around age 4, which increases risk for excessive weight gain as the child grows up," said Connie Crawley, a nutrition specialist with UGA Cooperative Extension.

Increased food intake, a sedentary lifestyle and environmental conditions that encourage unhealthy choices contribute to the obesity epidemic. Cheap fast food, large portion sizes and access to salty and high-fat processed foods foster overeating or unhealthy eating, she said.

The best way to combat the epidemic is with changes to eating habits or lifestyle choices, which isn't easy, she said. But it can be done with some slow but deliberate strategies.

"The original fast food is fruit," Crawley said. "Apples, oranges and bananas are always a good buy all year round." Families can also save money, she said, by

purchasing in-season fruits, like peaches in the summer or pears in the fall and winter.

Crawley says to avoid soft drinks and highly processed foods. These are mainly sources of sugar, fat and calories with few healthy nutrients when compared to unprocessed foods. "If wheat flour or sugar is the first ingredient listed, find something else to eat," she said. "Put it down if there are three or four different types of sugar on the label, some you can't even pronounce." A complete overhaul of the pantry doesn't have to happen overnight. "Make an effort to change one product at a time," she said. "Decide to look for one better alternative for your family every week. In just a short time, you will see a lot of positive change."

Don't announce the intent to change the family's diet, she said. Simply introduce new foods as something fun to try. Family members can be slow to adapt to change. Often children need to be exposed to a new food 10 times before they will accept it. "Usually a child will accept a new food better if it is served with familiar foods and if it is offered in small amounts and not forced," she said. "Be patient, and keep offering."

Kid-friendly power foods, she said, are those with low fat, a lot of color, good fiber and require little prep work. Good choices are blueberries, raw broccoli with low-fat dip, whole wheat bread with natural peanut butter, sliced oranges, salmon, tuna or steamed edamame (green soy beans).

Crawley recommends the following tips:

- Offer old-fashion or quick-cook oatmeal without added salt. Avoid pre-packaged instant



oatmeal. To sweeten, add honey or brown sugar and cinnamon. Another nice addition is chopped pecans or walnuts, diced raw banana or sliced apples cooked for a minute or two in the microwave.

- Toss greens, like fresh or frozen kale or spinach, into an omelet. Or, sauté in oil for a few minutes.
- Cut creamy salad dressings with plain, non-fat yogurt, which has less fat and more protein and calcium.
- Offer avocado dip, hummus, salsa or low-sodium ketchup as dipping sauces for raw vegetables.

Weight control for children and teens depends on being physically active for at least an hour each day. Exercise as a family. Set aside time to be active together. Children enjoy taking walks or bike rides with their parents. They can improve their coordination with back-yard games of kick ball, soccer, hide-and-seek, volleyball, jump rope, or badminton. "Everyone will be more fit and benefit from the stress reduction and relaxation daily exercise can provide," Crawley said. "When you eat better, you feel better and so do your children."

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(April R. Sorrow is a news editor with the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.)

## Stopping Child Abuse & Neglect Starts with Strong Families

Across the country, early care and education programs, child welfare departments, and others are using the Strengthening Families approach to build five Protective Factors in families:

1. Parental Resilience
  - ▶ Parents Can Bounce Back
2. Social Connections
  - ▶ Parents Have Friends
3. Knowledge of Parenting and of Child Development
  - ▶ Parents Know How Children and Youth Grown and Learn
4. Concrete Support in Time of Need
  - ▶ Parents Know Where to Turn for Help
5. Social-Emotional Competence of Children
  - ▶ Children Learn to Talk About and Handle Their Feelings

Research shows that these factors reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect by providing parents with what

they need to parent effectively, even under stress. By building relationships with families, programs can recognize signs of stress and build families' Protective Factors with timely, effective help. This breakthrough strategy for dealing with child neglect and abuse shows great promise because:

- ▶ The Protective Factors have been demonstrated to work and are informed by extensive, rigorous research.
- ▶ Activities that build the Protective Factors can be built into programs that already exist in every state, such as early childhood education and child welfare, at little cost.
- ▶ Strengthening Families has widespread support from social science researchers, state child welfare officials, early childhood practitioners, and policy experts. Currently, the Strengthening Families approach is being applied in 36 states.

- ▶ Early childhood educators want to strengthen families: a National Association for the Education of Young Children survey shows that 97% want to do more to prevent maltreatment.

Although Strengthening Families was developed in early care and education programs, partners in a large variety of settings working with many different populations are exploring ways to apply the approach.

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### PARENTS, DID YOU KNOW...

You can increase the number of words your child is able to retain by associating pictures with words.



### Summer Gardening Fun for Children!



Teaching your child how to garden can be fun because children are more likely to enjoy the food they eat and the flowers that they grow if they played a role in creating them.

Plants and produce children can learn to plant are:

- Strawberries
- Watermelon
- Tomatoes
- Green peppers
- Tulips
- Sunflowers

## Summer Readiness for Parents!

As the summer approaches, it is normal to start planning for summer activities to keep children busy socially and academically.

When it comes to academics, many children struggle with remembering what they learned over the school year. When this happens, the progress teachers are able to make at the beginning of the new school year is hindered with lots of review. Help your child stay up to date this summer by encouraging a healthy mix of academics and play!

In addition, while summer vacation is a relaxed time filled with leisure and fun activities, childcare can become a concern. It is essential to

start planning early as summer programs fill up quickly.

To help alleviate stress and get your child excited about this summer, consider doing the following:

- ⇒ Ask your school's Counselor or Parent Involvement Coordinator about the availability of summer programs in your area.
- ⇒ Sign up for free summer enrichment programs at least two weeks before the deadline. This will increase the chances of your child getting in.
- ⇒ Sign up for sport camps and other extracurricular activities before the end of the school year.
- ⇒ Acquire additional work for the next grade level from your child's teacher.
- ⇒ Take your child to the local library to check out books each week and keep them excited about reading.
- ⇒ Set aside at least one full day each week to spend time with your child and engage in an activity they want to do.
- ⇒ Make pre-arrangements for childcare during the days that you have to work if you are unable to register your child for a summer program.
- ⇒ Enjoy your summer vacation!



**Remember to block off these important dates!**

**Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month**  
May 2011

**National Bike to Work Week**  
May 16-20, 2011

**World Environment Day**  
June 6, 2011

**National Culinary Arts Month**  
July 2011

**Independence Day**  
July 4, 2011

**International Picnic Day**  
July 18, 2011

**National Cheesecake Day**  
July 30, 2011

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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.

### Calling All Parents!

Have an idea to contribute to the newsletter? Send your parent involvement ideas and articles to us through your **Parent Involvement Coordinator** or e-mail us directly. If your idea or article is published, your name will appear in the newsletter!

### Have a Question?

**AskDOE**  
404-656-2800  
askdoe@doe.k12.ga.us

### **We're on the Web!**

[www.gadoe.org/parents.aspx](http://www.gadoe.org/parents.aspx)  
[http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss\\_title.aspx?PageReq=ParentEngagement](http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_title.aspx?PageReq=ParentEngagement)

## Middle and High School Parent Engagement



**Teens pretend that they don't want their parents to be involved at school, but they really care when their parents are not engaged.**

Teachers and administrators often wonder why parent engagement declines at the middle and high school levels. Most parents want to be engaged but are not able to for various reasons.

- Some of these include:
- ⇒ Developmental changes
  - ⇒ School structure reconfiguration
  - ⇒ Expectation changes
  - ⇒ Feeling incapable of helping their children once they reach this grade level.

It is important to remember that at these levels, parent engagement still contributes to student success, positive behavior and attitudes during the teenage years. Although teenagers often express that they want to be more

independent, they still care about their parents being there to support them. Children are going to make education as important as their parents make it. Ultimately, parents set the tone for their child's educational advancement.

Families can start early by having a consistent emphasis on post-secondary planning to ensure that they are supportive and able to help their teen set obtainable goals. These goals could include helping them prepare for college or career after high school. It is important to get involved from day one of the transition years, namely the first day of middle and high school. During the transition years, both children and

parents want to be reassured that the new school level is going to be a good fit academically and socially.

Family and community involvement helps adolescents succeed. By getting involved with activities that promote student improvement, support and achievement, parents can remain engaged with their teen's education during middle and high school.

