

P.I.C. Minutes-Region 5

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I. Welcome

Michelle Tarbutton, Parent Engagement Program Manager, opened the meeting by welcoming all in attendance, introducing the Georgia Department of Education staff in attendance and thanking Gwinnett County for hosting the meeting. She also explained that today's agenda was structured based on the comments and recommendations that were made at the last meeting. A general overview of the meeting was given as far as what to expect, which included voting on the parent engagement definition, completion of evaluations and distribution of certificates at the end of the meeting.

II. Introduction Activity

Lakeita Servance, Parent Engagement Specialist, introduced the opening activity entitled "What Is". This activity centered on defining "What Is a Good Parent, Advocate, Teacher, School and Community?" All participants were asked to collaborate with their neighbor and take two minutes to define each of these entities. This lead into a discussion based on factual perceptions and reasonable expectations. Participants volunteered to share their vision and definitions with the group. The key point made is that all of these entities are working together to help students achieve and no one can do it alone. It was also stated that today's objective is to learn what some counties are doing to make sure everyone is a part of the puzzle. We want everyone to take back concrete tools and use them to make their "What Is" vision a reality.

III. Learning From Each Other: Gwinnett County P.I.C. Presentation

Kathy Jackson from W.C. Britt Elementary School presented a workshop entitled "A Few Good Practices." This workshop focused on selecting instructional material, school staff valuing parents, and communication. She mentioned that instructional materials are based on data obtained from benchmarks. Then she proceeded to talk about data tools that are used to measure at-risk students. From there she mentioned ways to grow our relationship with parents and stated some facts. Our attitudes towards parents can have an impact on how involved they are. She also talked about giving parents the right tools and providing opportunities for parents to learn how to work with their children at home. We also have to build trust by not making fun of illiteracy and other issues parents are trying to overcome. Growing relationships with parents also entails making positive phone calls. You have to build bridges with parents between home and school. One learning tool displayed was called "Hot Dots." It consisted of folder games that improve learning skills in the areas of science, social studies, language arts, and math. It's engaging hands-on material that will get parents involved with their child. She also mentioned the Rock-n-Learn DVD that talks writing

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strategies. The closing key point made was that students learn best when parents are involved.

Donna Powers featured a workshop that centered on the Parent Leadership Academy in Gwinnett County Public Schools. Schools have to be more parent-friendly and not display signs that clearly scream they are not welcome. Donna explained that educators cannot expect total engagement and high standards from students if both families and schools cannot form powerful alliances to guide those students to academic and lifelong success. Many parents are unclear as to what their role is in their child's education. For this reason, Gwinnett felt a need to build a program that define meaningful parent leadership, establish and discuss guiding principles of meaningful and effective parent leadership, discuss challenges and share ideas, successes and accomplishments. She introduced a member of the Parent Leadership Academy and Parent Advisory Council member, Anthony Scott. He talked about some of the benefits of being a member and how it can really encourage parents to be more involved. It teaches parents about laws, guidelines, their rights in education and promotes partnership between school, parents and community.

Both presenters stated that they will provide participants with more details about the various educational resources that were featured in their presentations. This information will be uploaded electronically along with the minutes.

IV. Parent Workshop- Learning Your Child's School System: The Key to Success

Michelle Tarbuton featured a workshop that will educate parents about the governance of schools. This workshop was designed for Parent Involvement Coordinators to take back and format to fit their school and district structure so they can inform parents about the school personnel that are key to helping them and their child succeed. Knowledge is power and that point was stressed throughout the presentation. Many times parents are at a lost and do not know who to turn to for certain educational issues they need addressed. Knowing who your Local Board of Education members are, how funds are dispersed, and how employment of certain school personnel is determined were also among some of the topics discussed. The use of acronyms has been a barrier to parents, so an acronym sheet and game were provided for Parent Involvement Coordinators to use in assisting parents with breaking down this barrier. A navigation tool was also provided as a quick reference guide for parents. The chain of assistance normally starts with the teacher as indicated on the handout. A contact form was also distributed for parents to write in the contact information of school personnel they need for specific issues. This form should be tailored to reflect your school structure. Some commonly used terms were also mentioned and at the end, a game was played by all to test their knowledge based on the workshop. This game is also available for parents to play

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after the workshop to make sure they grasped the main points. Parents will definitely feel empowered once they are familiar with their child's school and structure.

V. Working Lunch: State Family Engagement Policy

Michelle Tarbuton explained that the Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council is currently working on developing a State Family Engagement Policy, as the Georgia Department of Education recognizes that parental involvement is the key to academic achievement. The policy will provide a clear explanation of the state's vision for family engagement, which in hopefully will highlight the importance and support the implementation of family engagement in our local school districts and schools. In addition the policy will also provide parents with an understanding of not only what they should expect from their schools, but what they should expect to contribute as active partners in their child's learning. As Parent Engagement professionals, participants were asked to talk in groups and provide feedback on the following question to help guide the Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council in their work:

What is important for you to see in Georgia's State Parent Engagement Policy?

The answers were as follow:

- How the state will support and encourage parents to become more involved with their child
- It is important that we positively communicate with parents in adoption policies that address negative behaviors of students
- It is important that all Title I parents become PTA members
- PTA should be educated thoroughly about the role of Title I
- PTA and Title I parents need to work together to make the parent center reasonable for the school
- Establish that teachers have to respect all parents who want to be involved in their child's education
- Establish professional development days for the staff on relating to parents in a more positive way
- Productive communication between parents, teachers, students and the community. A strong focus on student needs and accomplishments
- Parents and students are responsible in having good student behavior
- The use of parenting workshops and other parenting resources to help the parents
- The importance of parent participation in school activities
- Partnership between the parent, student, teacher, and community
- Empowering parents via PTA meetings off campus activities students are involved in, etc.

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- Change policy regarding teaching sex education and preventive measures for STD's and pregnancy. Teen pregnancy in Georgia is too high and there are too many female students dropping out because of pregnancy
- The importance of our state recognizing that all parents are welcome and urged to become involved like the Missouri policy
- Add the comprehensive approach along with the characteristics of a successful school-family-community partnership
- Develop workshops that actually address the needs of parents personally
- Develop a parent leadership academy in the local county cluster
- Host family fun games nights that involve parents and students using teaching tools
- Develop parent mentors to work with students on different academic levels
- Promote regular, meaningful, communication between home and school
- Include parents as full partners in decisions affecting their children and families
- Collaborating with the community to use available resources to strengthen and promote school programs, family practices and the achievement of students
- Parents and families the State Board of Education support and endorses. Hartford Connecticut was an example
- A smaller version of the Connecticut policy would be great if geared toward Georgia parents
- Start with a definition, use parent-friendly words, make it short and concise, and state the purpose, mission and/or vision statement
- With each of the elements and goals list an example; parents should have an input so it's simple and easy for them to read
- Enforcing parent accountability: parents should be accountable for attending meetings, workshops, etc.
- Comprehensive approach: concerns about wordiness and literacy levels of our families
- Supporting learning at home by involving families in learning and enrichment activities at home and in the community; these should be linked to academic standards
- Shared responsibility with schools and other community organizations committed to engaging families in meaningful and culturally respectful ways
- Government should pursue mandating parental involvement as a requirement when requiring government assistance of any type
- Families become stakeholders in their children's school
- Each school has a trained Parent Coordinator, Parent Liaison, etc.
- Should be simple to read, short, describe responsibilities, provide examples, and translate to other main languages (i.e. Spanish)

VI. Networking Conversation Activity

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National PTA Standards Defined

Standard I- 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.

Standard II- Communicating effectively—Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.

Participants were asked to split into groups according to the numbers on their badge. These groups consisted of Elementary, Middle, High, and District level personnel. Based on the National PTA Standards I and II, participants were asked to list their best practices for implementing these in their schools and/or districts.

The responses were as follow:

Elementary Standard I-

- Welcome
 - Family Orientation
 - Language Interpreters
 - Welcome sign in front of the school
 - Utilize parents for translation services
 - Allow parents to participate in the selection process of parent resources
 - Accessibility, parking, clear signage
 - Warm environment-friendly faces, smiles
 - Parent Liaison/Coordinator up front in the school
 - Parent Center space should be just for parents
 - Best practices-survey parents by means of a school assessment checklist
 - Workshops on safety, academic needs, managing money, financial assistance, etc.
 - Visible presence and greeting by counselors and Parent Involvement Coordinator
 - Have desks in room prior to student arrival
 - New students get textbooks from office immediately
 - Offer childcare during meetings
 - Provide coffee and pastries in parent center
 - Recognize parent volunteers; give gifts
 - Staff to register new families
 - Volunteer orientation
 - Need signs in dual languages

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- International Night

Elementary Standard II-

➤ **Communication**

- Send out invitations in all languages for events
- Welcome parents to take literacy classes to help them communicate
- Community collaboration
- Community diversity training
- Promote positive communication between parent and child
- Promote positive communication between parent and school administrators
- Newsletters
- Weekly auto-dial
- Tele-parent
- View of the week posters
- Electronic book bag link on the website
- E-mails
- School website
- Marquee
- Workshops
- Reminder stickers
- Notes from children
- Child-centered invitations
- A+ Parent Chat for parents of children who failed CRCT
- Watch Dog Dads
- Promote 'Fathers as Readers' - Dads in media center reading stories
- Check-in machines
- Text messages
- Word of mouth
- PTA meetings
- Partnerships/ Business sponsors
- Morning announcements
- TV notices that scroll all day
- Allowing parents to walk students to class in the morning
- School Tours
- Visibility of Administrators
- Volunteer Appreciation Reception
- Parent Resource Center contains material in different languages
- Parent classes that teach English, Nutrition, Discipline, etc.

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- Individual Conferences for *all* parents, including Spanish speaking families

Middle Standard I-

➤ Welcome

- Smiling faces in welcoming places and over the phone
- Consistent positive attitude
- Administration sets the tone
- Administrative visibility
- Parent Center as central location
- Respect diversity
- Visible PTSA
- Bi-lingual receptionist
- Multicultural poster welcoming families
- School tours with welcome packet containing resources to help parents understand the school
- Train all school personnel including cafeteria staff and custodians

Middle Standard II-

➤ Communication

- Parent Newsletter
- E-mail
- Website
- Tele-parent
- Mailings
- Marquee
- Implementation
- Be present when parents are present
- Networking
- Automated phone calls
- Individualized friendly student letters
- Develop 'Communication Committee' - a group of parents to pass the word
- Incentives for parent attendance
- Go to community events to communicate information from the school

High Standard I-

➤ Welcome

- Welcome all families as they arrive
- Re-arrange staff to welcome guest

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- Provide assistance in a timely manner
- Principal must buy-in

High Standard II-

- Communication
 - Using parent-friendly communication
 - Learn which medium is effective for parents
 - Connecting parents through school meetings
 - Develop creative ways to get the word out

District Standard I-

- Welcome
 - Calling Post
 - Physical appearance of office
 - First contact person is friendly
 - Parent-friendly website
 - Open-door policy
 - Pictures of staff
 - “Welcome” desk
 - Multi-cultural activities
 - Providing transportation for meetings
 - Providing childcare
 - Signage in various languages
 - Translators/Interpreters
 - Designated parent spaces
 - Professional learning for staff
 - Expedite services; response time is brief
 - Inclusive of community through multiple media-newsletters, calls, etc.
 - Meet parents where they are as far as skills and levels of the their child
 - Strategic community partners
 - Multiple resources for parent access and/or use
 - Don’t talk over the heads of your parent community
 - Parent outreach initiatives
 - Access to handicap facilities logistics, etc.

District Standard II-

- Communication

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- Flyers
- Newsletters
- E-mail
- Twitter/Facebook
- E-letter
- Student Handbook
- Parent Handbook
- Tele-parent
- Public Television Station
- Newspaper articles
- Keeping track of district data
- Multiple languages
- Hearing and vision support
- Promote positive communication
- Implement research-based programs
- Understandable language
- Effective training of parent mentors/ambassadors
- Survey
- Planning/Visioning sessions with parents
- Changes/Plan of action based on data- establish training plan based on perceived needs
- Volunteer training based on parent-identified interests and skills
- Parents assist with planning and decision-making; make them an integral part of implementation

VII. Learning From Each Other: Rockdale County P.I.C. Presentation

April Fallon from Rockdale County featured a workshop which centered on how powerful parents are and their strategic plan to accomplish this. She displayed a picture of an enormous crowd and asked how many people invite parents out and have this kind of attendance. She then emphasized when parents become more engaged, students succeed. The U.S Department of Education defines parental involvement as parent and educators participating in “regular two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities.” Based on research no matter what a family’s income or background is, with involved parents’ students are more likely to earn higher test scores, be promoted, attend school regularly, graduate and have better social and behavior skills. She mentioned some barriers parents have when it comes to actually attending school events such as driving without a license. However, having a district webinar could be another effective method to engage parents who are unable to attend meetings because they’ll still be able to



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access the information. Parents may want to be more involved, but they lack the time, interest or don't know how to be more involved. She listed some best practices parents can use to help them become more engaged and apart of the school environment. That environment needs to be warm and supportive, inviting parents to join in and assist wherever they can. She stated that this information is being shared with the administrators in Rockdale County and encouraged Parent Involvement Coordinators to do the same in their effort to get everyone on board with increasing parental involvement. In closing, she shared some information about community outreach programs and ways to award schools and parents who have exhibited outstanding accomplishments.

VIII. Closing

Participants were asked to complete their evaluations and voting ballots, and submit them in the appropriate boxes. The dates for the State Title I Conference were announced, which are June 14-17, 2010 in Atlanta, GA. Participants were encouraged to consult with their schools and districts as to whether they'll be able to attend. Parent Involvement Coordinators can look forward to another Fall and Spring meeting. There will be additional training in September 2010 for new Parent Involvement Coordinators. The minutes, resources and presentations featured today, will be uploaded electronically to the Google Group and sent out to participants for all Parent Involvement Coordinators to access and use for implementation. Michelle Tarbuton thanked everyone for attending and certificates were distributed to all in attendance.