Parents, the school year is nearly half over and there’s no doubt that you have been busy helping with homework, attending PTA meetings, watching student programs, and engaging with your child’s teachers at parent-teacher conferences.

As the father of two adult children who attended Georgia’s public schools, I remember how difficult it can be to get involved in your child’s education. Life is demanding and there is almost never enough time. When the excitement of back to school has worn off and the school day has become part of your regular routine, remember that being active in your child’s education is arguably the most important role a parent plays.

Parents set the tone for education and are their child’s best teacher. Therefore, I would like to commend you for all of the hard work you have been doing and remind you to remain a positive presence in your child’s life. I’m proud to say that I, along with the State Board of Education, celebrated and personally recognized parents during November, which was Parent Engagement Month. As we approach the winter break, I want to encourage you to keep challenging your children.

Many parents eagerly anticipate the day their teen graduates from high school, but that joy can be diminished quickly if your child is not prepared for the next step in his or her life. Parents play a major role in helping their teens map out post secondary plans, which could include but are not limited to attending a two-year college or four-year university. To assist with the planning, here are a few suggestions you can keep in mind as you begin the process:

- Identify your child’s career path
  Parents can help their children identify a career by supporting the development of their talents, skills, and interests. Children need guidance and support with making this important decision.

- You can never start too early
  You and your child can start planning for college as early as the sixth grade! Starting early gives the family an opportunity to make an informed decision instead of a rushed one.

- Tap into free resources
  There is so much free information available now about programs, colleges, and universities. Visit websites or talk to your school counselor about how to tap into what is available.

- Plan college tours
  This can be very time consuming and stressful, so make it fun by turning college tours in to family road trips. Ask questions while taking the tour and pay close attention to the college environment. Make sure to visit while students are there instead of when the campus is empty.

- Avoid scams
  Beware of potential scams that will not benefit your child, such as too good to be true scholarship guarantees, high cost college search agencies, and loans with upfront fees. If you suspect a scam, check with your school counselor.

To obtain more information about colleges, career planning and funding sources, visit www.gacollege411.org.
“In general, kids and teens who eat breakfast have more energy, do better in school, and eat healthier throughout the day.”

**Nutrition and Fitness:**

Learn how to keep your children healthy with the right food and exercise.

We all recognize the importance of good nutrition and exercise, but how do you feed a picky eater or encourage a child who hates playing sports to exercise? Here are some suggestions:

**How should I deal with a picky eater?**

Encourage your child to try different nutritious foods at each meal. You may have to present a food 10 to 15 times before they’ll try it. This is not uncommon. You shouldn’t cook special meals just for a picky eater, but do include something he or she likes in every meal. Look for new recipes with ingredients your child likes then invite them to go grocery shopping and cook meals with you.

**Why is breakfast so important?**

In general, kids and teens that eat breakfast have more energy, do better in school, and eat healthier throughout the day. Without breakfast, people can be irritable, restless, and tired. Choosing breakfast foods that are rich in whole grains, fiber, and protein may boost kids’ attention span, concentration, and memory so make time for breakfast.

- **In honor of Parent Engagement Month the Georgia Department of Education and the Georgia Parental Information Resource Center teamed up with Georgia Public Broadcasting to create GET INVOLVED video scenarios that capture real parents telling their real stories about ways to get involved. These videos are available in English and Spanish on the Parent Engagement Program’s website listed below.

- **Need to get involved yourself? Not sure what you can do? Check out our “Get Involved!” brochure that lists 15 different ways parents and families can get involved in their children’s education. The brochure is not age specific, so all parents can utilize this resource.**

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

http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_title.aspx?

PageReq=ParentEngagement

**Highlights: Parent Engagement Program**

The mission of the Georgia Department of Education’s Parent Engagement Program is to increase student achievement by engaging and empowering parents to become actively involved in their children’s education across all grade levels. While your local school and community is the best place to obtain information first, we are excited to inform you about the following events that recently took place to recognize the important role parents play in their children’s education:

- **November was Parent Engagement Month! Governor Perdue proclaimed November as Parent Engagement Month in Georgia to encourage parents to remain actively involved in the education of their children. Schools and districts planned numerous activities and celebrations in honor of parents throughout the month of November.**

- **On November 10, 2010 the State Board of Education unanimously signed Georgia’s first Resolution and Statement on Parent Engagement! These documents are the guiding foundation for local school officials to develop local school and district plans and policies, providing a framework for parent-school-community partnerships. This resolution was written by parents on the 2010 and 2011 Superintendent’s Parent Advisory Council, and it represents how parents can play an active role in the decision making process by being leaders in our school communities!**

- **Thursday, November 18, 2010 was National Parent Involvement Day! On this day, parents across the United States celebrated by acknowledging the importance of giving back to their child’s education and school. Also, State Superintendent of Schools, Brad Bryant, wrote a letter to Georgia’s parents thanking them for being involved.**

- **There is no better way to inspire parents to get involved then by sharing other parents’ real life stories. During November, the Parent Engagement Program was able to capture many GET INVOLVED moments by collecting stories from parents across the state that were submitted by local schools and districts.**

Brad Bryant, State Superintendent of Schools
December 15, 2010 ● Page 2 of 4
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Everyone gets bullied at some point in life, and it will most likely happen at school. If your child is being bullied, you can do some things to help stop it.

Bullying can come in many forms, including physical or emotional abuse, damage to a child’s property, spreading malicious rumors or forcing a child to do something he or she doesn’t want to do, said Sharon Gibson, a University of Georgia Cooperative Extension family and consumer science educator. A consistently bullied student can have emotional problems and perform poorly in school. And if the bullying is physical, it can take its toll on the student’s body.

Don’t ignore the problem. And don’t tell your child to ignore the bully. “When a child is bullied, he or she may feel angry, helpless or deserted,” Gibson said. “If that child tells a teacher or parent about the bullying, he or she needs to know it’s not tattling and that speaking about it was the right thing.”

Calm down

Parents can become angry when they first learn their child is being bullied. “Parents should stay calm and first find out if their child is in any immediate physical danger,” she said.

The most important thing to do is find a way to stop the bullying. Ask for a meeting with the principal of your child’s school.

The principal can then determine if and when to bring the child’s teacher or teachers into the conversation. “Again, parents should stay calm. If they’re not, this could set up a defensive action by school officials,” she said. “Parents should be proactive, but not demanding before they learn more about the situation at school.”

Teachers and principals are trained to deal with issues like bullying, she said. So voice your concerns, but listen, too. Most schools have an action plan to deal with bully situations. If the school doesn’t, offer to help develop a plan.

The child doing the bullying should be given a chance to reform. The child who is being bullied should have an adult contact at school to tell if the bullying doesn’t stop. This person could be the teacher or a paraprofessional.

Help teachers help

A lot is going on in the average classroom, Gibson said. Teachers or paraprofessionals can have their hands full all day. It can be tough to concentrate on one child.

Gibson recommends setting up a code word for the bullied child to use when he or she feels uncomfortable or in danger due to bullying. This will inform the adult without the child having to raise a hand or bring much attention. The adult can then investigate or even witness the bullying.

Follow up with the school to make sure steps are in place to keep your child from being bullied. At home, encourage good social skills and behavior. Help your child find his or her talents, and praise accomplishments.

“A confident, assertive child is less likely to be the target of a bully,” Gibson said.

How much sleep does your child need?

- 12 Months Old: 16 - 18 hours per day
- 1-3 Years Old: 14 - 16 hours per day
- 3-5 Years Old: 12 - 14 hours per day
- 6-12 Years Old: 10 - 12 hours per day
- 12-18 Years Old: 9 - 10 hours per day

The key is to find the right balance between academics and family time. By allowing your children to stay up past curfew and sleep in late, you can help them maintain their energy levels for the day.

Reward good behavior by allowing your children to stay up past curfew and sleep in late.

Take your children to the local library to check out books of their choice to read over the winter break. Talk to them daily and ask them to tell you what they are enjoying about it.

Play games as a family, rent movies that you all want to see and enjoy your time together!
Develop and encourage friendships with positive role models, mentors or older sibling(s). Get to know your child’s friends and their parents. Know where your child is at all times. Encourage independence by reinforcing that being different is okay. Embrace diversity by helping your child strive to have friends of all races, backgrounds, and social classes. Praise and teach assertiveness. Stress that negative consequences come along with certain behaviors.

It’s not enough to hope that your child will know how to handle a situation when faced with negative peer pressure. It is your obligation not only to prepare your child, but pay close attention to him or her so you will notice pattern changes. If you suspect that your child is being negatively influenced by their peers, you can take steps to resolve the issue by:

- Communicating
- Initiating practice sessions on how to deal with different situations
- Nurturing strong self-esteem
- Instilling strong values, standards and morals
- Planning family time and social events
- BEING THERE

If you need additional support in helping your child cope with peer pressure, you can also seek assistance from the school counselor, social worker or Parent Involvement Coordinator.

Peer Pressure: What Parents Should Know...

Negative peer pressure is something everyone has to deal with at some point. Is your child prepared?