



Impacting
Education with
Family
Engagement
Strategies



GEORGIA
PARENT MENTOR
PARTNERSHIP

This second edition of the Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership Toolkit describes family engagement supports, trainings, resources and collaborative initiatives led by parents and educators who are positively impacting results for Georgia students. This Toolkit was funded by the Southeast Regional Resource Center. To learn more about starting a parent mentor program, please refer to the Parent Mentor Partnership's first Toolkit at www.parentmentors.org or www.gadoe.org (Division for Special Education).

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DEDICATED TO PHIL PICKENS, 1946–2006

Founder of the Parent Mentor Partnership, Retired Georgia State Special Education Director.

Phil inspired a true partnership between educators and parents and, above all, elevated the well-being of every child.

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INTRODUCTION: An Overview

A data-driven national model for family/school/community collaboration, the Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership encourages families of students with disabilities and/or other academic risks to be critical players in the school improvement process. The Georgia Department of Education launched this *determined* and *energetic* partnership to engage families of students with disabilities in the education process. Today, the state/local partnership boasts nearly 90 trained parent leaders partnering with local school systems in family engagement initiatives.

Together with educators and a cadre of family partners, the Parent Mentor Partnership (PMP) reaches more than 75 percent of the state's students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and thousands of other students considered at risk because of factors such as English as a Second Language, poverty and/or family social issues. The Parent Mentor Partnership is a springboard for change with the combined goals of increasing the graduation rate for students with disabilities and engaging families in the education of their own children.

The Georgia Department of Education initiated the Partnership in 2002 as a response to the national dialogue on the importance of family engagement to student learning. A synthesis of research by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp identified a positive link between family engagement and improved academic achievement. Further research by Mapp found this connection to be true across socioeconomic, racial/ethnic and educational backgrounds for students of all ages.

It is as simple and profound as this mission statement for the Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership:

“Building collaboration and communication between families and educators ultimately leads to greater success for children with disabilities.”

The Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership promotes family training and engagement as an integral strategy in almost every state performance goal in Georgia. The common denominator is to provide training, support and leadership opportunities to the parents of students being targeted for improvement.

The Parent Mentor Partnership is not just a noun but a verb, activating family engagement practices to improve achievement. Building its foundation on the



PTA's national standards for parent/family involvement, parent mentors promote effective communication, parenting, student learning, volunteering, decision-making and collaboration. In special education in particular, explains Richard Robison, Executive Director of the Federation for Children with Special Needs (FCSN), parent participation has "evolved from pioneering efforts to ensure that a child with disabilities gained access to services to making an impact on systems."

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) umbrella, Georgia serves more than 180,000 students. IDEA challenges educators to find ways to improve the achievement of these students so they will graduate with a general education diploma or be prepared for other work/

school options. The parent mentors and administrators believe that to impact these students, they must work across departments, divisions and communities to meet many needs.

Becoming a part of the Parent Mentor Partnership is an opportunity for a school system to act in the spirit—not just the letter—of the IDEA requirements for family engagement. "If a school is working on a comprehensive school-family-community partnership," explains Joyce Epstein, Director of the National Network of Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, "the work of the parent mentor would be added to the school's action plan for partnership" (www.partnershipschools.org). Parent mentors encourage a school system to promote and support family leadership, tearing down the silos to increase services and impact student achievement.

The unique aspect of the Partnership is that these parent mentors are moms and dads of children with disabilities paid to enhance family engagement in local school systems. As partners with the local special education director, their attention is focused on students with disabilities and their families; yet their job description can look different in every local school system. A parent mentor may work with individual families, work toward systemic change or both. Parent mentors are listeners, negotiators, problem solvers and creators; yet the key to their effectiveness is that they live with many of the same challenges as the families they are seeking to support and encourage.

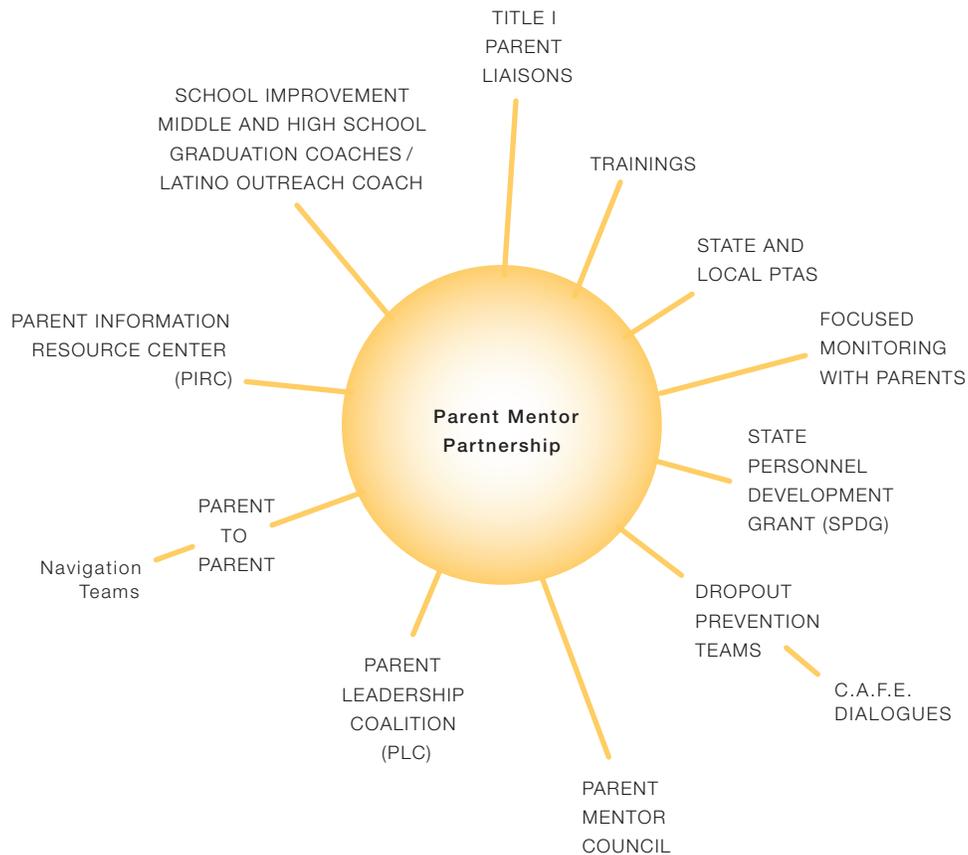


ACTION STEPS TO ENGAGE FAMILIES*

1. Recognize that all parents, regardless of income, educational level, or cultural background are involved in their children's education and want their children to do well in school.
2. Link family and community engagement efforts to student learning.
3. Create initiatives that will support families to guide their children's learning, from preschool through high school.
4. Develop the capacity of school staff to work with families.
5. Focus efforts to engage families on developing trusting and respectful relationships.
6. Embrace a philosophy of partnership and be willing to share power with families. Make sure that parents and school staff understand that the responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise.

* Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

It is amazing what teamwork can do when the child is the focus





“There isn’t a project at the Georgia Department of Education, Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports, in which families are not part of the solution.”

PATTI SOLOMON, FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST, GEORGIA DEPT. OF EDUCATION
STATE COORDINATOR OF PARENT MENTOR PARTNERSHIP SINCE ITS BEGINNING IN 2002

Mentors also sit on district advisory and continuous improvement teams, the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, the State Advisory Panel and curriculum teams. In three local school systems, parent mentors also work part-time as Title I Parent Involvement Liaisons. In another, the parent mentor assists in running a self-determination program for ninth graders and their families. Parent mentors are a powerful force for quick action, increased understanding and broad dissemination of information.

In a few short years, Georgia's Parent Mentor Partnership also became the hub of a wheel with spokes linked to dropout prevention, Title 1 initiatives, middle school improvement, high school graduation and more.

PARENT MENTORS:

- Dramatically increase the number of family contacts made each year;
- Lead numerous projects and initiatives beyond their mentoring role;
- Align family engagement activities with goals in the strategic plan and with performance indicators in the Annual Performance Report;
- Collaborate with a multitude of government agencies and non-governmental organizations;
- Play a key role in making family engagement a critical element of school improvement planning and decision-making; and
- Provide the power and ingenuity behind family engagement strategies for system change.

“Hiring a parent mentor was one of the best things we ever did. I have been an educator for 34 years and learned early on how important parents are to the process of learning. Having been a parent myself, I know firsthand how important the parent’s role is in education.”

Tom Erdmanczyk, Former Special Education Director, Clayton County Schools

2

KEEPING TRACK: Data & Accountability

The overarching theme of the PMP is to *train parents of students with disabilities*. Mentors seek or create opportunities to involve families in meeting critical federal and state student performance goals and indicators. The Partnership collects data that demonstrate the impact of family engagement on academic achievement.

“From the Parent Mentor Partnership, we learned that training parents and giving them support to lead in school improvement increases the number of successful students. We use the same strategy in everything we do.” PATTI SOLOMON, FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST
GEORGIA DEPT. OF EDUCATION

PARENT MENTORS USE THREE KEY FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES:

1. Identify, train and support family leaders among the parents of students who are being targeted for improvement.
2. Create school, family and community partnerships to address the complicated issues in and out of school that impact student achievement.
3. Embed family engagement in data-driven school initiatives across divisions and agencies.



Implementing these three family engagement strategies is making a difference in long-term academic achievement. In fact, Georgia's parent mentors connect the dots on school improvement in part by paying attention to the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships:

1. **Welcoming All Families into the School Community:** 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.
2. **Communicating Effectively:** Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.
3. **Supporting Student Success:** Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, with regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills.
4. **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.
5. **Sharing Power:** Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and work together to inform, influence and create policies, practices and programs.
6. **Collaborating with Community:** Families and school staff collaborate with community members to provide opportunities for learning, community service and social/civic participation.*

*www.pta.org/national_standards.asp

The Parent Mentor Partnership also works to implement the elements in the state's Family Engagement Strand of the Georgia Schools Performance Keys (*Unlocking Excellence through the Georgia School Standards*): "The school as a community of learning involves parents and community members as active participants... Everyone collaborates to help the school meet its continuous improvement targets and short- and long-range goals," says Kim Hartsell, Director of the Division for Special Education Supports.

Not surprisingly, the Georgia School Standards on family engagement mirror the PTA findings by calling on schools to promote parent outreach and training and to create opportunities for families and community members to feel welcomed in the school.



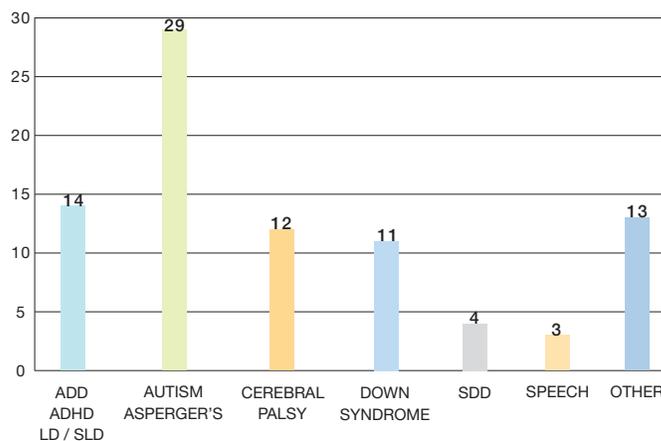
KEY FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1: IDENTIFY, TRAIN, SUPPORT PARENT/FAMILY LEADERS

Overall, the defining result of the PMP's seven-year history is the impact family leaders can have when they are the parents of students who are being targeted for improvement. The concept took root in 2002 when Phil Pickens, then Georgia's Special Education Director, asked five local school systems—Grady, Fayette, DeKalb, Fulton and Catoosa—to hire a parent of a child with a disability to mentor other parents. “You want me to do what?” recalls Kermit Gilliard, now a Grady County School System principal. He soon learned, however, that this unique employee would dramatically influence Georgia's education landscape. Gilliard recently said, “Now that I am a principal I see the need even more for trained parent leaders within the school system partnering with educators to help us reach all our families. Parent mentors play a major role in assisting, supporting and educating our families in ways we as special education directors would never be able to do.”

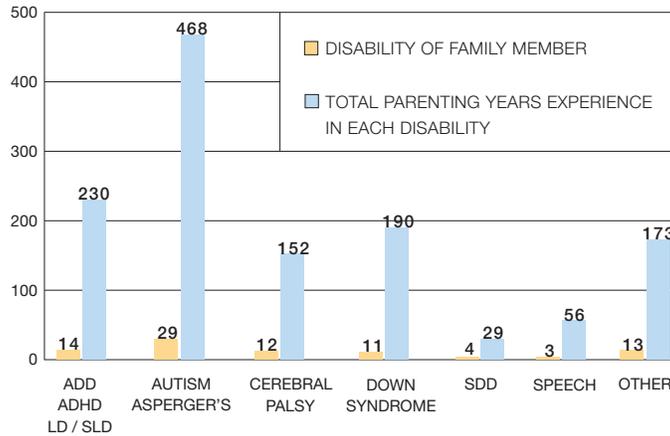
With the inauguration of the Parent Mentor Partnership pilot, Georgia cast the mold for a new kind of family leader in local school systems. Parent mentors soon showed how they could bring the firsthand knowledge and experience of parenting a child with a disability into the decision-making arena and day-to-day operations of the school system. Imagine the combined experience of 468 years of parenting in raising a child on the autism spectrum! This inside knowledge not only helps parent mentors support families but also builds understanding among educators. Whether the parent mentor is an active member of an IEP team or a coach on the sidelines encouraging parents and educators to see other points of view, these leaders are making a difference.

Disabilities Represented by Children of Parent Mentors



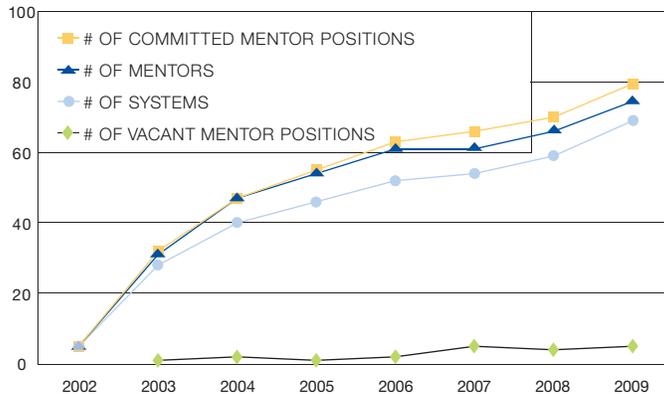
Parent mentors are required to be the parent of a child with a disability. This graph shows the types of disabilities represented by the Georgia parent mentors in 2009.

Total Parenting Years Experience in Each Disability Category

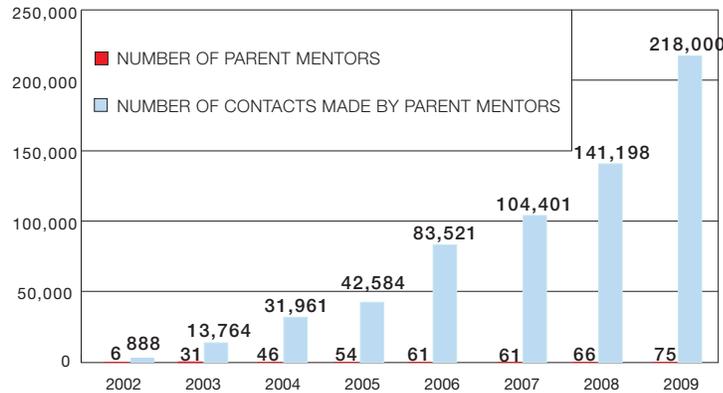


The PMP has shown steady growth since its first pilot project.

Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership System and Mentor Participation 2002–2009



Contacts Made by Parent Mentors in the Parent Mentor Partnership by Year



Each new parent mentor contact is an opportunity to listen, negotiate, solve a problem, or bring a new family to the table.

The PMP continues to grow. In the 2008–2009 school year, approximately 75 parent mentors led family engagement initiatives in school systems across Georgia, reaching more than 68 percent of the students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). In the 2009–2010 school year, 14 more local school systems joined the team.

These parent leaders are involved in family engagement in a new way. They look, act and lead differently because each comes with different experiences and backgrounds. With backgrounds from a military major, to a juvenile judge, to a stay-at-home mom who described herself as a farmer’s wife, they reflect the parents in their community. Yet they all share the realization that they need to be accountable to their school systems’ improvement efforts even as they address the needs of parents calling their offices each day. They also know that ultimately their charge to increase parent leadership and engagement needs to be instituted districtwide and even statewide. They are relentlessly dedicated to responding to data-driven initiatives with other community partners, cutting across old barriers and staying focused on the issues, in the best interests of children.

Georgia’s parent mentors are following 30 years of family engagement research and adamantly believe that when schools, families and community groups work together to support learning, children do better in school and stay in school. *Their leadership strategy is to tap into the assets of natural leaders—in rural neighborhoods and urban—and bring these leadership dynamics into the work of school improvement.*



“Recognize, respect and address families’ needs, as well as class and cultural differences. Embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared.”

HENDERSON, A., & MAPP, K. *A NEW WAVE OF EVIDENCE: THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT*. AUSTIN, TX: SOUTHWEST EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LABORATORY.

STRATEGY 2: CREATE SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The second strategy practiced by parent mentors is to create school, family and community partnerships, joining the many kinds of resources critical to solving the complicated issues in and out of school that impact student achievement. Parent mentors encourage stakeholders to share power in making decisions. More than 80 percent of mentors surveyed by the Parent Mentor Council last year said they collaborated regularly with Title I Parent Involvement Liaisons and more than half collaborated with school improvement teams. Many also took on local, regional and statewide leadership roles (see chart page 29). Family Engagement Specialist Patti Solomon and several other parent leaders organized Georgia's Parent Leadership Coalition to improve communication among state organizations. In addition, parent mentors collaborate on a day-to-day basis with Parent to Parent of Georgia (Georgia's PTI). Each of these collaborations is discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

STRATEGY 3: EMBED FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN DATA-DRIVEN SCHOOL INITIATIVES

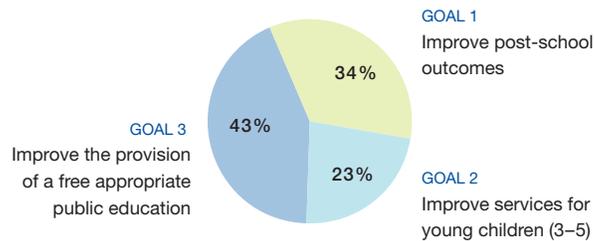
Some educators initially believed that it would be impossible for these new staff members to gather any data on their impact on the system because of the emotional nature of working with families. Some believed it wasn't necessary for parent mentors to align their activities with the school's performance goals. Eventually, the Parent Mentor Partnership learned that parent mentors need to do both—at the same time! Family engagement strategies must be embedded in data-driven school initiatives across divisions and agencies.

While the initial attempt to measure accountability used a simple form called a "Library of Activities," parent mentors soon learned to pursue specific projects and initiatives to address particular achievement goals, while gathering data that would demonstrate progress in areas that need improvement. Georgia has four Performance Goals for students with disabilities, each with several markers or indicators of progress (see Appendix B).

Mentors partner with individual school systems to target underlying indicators to achieve three of the state's four Performance Goals.

1. Improve post-school outcomes for students with disabilities.
2. Improve services for young children (ages 3 to 5) with disabilities.
3. Improve the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to students with disabilities.
4. Improve compliance with state and federal laws and regulations.

**Parent Mentors Targeted Goals in Partnering with School System
on State Performance Goals 2007–2008**



More than a third of Georgia's parent mentors focused on Goal 1 in FY08; almost a quarter partnered with their school system to improve services for young children (Goal 2); almost half focused on Goal 3.

Mentors plan activities to address a particular goal by following the family engagement standards outlined earlier and partnering with the system's administrative team to reach the goal. The planning process follows a carefully charted course of action:

Step 1: Create a vision for parent/family engagement that supports the selected goal.

Step 2: Determine the needs related to parent/family engagement to support the goal.

Step 3: Identify ways to overcome barriers.

Step 4: Identify current parent mentor-led activities that support the indicator.

Step 5: Develop an Action Plan, including timelines, training and benchmarks.

Recent initiatives developed in this way include:

- Leading home learning and parenting skill training to families of children at risk, particularly with disabilities, who did not pass standardized tests;
- Partnering with high school graduation coaches on schoolwide activities to reduce absenteeism and discipline rates;
- Teaming with Title I Parent Involvement Liaisons to assist families eligible for Supplementary Education Services in obtaining tutoring services;
- Launching Babies Can't Wait with parenting classes and support; and
- Training family leaders on special education rules and regulations so they can partner with school principals to assist other families.

ACCOUNTING FOR PROGRESS

Each local school system in Georgia develops an action plan aimed at improving results for students with disabilities. The action plan—often developed in conjunction with a stakeholder group including educators, administrators, parents and community representatives—becomes part of the local school system's overall improvement plan. Progress is measured according to specific indicators under each goal.

The Parent Mentor Partnership decided to narrow the mentors' focus by selecting four indicators and asking each school system to focus on at least one. As described in the next section, parent mentors developed best practice initiatives and activities by incorporating the family engagement strategies and standards.



Georgia IDEA Performance Indicator

INCREASE THE PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG CHILDREN REFERRED BY PARENTS, OR OTHER AGENCIES PRIOR TO AGE THREE WHO ARE DETERMINED ELIGIBLE AND HAVE AN IEP IMPLEMENTED BY THE THIRD BIRTHDAY.

Parent mentors who chose to focus on this indicator faced numerous roadblocks:



- Families who did not have their child involved in early intervention services through the state agency (Babies Can't Wait).
- Families who did not agree that their child has a disability.
- Families who couldn't get to meetings due to transportation issues.
- Families who faced language barriers or non-resident status.
- Communication issues in some areas in the state between early intervention and the school system.

And yet, in reality, many of these families were simply overwhelmed and very sensitive to feelings of isolation. They needed a welcoming, non-threatening environment to dispel the myths of “them” vs. “us.” As suggested by the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, schools can successfully overcome the barriers that interfere with communication by responding to the qualities, characteristics and needs of the parents. These barriers include parental literacy; language preferred for reading, listening, speaking and writing; daily commitments and responsibilities that may affect the time, energy and attention available to devote to school; and parents' levels of comfort in becoming involved in their children's education.



The parent mentor for Seminole County School System assists in organizing quarterly Community Baby Showers, each one attended by about 75 expectant moms. Each event is held at the local hospital and organized by the hospital, pediatricians, the parent mentor, childcare facilities and other community partners. In addition to serious information, there is food, friendship and door prizes.



The event led one mother to discuss her older child's developmental milestones with her pediatrician. When the mother was not willing to accept the possibility that her child might need help, the pediatrician referred her to the parent mentor who worked personally with the mother to identify appropriate services before the child's third birthday. Now the youngster is doing well with appropriate modifications and support in a pre-kindergarten class.

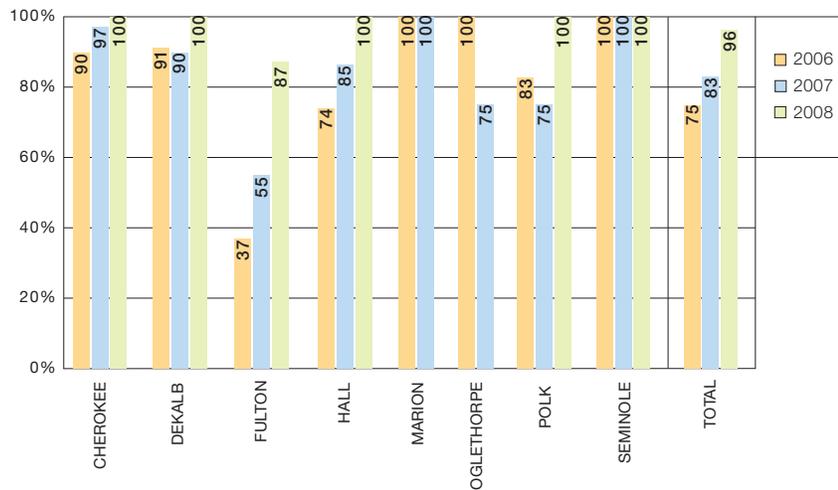
Parent mentors meet parents where they are comfortable both personally and emotionally:

- Parent mentors collaborate with local pediatricians and childcare facilities so more young children will be referred to the local school system before their third birthday.
- Community fairs with exhibits from the Department of Early Care and Learning, known as Bright from the Start (statewide inclusion coordinator), Babies Can't Wait, private preschools, Head Start and Early Intervention Division are held for young families.
- Meet and greet information meetings are organized with school system Special Education Preschool Teams. Each family receives a packet with tips on "How to Have a Successful Transition into School" and meets the Preschool Team and parent mentor.
- Preschool parent trainings are held on such topics as behavior management, positive discipline and developing communication skills in your preschool child, increasing parental ability to assist with child learning.
- An Early Learning Strategy Team fosters relationships between early learning providers and the school system, brainstorming ways to work together to improve school readiness.



Over the last three years, eight parent mentors focused on this goal to provide timely service to young children. In 2006, these systems documented that only 75% of the children who were referred prior to their third birthday were receiving services. In 2008, those same eight systems reported that more than 96% of the students referred by their third birthday received services on time.

Percentage of Children Whose Referrals for Service Were Completed by Age 3



Georgia IDEA Performance Indicator

INCREASE THE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT OR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION.

Families need to be aware of all the possible options and services that could be available once their child graduates and transitions out of the school system. Providing this information during an IEP meeting can be overwhelming and frustrating, so parent mentors began organizing transition fairs to allow families, students and educators an opportunity to move at their own pace, meeting with exhibitors/vendors of particular interest to them. The atmosphere is lighter and more upbeat—not unlike college fairs where other students are investigating their post-secondary options.



The following services are highlighted at the PMP transition fairs:

- Post-secondary educational options, including colleges/universities and technical/vocational schools offering accommodations or special programs to students with disabilities
- Competitive and supported employment
- Day support/day habilitation
- Residential options
- Recreation/leisure/sports
- State and federal agencies that provide supports (SSI, Medicaid, Vocational Rehabilitation)

After families and students in Bibb County attended information sessions about post-secondary options, one mother commented, “I never dreamt my daughter could work, and at a job she likes. I can finally hope . . . for her!”



Attendance at one transition fair in Rockdale County has grown to more than 300 a year. Families wait to receive the announcement brochures each year. More than 30 agencies, community partners and colleges had exhibits at the fair. The parent mentor disseminated information about critical legislative issues and identified five parents who were able to attend Disability Day at the State Capitol and advocate for children with disabilities.

In Bryan County, the parent mentor scheduled a series of parent trainings with the transition coordinator. Parents helped select speakers for the trainings. At one meeting, former students with disabilities shared experiences with job searching, interviews and working.

RESULTS ON TARGETED TRANSITION INDICATOR

2007 BRYAN ROCKDALE STATEWIDE

SWD* attending college/university/tech college (full-time/part-time)	13.7%	27.8%	17.5%
SWD employed and attending post-secondary school	34.5%	8.5%	6.2%
SWD competitively employed (full-time or part-time)	24.1%	17.1%	31.5%

2008 BRYAN ROCKDALE STATEWIDE

SWD attending college/university/tech college (full-time/part-time)	12.9%	21.4%	17.8%
SWD employed and attending post-secondary school	16.1%	11.9%	5.1%
SWD competitively employed (full-time or part-time)	54.9%	26.2%	32.5%

**Students with disabilities*

When averaging results on each of the three transition indicators, Bryan had a 4% increase, Rockdale a 2% improvement while the statewide average was a .1% increase.

Georgia IDEA Performance Indicator

INCREASE THE PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ON STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS WHEN GIVEN APPROPRIATE ACCOMMODATIONS.

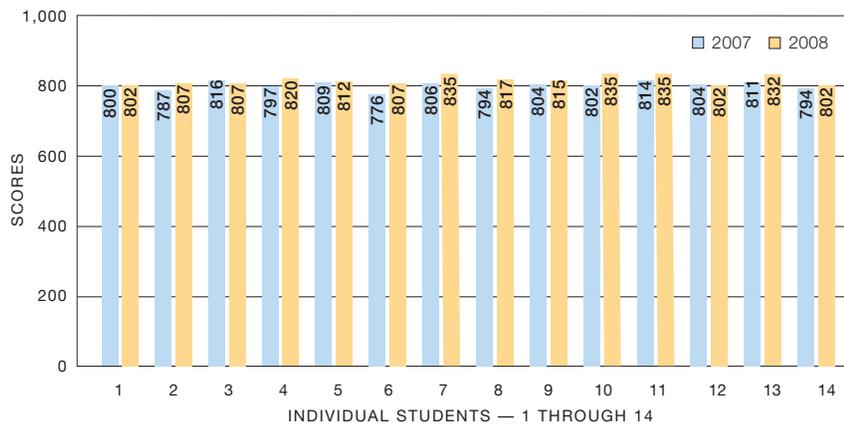
The parent mentor, by providing information, resources and training to parents, provides a non-threatening approach to bridging the gap in home-school communication. Through collective partnerships at different levels within the school system, students at risk of not passing Criterion Reference Competency Tests (CRCT) are identified. A parent mentor can discuss the importance of the tests themselves, the need for better bedtime routines and eating habits as well as good attendance at school, especially during testing periods. Collaborative partnerships in the community foster the notion that it takes a village to raise a child: local businesses offer workers time to volunteer as tutors for these at-risk students.

“Parents never want to see their children fail,” says Thomas Roman, State Graduation Coach Coordinator. “Yet all too often, they are viewed as part of the problem when it comes to their children’s education. But to make a real and lasting impact on both children and families, parents must be engaged as part of the solution. Parents of struggling students are always seeking ways to help their children be as successful as they can. We have seen powerful results when parent mentors and graduation coaches team up to help our students succeed in school.”



The parent mentor in Pulaski County worked with the Middle School Graduation Coach to identify students already at risk in middle school. Each family received a packet including the student's previous test scores (in a sealed envelope), calendars of test dates, parenting tips, a parent survey and services available to students such as vision and hearing screening, after-school programming and tutoring. Home visits were made to families who did not attend an informational session. Fourteen students targeted in 2007 improved their reading scores by 2008.

Comparison of 2007 and 2008 8th Grade Reading CRCT Scores



Georgia IDEA Performance Indicator

INCREASE THE PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES WHO REPORT THAT SCHOOLS ENCOURAGED PARENT INVOLVEMENT TO IMPROVE RESULTS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.

The Parent Mentor Partnership has identified a series of best practices specific to this indicator because it represents the essence of family engagement:

- Create a welcoming school environment for all families.
- Task the parent mentor with developing two-way communication between school and families as well as leadership skills among parents, by increasing awareness about the value of family engagement among educators and the community and training teachers to support and encourage family engagement.
- Embed parent leadership in all school/education initiatives.

Parent mentors open doors for families to become more engaged. Building trusting relationships is essential to effective home-school collaboration. Parent mentors have used a variety of activities to build this trust and support.

- A newsletter, Very Important Parent (VIP), was distributed to all parents of students with disabilities. Topics included volunteer opportunities, communication needs, college opportunities for students with learning disabilities, social friendship clubs at middle and school high schools.

“Our project for next year is going to be working with a targeted set of schools to improve the attendance of parents at IEP meetings. We are going to be personally contacting these parents to see what the barriers are to their attendance and how we can facilitate their participation. We believe that their involvement will help their students’ achievement.”

Madeline Griffin, Parent Mentor, DeKalb County

- One parent mentor worked with the local Special Education Parent Advisory Council, parents, local businesses and the county recreation department to provide Buddy Ball, a version of baseball for youngsters ages 3 to 13 with significant disabilities. Youngsters are paired with someone to help them hit the ball, run bases, play outfield, etc. Players gained confidence while participating in a sport. Parents increasingly felt as if they and their children belonged to the school community.
- Another parent mentor initiated a Family Support Group with the intention of turning the group into a Navigator Team (see Chapter 3) for the county. Monthly meetings often attracted 90 parents. Some training topics included Parent to Parent of Georgia presentations on available services, guardianship and “how to be an advocate for your child without being an adversary.”

“The family was pleased with the IEP meeting and thought it was because I was there. I let this mother know it was not because of me. It was the fact that she was prepared and was willing to listen and be an active team player.”

LISA VAUGHN, PARENT MENTOR, LIBERTY COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

In 2008–09, parent mentors statewide focused on increasing the return of parent surveys designed to gauge levels of satisfaction with the local school system, including the degree to which parents were encouraged to become more involved. Georgia uses a survey validated by the National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring. Parent mentors shared daily tips online and distributed flyers filled with ideas to increase survey returns. The parent mentor in Hall County School System targeted the return of surveys as one of his improvement initiatives over the last two school years. Because of his efforts, the county reported a 33% survey return rate, which was significantly higher than the state average for 2007–2008. In the recent results released on the 2008–2009 surveys, Hall County School System jumped to about 60 percent in returns. The percentage of surveys returned was consistently higher in systems with parent mentors and the percentage of parents who indicate strong levels of satisfaction increased across the board when parent mentors were involved.

Percentage of Parents Indicating High Levels of Satisfaction with Their Local School Systems



“One parent commented on a survey, ‘I don’t know what I don’t know,’ letting me know that I need to give more thought to what new parents may need when their child begins receiving special education services.”

TERESA JOHNSON, PARENT MENTOR,
WALTON COUNTY

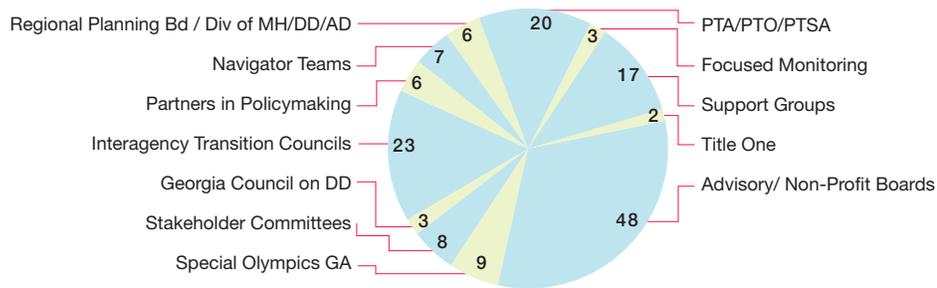
Parent mentors’ records of success are due in part to the Partnership’s ability to gather not only parents who have been isolated or left out, but also a wide variety of community organizations, education leaders and special interest groups to share knowledge, learn, build consensus and act to achieve common goals. The next chapter explores the networking genius of the Parent Mentor Partnership.

3

EXTENDING THE PARTNERSHIP: Networking and Collaborating

The Georgia Department of Education planted the seeds for the Parent Mentor Partnership. As it grew and flourished, the PMP went on to pollinate dozens of other projects and programs, ultimately adding the texture and richness of family engagement to virtually every school improvement initiative in Georgia impacting children academically at risk. Parent mentors also have taken on leadership roles in numerous school and community organizations. This natural growth serves to build family leadership, broaden the PMP's reach and increase services to have greater impact on academic achievement and student outcomes. This chapter highlights the best of the Partnership's networking and collaboration.

Parent Mentors — Additional Leadership Roles



PARENT LEADERSHIP COALITION

The Georgia Department of Education played a key role in initiating a Parent Leadership Coalition soon after the Parent Mentor Partnership was underway in 2002. This coalition of diverse state organizations working on parent engagement and training meets regularly to exchange ideas and build on each others' statewide programs.

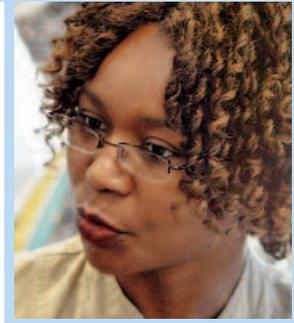
The Southeast Regional Resource Center funded a Coalition retreat in 2004 during which Coalition members decided to create a statewide Navigator Team Project. The goal was to place community teams in 159 counties by 2010 to support families raising children with disabilities.

“Parent mentors are the real connectors in communities. They are skilled at bringing together parents and professionals for the purpose of creating positive change in their communities.”

RITA YOUNG, ATLANTA ALLIANCE FOR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES



By 2005, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities funded a full-time Navigator Team Director at Parent to Parent of Georgia. In 2008, the Parent Leadership Coalition (PLC) handed over the management of the Navigator Teams—reaching about 60 counties—to Parent to Parent. Many parent mentors also assist these teams, which in the last several years trained more than 1,800 families in 100-plus workshops, organized more than 220 community meetings and distributed nearly 10,000 flyers.



PARENT TO PARENT (PARENT TRAINING INFORMATION CENTER–PTI)

Parent to Parent (P2P) of Georgia is the state’s designated Parent Training Information Center. Funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs to provide training and resources to parents, it offers a comprehensive database containing over 4,000 resources in more than 100 categories. P2P conducted 33,572 database searches for families from March 2008 to February 2009 while 24,727 individuals conducted independent searches online. P2P’s regional coordinators reported receiving 5,831 calls from families seeking help in accessing information and an additional 349 calls from professionals seeking assistance. The database is also a prime source of information for parent mentors.

Parent to Parent’s multi-step support system dovetails with the work of parent mentors. The two organizations collaborate on trainings, town hall meetings and on the State Personnel Development Grant activities. Some parent mentors also work part-time for Parent to Parent. “The effectiveness of parents on the inside collaborating with a well-trained team on the outside is powerful,” says Patti Solomon, who not only leads family engagement initiatives and trainings statewide but also is a parent of a daughter with autism. “It is amazing what can be done when the child is the focus.”

Parent mentors also collaborate with Parent to Parent and the Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports to offer community forums on critical education issues such as the state special education regulations and Georgia’s Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions/Response to Intervention (Appendix C).

“We oftentimes hear from other parent organizations across the U.S. about their struggles to work with their state departments, and even their local school systems, but our partnership is a model of what true collaboration should be!” says Debra Tucker, Executive Director of Parent to Parent. “I am truly excited about the possibilities that this partnership holds for the future!”

MEMBERS OF THE
GEORGIA PARENT LEADERSHIP COALITION IN 2009

- Bright from the Start, the Georgia Department for Early Childcare and Learning, including Head Start
- Babies Can't Wait
- Parent to Parent of Georgia
- Georgia Department of Education, Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports, Parent Mentor Partnership
- Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities
- Center for Leadership in Disabilities, Georgia State University
- Georgia Family Connection Partnership
- Institute on Human Development and Disability



COLLABORATING WITHIN THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

1. Title I/Family Engagement

The Georgia Department of Education (Parent Mentor Partnership and Title I Parent Outreach Manager), the State Parent Teacher Association and the State Parent Information Resource Center are collaborating on family engagement efforts to boost student achievement. At a 2009 Summit meeting, family leaders agreed to offer training for educators and staff with the expectation that each would influence many families. Family engagement efforts planned by this group are tied to achievement data and based on 30 years of research.

2. School Improvement Middle & High School Graduation Coaches

The Governor initiated a unique program in Georgia by placing a Graduation Coach in each middle and high school. The coaches target “at-risk” students, including those with IEPs, to ensure they are equipped with the academic and family support needed to graduate. For the last three years, parent mentors often provided the family support, explaining assessments and scores and offering advice on parenting skills. The program is not fully funded across the state this year but the family strategies that parent mentors created with Graduation Coaches will continue.

3. Latino Parent Outreach Coach

This state-funded coach provides training and assistance to Latino families. In Hall County, the parent mentor observed an influx of families who did not speak English. He and the Latino Parent Outreach Coach set up meetings in churches and two high schools, also inviting the special education director and an interpreter. The outreach coach offered free English classes (including special education vocabulary) to parents who were willing to volunteer in their children’s schools.

4. PATHS/MAPS

PATHS (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) and MAPS (Making Action Plans) training empowers families and students to plan their own futures and find the supports they need to live active adult lives in the community. PATHS/MAPS training is provided on a continuing basis for mentors, who in turn train other families in their local areas. It is led in partnership with the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities and the Center for Leadership in Disabilities at GA State University.

5. Focused Monitoring Teams with Parent Leaders

IDEA requires states to ensure that local school systems provide a “free appropriate public education” to students with disabilities. Focused Monitoring is one of the means used to monitor local school compliance with these requirements. Each Focused Monitoring Team includes general and special educators as well as state and local administrators, and there are at least two parents of students with disabilities on each team. The state provides comprehensive training before the team spends up to a week in a single district, interviewing teachers, parents, administrators and students; reviewing student records; observing; and ultimately contributing to the reports of recommendations.

6. State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG): Dropout Prevention/C.A.F.E. DIALOGUES

Beginning in 2007, the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs awarded a five-year State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) to Georgia to improve educational results for children with disabilities. Several parent mentors and other parent leaders trained educators in the targeted SPDG schools on effective strategies to involve and communicate with parents. The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities worked with Georgia to encourage a parent to participate on each of 42 Dropout Prevention Teams and to embed family engagement in improvement initiatives.

The Parent Mentor Partnership began promoting school/family/community action teams several years ago. State Superintendent Kathy Cox and the Georgia Department of Education’s family engagement team, with the support of the state PTA, created the C.A.F.E. concept—Circle of Adults Focusing on Education—while producing a training video in 2006. The C.A.F.E. DIALOGUES were further developed by the IDEA Partnership, a national project funded through the U.S. Department of Education. DIALOGUES are used nationally to develop shared meaning on rules and regulations between states and national agencies and organizations. In Georgia, parent mentors worked with the GaDOE to use the DIALOGUE method to support the work in C.A.F.E.s. The concept of C.A.F.E. DIALOGUES is to look at local issues impacted by national laws, state regulations and local policy. In Pulaski County, a 12-member team, made up of parents, educators and community representatives, used the C.A.F.E. DIALOGUES process to discuss ways family engagement could lead to improved math scores. The two-part C.A.F.E. sessions resulted in suggested activities to embed family engagement in math improvement as part of Pulaski’s Focused Monitoring Action Plan. The team now is an ongoing committee assisting in implementing some of its suggestions in the Action Plan.



The goal of the C.A.F.E. DIALOGUES is to tear down barriers within and among schools, families and communities so they can work together. Georgia's C.A.F.E. DIALOGUES are unique in training and reaching out to family members who are not typically involved in school improvement decision-making, such as the families of students being targeted in school improvement action plans—often students with disabilities. While the IDEA Partnership has been successful at the national level in bringing together educators, state agency personnel, policymakers and *professional* family leaders, it partnered with Georgia to learn about a role for parents, often not in traditional leadership positions, in the local decision-making process.

Georgia's State Personnel Development Grant began C.A.F.E. DIALOGUES in two high schools in collaboration with the IDEA Partnership. The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities had provided a year of training for the two teams prior to the start up of the C.A.F.E.s. The teams, made up of the high school principals, other administrators, teachers, social workers, parents and members of the community, including clergy, are led by two parent mentors.



“The IDEA Partnership created the dialogue process as a tool for stakeholders to engage each other in moving beyond debates and simple discussions to a deeper level of interaction. As they interact, people learn to see how the views of others are important to creating lasting solutions to the issues they care about.”

The early success of the Georgia C.A.F.E. initiative is a glimpse into how dialogue can support understanding, develop simple common messages and move people to united action. This is an exemplary model that we intend to showcase nationally!”

JOANNE CASHMAN, DIRECTOR, THE IDEA PARTNERSHIP AT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DIRECTORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

C.A.F.E. DIALOGUES ON DROPOUT PREVENTION

In 2009, a series of C.A.F.E. DIALOGUES was held in two high schools, one urban and the other rural. The discussions began with a series of reaction and application questions based on national research on families' roles in preventing high school dropouts. The DIALOGUE Guide on dropout prevention was written by a statewide stakeholder team and led by the IDEA Partnership. Both teams agreed the communities' perceptions would need to be changed if their work was to be effective.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED:

- Lack of regular two-way communication between home and school.
- Perception that every call home involves a discipline problem.
- Tremendous peer pressure for students not to listen to their parents.
- High staff turnover, including three principals in four years at one school.
- No parent association.
- Many students live far from the school — one high school is isolated from many neighborhoods by a highway; no public transportation for either high school.

QUESTIONS:

- How do we get family and school on the same page regarding discipline?
- Are there alumni who could be helpful?
- How do we get parents to realize the importance of connecting with their children about education when they did not have a good experience in school themselves?
- Who is not at the table? How do we involve the church community?
- How do we use the research on family impact in dropout prevention from the National Dropout Prevention experts?

PARTICIPANTS:

- Agreed to commit to the work together for the next year.
- Invited local clergy to join the team.
- A principal on the C.A.F.E. asked minister members to nominate him to speak to 300 community members at a local Prayer Breakfast. He was invited and proceeded to ask the community to help him turn around the large percentage of students not graduating with a general education diploma. Participants left the hall shouting, “No More Dropouts.”
- A minister C.A.F.E. member partnered with the high school to offer Sunday afternoon tutoring for the state’s high school graduation test.
- Ministers representing the six neighborhoods around the high school spoke to their parishioners on a Sunday morning about families’ role in preventing dropouts.
- The state PTA assisted both high schools in starting local PTA chapters. Parent leaders are sent to the state PTA conference for training.
- The C.A.F.E.s investigated ways to receive Title I family engagement support and succeed.
- One principal was nominated by his parent mentor, who also ran the C.A.F.E., for the Impact Award by Parent to Parent of GA. A student helped the principal make a video on his passion to make sure every student graduates with a general education diploma. He won the statewide award for impacting students with disabilities.

For decades, federal education programs have mandated parental involvement. Research and reality validate this mandate, but the PMP and other family engagement initiatives in the state take parental engagement to a new level of family commitment and active concern. Collaboration and networking in turn took the Partnership beyond individual schools and even school systems and into the community, where the power of community resources is being harnessed to strengthen schools, families and student achievement.

4

Starting a Parent Mentor Partnership

It all begins when one parent talks to another parent:

Andrea has three children. Her oldest son was being served as a hospital/homebound student due to severe sensory problems. Andrea wanted her son back in school and needed support in presenting the information to the IEP team. After multiple phone calls and conferences with the parent mentor, and decisions agreed to in the IEP process, her son is now fully included in the appropriate grade and is making remarkable progress.

Lisa moved to a new town in Georgia in 2007. She was quite concerned about the impact the move would have on her son, a middle school student with cerebral palsy. The parent mentor listened to her concerns, introduced her to the county's navigation team and eventually, Lisa felt confident enough to become the Special Needs Chair of her school's PTA. She is feeling more confident about assisting her son, because of her new network of friends.

A well-developed Parent Mentor Partnership nurtures communication and collaboration among parents, educators and the community, ultimately leading to better outcomes for students at risk academically, especially those with disabilities. The Parent Mentor Partnership is both an avenue for a school system to show compliance with IDEA requirements for family engagement and also an effective way to recognize the important role families can play in raising academic achievement levels for their own children and their local schools.

A sense of broad communication and collaboration must infuse the process from the moment the special education director decides to join the Parent Mentor Partnership. "The earlier schools turn outsiders into insiders the better," wrote Kathleen Cushman in *Essential Collaborators: Parents, School, and Community*.



LET'S GET STARTED

- In Georgia, parent mentors typically work 20 hours a week during the school year at a competitive salary, which can vary according to the school system's salary scales and local economic conditions. The budget for a parent mentor should include the mentor's salary, travel, office supplies and an appropriate work space. Some systems offer benefits as well.
- Georgia local school systems may apply for additional state IDEA funding to support the parent mentor position. The local school system is expected to match the state allocation with funding and in-kind support.
- Special education directors must follow local school system hiring procedures to create a new position, including approval of the Superintendent.
- Local systems develop a job description so the position can be advertised.
- One qualification is an absolute: *the parent mentor must be the parent of a child with a physical and/or cognitive challenge.*

Parent mentors do not necessarily need to be college graduates. Judith Steuber, parent mentor in Cobb County, Georgia, says that “an individual's ability to be politically savvy, comfortable speaking in front of groups, organized, knowledgeable about community services, up on the latest laws, brave, honest and true will be more useful than a degree in history or engineering.”

“Parents do not want to feel intimidated or talked down to by a parent mentor. They want to talk to us as equals who have a little more experience or know how to deal with the system.”

Judith Steuber, Parent Mentor, Cobb County School System

AFTER THE PARENT MENTOR IS HIRED...

- Provide an organized orientation for the new parent mentor. Arrange for the parent mentor to shadow administrators and learn how the school system operates.
- Each parent mentor program must be individualized to meet local needs. Overall, the parent mentor focuses on family engagement strategies to help achieve targeted student performance goals. This includes conducting and organizing trainings, leading focus groups, advising educators on the needs of families and responding to individual family phone calls and email requests.
 - Some school systems encourage families to invite the parent mentor to accompany them to IEP meetings as a support while others want the parent mentor to meet with families outside the meeting.
 - Many parent mentors design a newsletter or other forms of online communication.
 - Parent mentors may partner with translators to meet the needs of families who speak English as a second language and collaborate on family engagement initiatives with Title I partners.
- Local systems provide professional development opportunities for the parent mentor. In addition, first and second year mentors receive coaching from veteran mentors. The Georgia Department of Education’s Family Engagement Specialist and a contracted Parent Outreach coach, both of whom are parents of young adults with disabilities, provide ongoing assistance to school systems.

“Focus, focus, focus on your county’s
need and your passion.”

GEORGIA PARENT MENTOR

GETTING THE WORD OUT

It won't matter how many wonderful skills a parent mentor brings to the task or how those tasks contribute to school system goals if no one knows the Parent Mentor Partnership exists. Following are some of the most effective ways to inform the school community about the parent mentor:

- Begin collaborating immediately with your state or local Parent Training Information (PTI) Center. In Georgia, the designated PTI is Parent to Parent of Georgia (www.parenttoparentofga.org).
- Mail information home to every family who has a student with an IEP and let your school staff know about the services provided by the parent mentor.
- Meet with principals, counselors and social workers in each school. It is helpful if the local special education director sends a letter to these school leaders in advance of the parent mentor's arrival.
- Partner and stay connected with individual school PTAs/PTOs.
- Offer presentations to the community about the Parent Mentor Partnership's mission to increase family engagement so student achievement improves. GaDOE has prepared standard presentations and resources available to all parent mentors on the password-protected Learning Curve section of the PMP website.
- Provide information about the program to local newspapers.
- Disseminate information on system and individual school websites, PTA/PTO newsletters and school listservs.

DAY TO DAY

The daily focus for each parent mentor should reflect his or her clear connection with the system's performance goals for students with disabilities. Yet, parent mentors and special education directors still realize how critical it is to provide day-to-day emotional supports to individual families. When Georgia mentors recently created a list of "absolutes" for each parent mentor to follow, top on the list was the need to provide the highest level of customer service to families even as they align leadership and capacity building activities to improve academic achievement.

In addition:

- Establish a strong relationship between the parent mentor and the immediate supervisor, who could be the special education director or an assistant in a larger school system. This relationship becomes a model for all parent/educator relationships with the school system. Establish weekly and monthly schedules that include time for school visits; contact with parents, students and local school leaders; training opportunities (local school system professional development activities, state or regional parent mentor workshops, etc.); and participation in central office planning sessions.
- Ensure the mentor is not pulled away on unrelated tasks in the office. It is easy for the mentor to become overwhelmed.
- Support the mentor in building a network among mentors and parent leaders in other districts or even across state lines. Mentors in Georgia communicate on a web-based listserv, at trainings and through a password-protected website.

"Because of Kim's compassion, understanding and unwillingness to give up, we were able to reopen communication with a parent," says Bartow County Special Education Director Scott Smith. When parent mentor Kim Chester later asked if her job was secure for the coming year, Smith said, "If it came down to it, I'd flip burgers to earn her salary. From a special education director's point of view, her value is more than her salary will ever be."



“I asked my six-year-old daughter what I do at work and with her usual insight, she answered, ‘Listen.’ She hit it right on the nose. Everything I do starts with the ability to listen.”

AMANDA LOCKE, PARENT MENTOR, EVANS COUNTY SCHOOLS



ACCOUNTABILITY

Parent mentors should be evaluated by their immediate supervisors based on specific goals and tasks in the same way as other school system employees.

There will be overall status reports on the school system's progress toward various performance goals, but it may also be necessary for the parent mentor to periodically follow up with individual families to see if outcomes for specific students have changed or improved because of intervention by the parent mentor.

DATA COLLECTION

What gets counted gets done: when data are accumulated about a concern or a situation, attention is drawn to it, others are made aware the problem exists, and chances improve that the problem will be addressed systematically. Data can be quantitative (number of parents seen or meetings organized, graduation rates and proficiency, number of children, types of disabilities, placements) or qualitative (interviews, focus groups, descriptions of situations). Qualitative data collection may also include journals, anecdotal stories, notes and observations. Parent mentors use judgment, wisdom and experience to identify themes and patterns that emerge so they can begin to tell a story, identify problems and seek solutions. Data enable parent mentors to turn their efforts into effects.



“My job as a parent mentor is to get in there and help these parents decide what they need.”

TRACY BARBER ROGERS, PARENT MENTOR, SEMINOLE COUNTY

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Parent mentors bring a different skill set and unique perspective to already existing professional learning communities. Parents have much to offer educators and professionals serving students.

Parent mentors should have access to appropriate professional development. The Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership typically includes training opportunities at the local, regional and state levels: an orientation conference for new mentors and special education directors; a council retreat to explore parent leadership; regional day meetings; a kick-off annual conference that includes mentors, special education directors and other resource partners; and a Spring Leadership Conference for parent mentors. Local school systems provide funding for conferences and other training.

The Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership website (www.parentmentors.org) is a dynamic resource for parent mentor information and training. In a password-protected section called the Learning Curve, state performance goals and family engagement standards are front and center, surrounded by links to presentations, parent packets, C.A.F.E. DIALOGUE questions and procedures, tips for workshops, sample forms and questionnaires. An active listserv allows parent mentors to share ideas and solve problems on an ongoing basis. In addition, several leaders from the state's Parent Training and Information Center participate on the listserv.



NETWORKING/COLLABORATING

Networking takes the parent mentor beyond the school walls and into the community. As you saw in Chapter 3, the Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership casts an ever-widening net to enlist as many partners as possible in the effort to improve student achievement.

If a mentor plans to initiate a short- or long-term partnership with one or more organizations, the mentor should understand what each partner can deliver to meet the goal(s)—funding, technology, knowledge and expertise and/or volunteers. It should be understood where the Parent Mentor Partnership connects to the goals of the partner organization. There should be a champion in each organization who will lead that group’s participation in the partnership.

“Our two parent mentors, who are parents of children with disabilities, work to foster better communication among parents, teachers, therapists and administrators. The program has ultimately led to greater academic success for our students, as well as a deeper understanding of children with special needs. This program is a positive, winning alliance for all.”

BEVERLY L. HALL, SUPERINTENDENT, ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
AND 2009 NATIONAL SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YEAR

APPENDIX A

Common Terminology

What is a Performance Goal?

It is an objective that sets expectations to guide educators in ways to lead efforts to increase student achievement. Research indicates that setting challenging, attainable goals leads to high performance. Performance Goals set challenging and attainable expectations for the state and its school systems.

What is an Indicator?

There are 16 indicators under the Georgia Performance Goals and Indicators. Indicators help us evaluate our success on the Performance Goals. Think of the Performance Goal as the umbrella and the indicators are the spokes that hold it up. An indicator helps the school system know how far it has gone toward reaching the goal. Each goal has two to four indicators to help measure progress.

What is a Strategy?

A strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal. Based on research, we activate our three family engagement strategies to reach our targeted indicators. We developed our family engagement strategies from the lessons taught by the PMP over the last seven years.

What is a Best Practice?

This is an ongoing initiative that makes a difference on a target. Best practices are methods which other mentors have successfully used to deliver the wanted outcome. If you follow these processes, you will reach the goal. Best practices should be the most efficient and effective way of accomplishing a goal.

What are Ongoing Activities?

These are the actual events designed to reach the indicator and eventually the goal. The activities can have short-term measurements leading to the long-term goal. Strategies help guide us in these activities. When similar activities lead to improved data in multiple places, best practices begin to emerge. For each major indicator you should be able to measure the effectiveness of your activities/implementation.

What are Anecdotal Data Stories?

Anecdotal Data Stories are a series of descriptions of ongoing activities demonstrating the family engagement work being coordinated by the parent mentor to reach a performance indicator. Stories may be about one activity with ongoing results or they can be about a series of activities that will lead to an impact on the targeted indicator. There should be matching data to defend the anecdotal story. Remember, qualitative data are “soft” data while quantitative are “hard” data. The quantitative tells you how much, and the qualitative tells you why!

APPENDIX B

Georgia's Performance Goals and Indicators for Students with Disabilities

Goal 1. Improve post-school outcomes for students with disabilities

1. Decrease the percentage of students with disabilities who drop out of school.
2. Increase the percentage of students with disabilities who earn a regular high school diploma.
3. Increase the percentage of students with disabilities who transition to employment or post-secondary education.
4. Increase the percentage of transition aged students with disabilities who have coordinated and measurable IEP goals and transition services that will lead to attainment of post-secondary goals.

Goal 2. Improve services for young children (ages 3–5) with disabilities

5. Increase the percentage of young children referred by parents, or other agencies prior to age three who are determined eligible and have an IEP implemented by the third birthday.
6. Increase the percentage of time young children with disabilities spend in natural environments with typically developing peers.
7. Increase the percentage of young children with disabilities who show improved positive social/emotional skills, acquisition and use of knowledge and skills, and use of appropriate behaviors.

Goal 3. Improve the provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to students with disabilities

8. Increase the percentage of students who are evaluated and determined eligible for special education within 60 days.
9. Increase the percentage of students with disabilities who receive their instruction in the general education setting with appropriate supports and accommodations.
10. Increase the performance of students with disabilities on statewide assessments when given appropriate accommodations.
11. Decrease the percentage of students with disabilities who are removed from their school or placements for disciplinary reasons.
12. Decrease the disproportionate representation of students with disabilities due to inappropriate policies, procedures, and practices.
13. Increase the percentage of parents of children receiving special education services who report that schools encouraged parent involvement to improve results for students with disabilities.

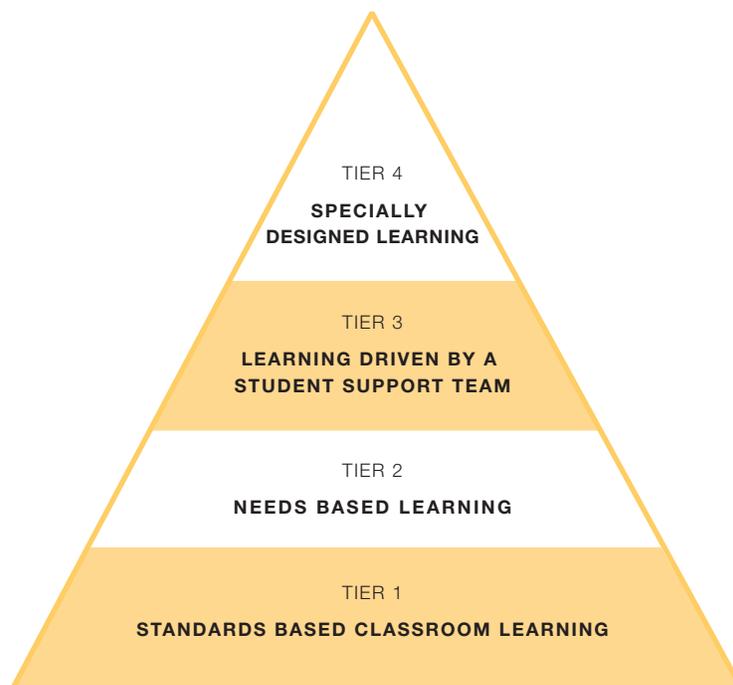
Goal 4. Improve compliance with state and federal laws and regulations

14. All identified noncompliance will be corrected as soon as possible, but no later than one year from identification.
15. Dispute resolution procedures and requirements are followed within any applicable timelines. Includes formal complaints, mediation, due process hearings, and resolution sessions.
16. Reports are submitted in a timely manner.

APPENDIX C

Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions

Originally, parent mentors worked with families of students in Tier 4—those already identified as eligible for special education services. It soon became clear that PMP strategies would work across the board with families of students at risk—those targeted for improvement—and parent mentors now reach out to families at the broadest Tier 1 level.



APPENDIX D

Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership Anecdotal Story Form (Blank)

FY09 Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership (PMP) Anecdotal Data

Qualitative Information on Quantitative Data (SHORT FORM)

Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports

Parent Mentor(s):	Local System:
Contact number/email:	Summer Contact number/email:
Performance Indicator targeted by System in the PMP FY09 Plan: #	School System's most current baseline data on indicator:
What is your FY09 school year total for contacts?	What is the approximate number of educators you trained for the FY09 school year?

Summarize your family engagement work on your targeted indicator this past school year (FY09):

Provide the benchmarks you used to monitor the progress in your work:

Forms MUST be submitted electronically – NO FAXES or SCANS
Name: _____ Indicator# _____

APPENDIX D

Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership Anecdotal Story Form (Blank)

FY09 Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership (PMP) Anecdotal Data

Qualitative Information on Quantitative Data (LONG FORM)

Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports

Themes/Patterns that Emerged:

Ongoing work on the indicator: “Who”, “What”, “When”, “Where”, “How Many”, “Why”?
(Please provide as many details as possible)

- Who were you targeting? How many families?
- What was the Family Engagement plan and expected outcome?
- How was it an ongoing initiative?
- What were the roadblocks and how did you get around them?
- Where did you find parent leaders? How did you develop and support them?
- How did you collaborate and form teams with families, various education divisions, parent organizations and community groups? Did you build capacity? Be specific...
- What do you want us to know specifically about your work this year:
- Give us your WOW story:

Forms MUST be submitted electronically – NO FAXES or SCANS

Name: _____ Indicator# _____

RESOURCES

Best Bets for Information

GEORGIA

www.parentmentors.org The official site of the Parent Mentor Partnership of Georgia provides information on team building, communication strategies, family support, personal stories from parents and educators, and links to resources and best practices in family engagement initiatives at the state, regional and local school levels.

www.cobbparentmentors.eboard.com Cobb County School System parent mentors use this bulletin board format to get information to families and educators quickly about upcoming events and topics. The site also archives past information for easy referral.

www.gadoe.org The official site of the Georgia Department of Education includes links on the Special Education Section to a *Transition Manual* that helps families and students understand adult learning, working and living options. A link to the *Implementation Manual* created by 60 educators and 10 parents explains the State Rules on Special Education.

GeorgiaStandards.Org This site, sponsored by a consortium of organizations and agencies, provides ideas and strategies to understand the Georgia State Performance Standards. Sections are provided for each grade level and subject area to assist parents and students; there are also lesson plans for educators.

parenttoparentofga.org This site for the state's Parent Training Information Center includes a vast resource database of supports and services including information about local Navigation Teams.

www.partnershipsforsuccess.com An initiative of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, Partnerships for Success provides opportunities for students with disabilities to participate with their non-disabled peers in recreation, social activities, sports and community service. It also offers a self-determination curriculum and training on student-led IEPs.

www.georgiapta.org The Georgia PTA partners at the state and local level with GaDOE and parent mentors in family engagement initiatives.

OHIO

www.thelinkto.org/parentmentor The Ohio Parent Mentor Program is an initiative by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities (OCECD).

www.ocecd.org/ocecd/parentmentor.cfm During the early 1990s, OCECD worked with Ohio parents of children with disabilities and the ODE to establish a statewide parent/professional collaboration model to support the appropriate education of children and youth with disabilities. This was the collaborative model for Georgia's Parent Mentor Partnership.

Ohio.gov/Education For a virtual tour of a family friendly school, go to *Learning Supports* on the Department of Education page and then click *family and community engagement*.

www.cincinnatichildrens.org Search for "Project Search" to learn about the Project Search High School Transition model, which is being used in many systems in Georgia; it is a collaboration among a school system, a vocational rehabilitation agency, a business and a supported employment agency.

NATIONAL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES

www.sedl.org/connections National Center for Family and School Connections with Schools

www.partnershipschools.org National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University

www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/fine This Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) is a community of thousands of educators, practitioners, policymakers and researchers dedicated to strengthening family-school-community partnerships. There is no cost to become a FINE member.

OTHER NATIONAL RESOURCES

www.eric.ed.gov The U.S. Department of Education site includes sections geared to families.

www.rrfcnetwork.org/serrc The Southeast Regional Resource Center is a federally funded technical assistance center serving Georgia.

www.nichcy.org The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities is a central source of information on disabilities in infants, toddlers, children and youth; IDEA; No Child Left Behind as it relates to children with disabilities; and research-based information on effective educational practices.

www.ideapartnership.org This site describes the DIAGOGUE problem solving method used in Georgia's C.A.F.E. DIALOGUES on dropout prevention and early childhood issues; there are links to National Communities of Practices on many key education issues facing families.

www.fape.org The Families and Advocates Partnership for Education (FAPE) links families, advocates and self-advocates to information about the IDEA.

www.pacer.org The Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER Center) is a parent training and information center for families of children and youth with all disabilities from birth through 21 years old. Located in Minneapolis, it serves families across the nation. Parents can find publications, workshops and other resources to help make decisions about education, vocational training, employment and other services for their children with disabilities. The related ALLIANCE for Parent Centers (www.taalliance.org) provides technical assistance to Parent Centers and is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

www.ndpc-sd.org The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD) assists in building states' capacity to increase school completion rates for students with disabilities and is a partner in Georgia's parent initiatives. Link to research on family engagement's importance in dropout prevention at www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/family_engagement/overview.htm

www.inclusion.com This private Canadian site provides information and resources for person-centered planning and other aspects of inclusion.

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Epstein, J., et al. *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press, 2002.

Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, Davies. *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnership*. The New Press, 2006.

Cushman, Kathleen. *Essential Collaborators: Parents, School, and Community*.
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