**TOOLS AND STRATEGIES
for
SCHOOL STAKEHOLDER TEAMS**

TO **IMPACT** GRADUATION & CAREER READINESS
EFFORTS for STUDENTS WITH and WITHOUT DISABILITIES

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Section One: C.A.F.E.s—What, Why, Who, & How

A Quick Look at the Origin of C.A.F.E.s

In 2009, the Georgia Department of Education, Division for Special Education Services and Supports, began piloting the C.A.F.E. Dialogue Process with school-based stakeholder teams. From the beginning, the goal was to engage educators, principals, families, and community members in an innovative, multifaceted effort to increase engagement around critical education issues, and, in particular, to increase high school graduation rates while accelerating college and career readiness opportunities for students with disabilities, as well as for other students at risk of dropping out or not graduating from high school.

These local pilots worked in concert with the Georgia Department of Education's successful GraduateFIRST program, a statewide initiative of the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG), funded by the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). GraduateFIRST continues to be improved and scaled up as a part of Georgia's new SPDG for 2012-2017.

The GraduateFIRST school-based teams not only led schoolwide efforts to increase graduation rates and improve career readiness but also identified, supported, and monitored the progress of students needing intensive interventions. These internal school teams, with the leadership of the statewide collaboration coaches, collected and analyzed data in more than 400 schools from 2007 to 2012, following up with data-driven, site-specific improvement plans. Technical assistance for this work was provided by the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities.

But the story behind declining graduation rates goes much deeper than what can be mined from a data dig. More than 60 percent of Georgia students receiving special education services also receive Title I supports such as free or reduced lunch. Poverty can lead to myriad social and economic pressures on families, pressures that can impact a student's performance on a daily basis. The C.A.F.E. school, home, and community engagement teams work in concert with a school's other efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities, as well as for other students at risk academically.

C.A.F.E.s: The Big Picture

School, business, and community C.A.F.E. participants range from school principals to members of the clergy, to local shop owners, to grandmothers. The demographic reviews of the students and families served by the six pilot schools in the C.A.F.E. initiative revealed that a large percentage lived below the poverty level, and, consequently, needed critical assistance and support beyond what the school could provide. By using a national facilitation model on teamwork, Georgia's C.A.F.E.s soon learned how to develop a shared vision regarding processes and practices that could enhance efforts to support students outside the classroom as well as in the classroom.

C.A.F.E. teams deliver an array of effective processes and practices, including

- Volunteer support coaches in classroom advisement groups;
- Facilitator-led sessions to map out life goals for students;
- A career readiness curriculum that includes local business partners with emphasis on developing soft skills, which are personal attributes that enhance an individual's interactions, job performance, and career prospects; and
- Communitywide public awareness campaigns to eliminate barriers to graduation such as high absenteeism.

Creating an effective home, school, and community stakeholder process is a powerful reminder of what can happen when people step out of their traditional rows and move into circles.

Rationale for Engaging Families and Communities in the Work

While intuition and/or common sense may tell us that the interest in and respect for education held by those adults who are significant in the lives of students is important, both research and experience prove this to be true.

The impact of family engagement on school success is supported by more than 35 years of national research. In his research report, "Parent Involvement and Student Achievement: A Meta-Analysis," (December 2005), William H. Jeynes reviewed 77 studies comprising more than 300,000 students and concluded that parent engagement is associated with higher student achievement outcomes. Moreover, this correlation holds not only for the overall student population, but for minority students as well. This meta-analysis is just one of many studies corroborating the results of family and community engagement on which Georgia's C.A.F.E. Dialogue Process is based. Additional research studies are available on the Harvard Family Research Project website.

The results experienced after Manchester High School, a rural school in the southwest part of Georgia, initiated C.A.F.E.s demonstrates the impact of this process on student achievement. One hundred percent of Manchester High School students qualified for a free or reduced cost lunch under federal guidelines. Three years after becoming a part of GraduateFIRST and creating an active C.A.F.E. stakeholder group, the graduation rate at Manchester High School increased from 60% to 94.6% for general education students and from 28% to 63% for students with disabilities. See Appendix E for more about family engagement in Georgia and Appendix F for more about specific Georgia C.A.F.E.s.

Structures that Support the C.A.F.E. Dialogue Process

State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded a five-year State Personnel Development Grant that provided Georgia with the financial resources to reform and improve its systems for personnel preparation and professional development in the areas of early intervention, dropout prevention, and transition services, in order to improve outcomes, with an emphasis on graduation rates, for students with disabilities.

GraduateFIRST

Georgia's statewide initiative, GraduateFIRST, employs a data-driven intervention framework developed by the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD) to address issues that negatively impact school completion rates. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) partnered with the national center to train local, school-based teams and team leaders in the diagnosis of the root causes of students dropping out of school. School teams conducted extensive data digs, followed by the development of site-specific action plans that included specific strategies for improving the graduation rates for groups of identified students. NDPC-SD works in conjunction with the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, the organization that produced the research materials on family engagement used by Georgia's C.A.F.E. Dialogue teams.

Collaboration Coaches

Collaboration coaches, funded by the SPDG, assist school teams with data collection and analysis, provide resources on evidence-based strategies, support the implementation of selected strategies, and work to build team leader capacity through continuous communication and coaching.

IDEA Partnership

The C.A.F.E. Dialogue Process is predicated on the IDEA Partnership's *Dialogue Guide, Facilitator Handbook*, published by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education in 2005, and on *Communities of Practice: A New Approach to Solving Education Problems*. Both publications are available at www.ideapartnership.org.

Shared Meaning

Using evidence-based materials and valid data, C.A.F.E. members share perspectives and common concerns and work together to establish goals and find solutions. They collaborate to tear down territorial barriers and create shared meaning in order to act in concert with one another.

IDEA Partnership's Dialogues and Collections

The IDEA Partnership, funded by the National Association of State Special Education Directors and OSEP, offers a variety of tools to increase understanding about critical issues such as the Common Core State Standards, assessment, secondary transition, and Response to Intervention. Members of the Partnership participate in work sessions to develop sets of

reaction questions on various topics, as well as sets of application questions for brainstorming ideas about ways to move forward on these critical issues.

Georgia's C.A.F.E. Dialogue on Dropout Prevention

A statewide stakeholder team worked with the IDEA Partnership to compose reaction and application questions for a Georgia dialogue on dropout prevention. The questions were based on evidence from research showing that families are a necessary component of preventing students from dropping out of school. Questions from administrators, teachers, and parents from across the state provide a consistent dialogue process methodology that can be replicated in each C.A.F.E.

Family and Community Engagement

Georgia's C.A.F.E.s. establish shared responsibility among schools, community members, agencies, and organizations committed to reaching out to engage families in education, including encouraging families to support their children's learning and development in active and meaningful ways.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see Figure 1) can be effective in helping to understand the different points of entry for families and community members who comprise C.A.F.E. teams. In addition, the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) standards provide a research-based outline for engaging families (see Figure 2).

SELF-ACTUALIZATION

SELF-ESTEEM:
achievement, mastery
recognition, respect

BELONGING – LOVE:
friends, family, spouse

SAFETY: security, stability, freedom from fear

PHYSIOLOGICAL: food, water, shelter, warmth

Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Figure 2. PTA Standards

[Appendix A](#) provides additional information about the National PTA standards.

An Adaptive Means of Problem Solving

In their groundbreaking article "The Work of Leadership" (*Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1997), Heifetz and Laurie identify the principles of leading adaptive change:

- Getting on the balcony (to observe what's going on in an organization and mobilize for change)
- Identifying the adaptive challenge (to determine necessary changes in values, beliefs, roles)
- Regulating distress (to provide impetus for change without giving in to uncertainty, frustration, or anxiety)
- Maintaining disciplined attention (to focus on collective solutions by understanding others' assumptions)
- Giving the work back to the people (to allow people to solve their own problems)
- Protecting the voices of leadership from below (to encourage all involved to speak openly and take responsibility)

The work of the C.A.F.E. team is predicated on an adaptive approach. C.A.F.E. teams work collectively to examine the data in order to develop actions to curb negative attitudes and develop positive school, home, and community collaborations. C.A.F.E.s also allow a diverse group of thinkers to consider multidirectional solutions to issues while looking at the big picture and at how all the different parts of that picture fit together. Many students identified as

needing support, for example, also share underlying commonalities that are difficult, if not impossible, to address during the school day, but that can be positively impacted through a wrap-around approach that involves school, home, and community. Finally, C.A.F.E. teams provide school and community stakeholders with opportunities to solve their own problems through dialogue and shared responsibility.

C.A.F.E. slogan painted on sidewalk at Upson-Lee High School in Thomaston-Upson County

Section Two: Getting Started

An Overview of the Process

A facilitator assists the C.A.F.E. stakeholder team in developing a shared meaning on issues identified through vetted research, the school's GraduateFIRST team's data dig, and fellow team members' responses to the Dialogue questions. Teams typically examine factors such as absenteeism, discipline, and/or evidence of the engagement level of the school climate. Most importantly, the C.A.F.E. looks at social, economic, and other outside influences that can adversely impact a student's wellbeing and ultimate academic success.

Adhering to an adaptive means of problem solving, a C.A.F.E. works to

- Respect each team member's contributions;
- Listen to each opinion;
- Develop a shared meaning;
- Establish a long term vision;
- Map out local resources and seek out needed members;
- Understand the value of an outside facilitator coming in and leading the team in identifying and launching sustainable initiatives and/or activities;
- Set goals;
- Examine attitudes, perceptions, and plans for needed adjustments; and
- Deliver a public relations victory early on in the process to help shape community attitudes and build excitement for success.

For a C.A.F.E. to be successful it is essential that

- A trained facilitator guides the work in the beginning months,
- A school district parent mentor or family leader keeps the team moving forward and provides training and support for parents,
- Parents of students being targeted for improvement serve as members on the C.A.F.E. team,
- The team creates a sense of urgency to raise awareness quickly, and
- The principal of the school supports the C.A.F.E. 100%.

Recruitment/Commitment

It is important to recruit schools whose principals will commit to do the following:

- Attend all C.A.F.E. meetings—The principal's presence emphasizes the importance of the C.A.F.E. to all staff, families, students, and community members.
- Run interference—If there are bureaucratic hurdles or local practices that block the progress of C.A.F.E. initiatives, the principal should strive to eliminate those barriers.
- Keep the C.A.F.E. viable—Just as the principal strives to eliminate hurdles in the larger context, s/he must also reduce hurdles inside the work group by providing reality checks. Especially important is screening for what is legal, what is related to targeted funding, and what actually addresses identified needs and values.
- Speak positively about the C.A.F.E.—Outside of C.A.F.E. meetings, the principal should show regard for the C.A.F.E., its members, and its work.
- Assure the actions that are agreed on by the C.A.F.E. team and that are within the purview of the principal are accomplished.

It is also important to recruit C.A.F.E. members who will commit to

- Making time for the C.A.F.E. meetings and volunteer work;
- Honoring confidentiality, respect, leadership, and teamwork in the C.A.F.E.;
- Supporting the vision for the school that is determined by the C.A.F.E.; and
- Promoting family and community engagement in the school process.

In order to recruit the right C.A.F.E. members, it is important to provide stakeholders with valid reasons for committing to the C.A.F.E. process; for example:

- Businesses—Increased graduation rates result in a larger pool of skilled employees. Strong schools also help increase home sales and attract new business to the area.
- Members of the faith community—A C.A.F.E. expands outreach to new families.
- Family members—Participating as equal and valued participants in the discussion increases opportunities to understand the bigger picture and to have an impact.
- Postsecondary administrators—A C.A.F.E. provides a significant way to impact potential postsecondary students and influence their success before they leave high school.
- School administration—A C.A.F.E. builds circles of support for assisting students in need.
- Teachers/staff—A C.A.F.E. provides a voice for school personnel and allows them to impact school culture and collaborate with others on issues that are too big to handle alone.

Parents As Partners

Knowing that critical information for student improvement also needs to come from the families of the identified students needing more support, C.A.F.E.s invited parents of students targeted by GraduateFIRST to get involved.

These family members offered needed insight from personal experience. One C.A.F.E. acted on a mother's story about her daughter's academic struggles and lack of positive connection to anything at school. This mother indicated a need for more after school activities, in addition to sports and chorus, to engage students such as her daughter and provide them with a reason to go to school. As a result, the C.A.F.E. team found volunteers to run additional after school activities; and, within a few months, the principal reported the school was full of students until 6 pm each weekday. In addition, the 9th grade principal now makes sure every freshman is signed up for at least one extra-curricular activity.

Schools always need parent leaders who are willing to be part of educational councils, assume leadership positions, or take on other responsibilities; however, as students rise through the grades, this kind of parent involvement tends to decrease. In addition, many parents of children who have been identified as being "at risk," who experience academic challenges, or who struggle with attendance or behavior do not feel welcome at their children's schools. These are the very parents C.A.F.E. teams need to engage if they are to comprehend fully the multiple factors impacting struggling learners.

Important Tips for Engaging Parents in the C.A.F.E. Process

1. Some parents who have been recruited for a C.A.F.E. may not initially feel comfortable attending a school meeting where administrators and community leaders are present. Therefore, it is important for the C.A.F.E. leader to explain and/or clarify any generally agreed on or cultural expectations for the C.A.F.E. meetings such as appropriate dress, arriving on time, etc.

2. Often, parents involved in C.A.F.E.s are not able to afford any extra expenses that might be required to attend meetings; so C.A.F.E. organizers should take care to determine whether parents need transportation to the school or meeting location, as well as whether they may need childcare in order to attend the meetings. It is important to remember that many

C.A.F.E. members, including teachers, ministers, or business owners, are at the table as part of their job responsibilities; but parents are usually volunteers.

3. For many parents, this may be their first positive opportunity to sit across from a principal and share their ideas; so C.A.F.E. organizers should explain to the parents in advance that C.A.F.E. meetings are not for the purpose of talking about or solving the problems of their individual children. Rather they should try to focus on the big picture and the school's targeted issues such as the declining graduation rate. If problems arise during a meeting, the facilitator should steer the conversation away from a specific parent's child or personal issues; however, all team members need to be patient as parents become comfortable with the process.

4. All C.A.F.E. members should refer to one another by first names at meetings. This establishes and supports the value of all team members' contributions to the C.A.F.E. Some school administrators or leaders, however, may prefer to continue more formal salutations outside of C.A.F.E. meetings. This needs to be determined and communicated to everyone when establishing the processes and procedures for the C.A.F.E.

Finalizing the Team Prior to the First Meeting

Since C.A.F.E. membership should reflect local needs and talents, the composition of each C.A.F.E. team will be unique to that C.A.F.E. In general, however, a C.A.F.E. should include school administrators, postsecondary faculty, community members (e.g., business, government), representatives from the faith community, and parents or family members who are or could be impacted by the C.A.F.E.

While the size of a C.A.F.E. team may vary, those that experience the most success generally have from 12 to 14 members. As the work of a C.A.F.E. progresses, the number of members can be increased, and the team may decide to add members whose specific expertise is needed. Regardless, it is critical that the majority of the C.A.F.E. team members commit to serving for a minimum of one year.

When selecting members for a C.A.F.E. team, consider the following:

- Always include the principal in discussions regarding team selection.
- A Parent Mentor, or someone else on the staff who can regularly connect with families,

can be an important asset to the team.

- Think beyond persons who fill traditional leadership roles when selecting C.A.F.E. members.
- Look for members who can offer fresh insights to help solve old problems.
- Be sure to include members who influence students and families being targeted in a variety of areas (e.g., clergy or coaches in recreation programs).
- Take care to balance the team composition to reflect the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the school population.
- Finally, include a member of the GraduateFIRST team, whenever possible, to help connect the GraduateFIRST school team's focus on academics and the C.A.F.E. team's focus on family and community.

C.A.F.E. Facilitators

Valuing all team members equally is one key to a successful C.A.F.E., so it is not wise for the principal to lead C.A.F.E. meetings. Georgia C.A.F.E. teams have successfully used facilitators from outside the school district. These trained facilitators can keep the tone of meetings neutral and keep the discussion on topic. In addition, they play an essential role in helping the team examine and/or question assumptions, find common ground and/or reach consensus, reflect on the C.A.F.E. process, and take action.

As a result of the diverse make up of a C.A.F.E., a variety of perspectives may be brought to the table at C.A.F.E. meetings. The facilitator understands and conveys to team members the importance of listening to one another thoughtfully, supporting each other, and acting together to find solutions and initiate change.

In addition, the facilitator works with the team to set ground rules for C.A.F.E. meetings; and, if necessary, the facilitator redirects members who do not comply with these agreed upon rules, employing humor or a light touch whenever possible to avoid embarrassing any member of the team.

Facilitation Strategies

According to the *Dialogue Guide's Facilitator Handbook* created by the IDEA Partnership, facilitation strategies are used to keep participants on task and involved.

Facilitation strategies include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Communicating Respect**—Use individual names, make eye contact, and give credit to participants' ideas. Recording participants' viewpoints on chart paper for all to see demonstrates the value of the various viewpoints, provides a means for visual reflection, and helps summarize the discussion.

- **Listening Actively**—Arrange the meetings so group members face each other as well as the facilitator. With this arrangement, both the facilitator and the C.A.F.E. members can provide cues such as eye contact, positive facial expressions, and body language to show that they are listening to one another.

- **Clarifying Points**—Define or explain technical terms or jargon that may not be familiar to all members, rephrase statements that may be confusing, and/or ask members to elaborate when statements are vague or incomplete.

- **Summarizing and Paraphrasing**—Periodically restate, or invite team members to restate, major dialogue points so that participants can reflect on the discussion. This strategy works well when the discussion appears to linger on a question that has been answered or when the group is off task and needs to reorient.

A trained facilitator is most crucial in the early meetings of any C.A.F.E.; however, these facilitation strategies can be successfully employed by any member of a C.A.F.E. team later.

Preparing for the First C.A.F.E. Meeting

The Georgia C.A.F.E.s meet at various times of the day, depending on what the team decides is most convenient for the team members. A meeting date, time, and location should be determined enough in advance for members to plan and arrange to attend. Typically, C.A.F.E.s meet at the school to make it easier for the principal and school personnel to attend.

Once a date, time, and location have been determined, a "save-the-date" email should be sent to each person who has committed to participating in the C.A.F.E. In addition, several weeks before the first meeting, a meeting invitation should be sent to each participant. A sample invitation can be found in Appendix B.

A synthesis of the research on the impact of family engagement should be included with this invitation. C.A.F.E. members should read this synthesis prior to the meeting; and, at the beginning of the first meeting, the facilitator should ensure that all members agree with the article's premise that there is a positive relationship between family engagement and improved academic achievement. Appendix C includes this synthesis.

Section Three: The Meeting

An Eight-Step Process for Effective Change

John R. Kotter, author of *Our iceberg is Melting* and *Leading Change*, developed an eight-step process for leading change that has proven applicable to the C.A.F.E. process. The chart below shows how these eight steps guided Georgia's C.A.F.E. team process.

Kotter's Eight Steps	Georgia's C.A.F.E. Team Process
1. Create a sense of urgency	GraduateFIRST teams conducted extensive data drills in the major areas identified by the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD) as critical markers, and then C.A.F.E. leaders used this data to create a sense of urgency.
2. Pull together the guiding team	Schools assembled a group that included school and community stakeholders, including people who had the power to create change in the school.
3. Develop the change vision and strategy	C.A.F.E. teams followed a set dialogue process to react to a series of questions, applied personal knowledge to an additional set of questions, and then used this information to create a change vision.
4. Communicate for understanding and buy in	C.A.F.E. teams communicated the vision, along with the data showing the urgency for action, to the school, homes and families, and the community. They took the graduation message everywhere from parades to festivals to prayer breakfasts, to public television. Most important, they gained the buy in of the students and faculty.
5. Empower others to act	The principal/school leadership empowered the C.A.F.E. team to act on behalf of the school. A sense of trust was established in the C.A.F.E. so that all persons could contribute and nontraditional ideas could be discussed safely.
6. Produce short-term wins	The C.A.F.E. team focused on the school's assets rather than its deficits. It looked for ways to remove obstacles to change and set short term goals that could be met within the first 30 days.
7. Don't let up	The C.A.F.E. team maintained the sense of urgency through continuous communication.
8. Create a new culture and make it stick	The C.A.F.E. team kept bringing its work back to the data to assess, evaluate, celebrate small victories, plan more, and act faster as the process became enculturated.

Figure 3. Georgia's C.A.F.E. Team Process

Creating a Sense of Urgency

A sense of urgency should be created the first day the C.A.F.E. Dialogue team meets by giving the team a look at the data on graduation rates, absenteeism, and/or other areas impacting student success. It is important at this point in the process that the team not spend a large amount of time digging into every point of data; rather, the team should work to understand the big picture in terms of what is going on in the school. A one page data sheet with four major data factors generally works best. When introducing data on graduation, discipline, etc., to the team, questions and varied opinions can arise; however, it is critical to stay on task and leave the questions/discussion for later in the process.

Introducing school data in this initial step may prove difficult for some principals and administrators. One Georgia principal explained that he felt as if he were "airing the school's dirty laundry to people he really didn't know." Yet once this principal and the C.A.F.E. team members became engaged in the process, he soon realized that the participants at the table did not want to point fingers in blame—they wanted to raise their hands to help.

Georgia's experience revealed that every team needed the "WOW" factor to get the community engaged in a long-term change effort; and creating a sense of urgency through an initial, cursory examination of relevant data was the key.

Pulling Together the Guiding Team

Putting together a team to create change requires much more than assembling stakeholders together in a room. To work together effectively, a C.A.F.E. team must build trust among its members. In addition, an effective team accesses the various influences and talents of its members in order to utilize these assets to effect change in the school.

Although some C.A.F.E. participants may cringe at the mention of ice breakers, the Georgia C.A.F.E. Dialogue teams found that this type of opening activity done properly exposes team members to different sides of people they may feel they already know, promotes more meaningful interaction among team members, begins the process of developing trust within the group, and initiates the process of assessing the influences and talents of the C.A.F.E. members. To be most effective, ice breakers should be led by trained facilitators. Two ice breakers to consider are "The Elevator Speech" and "The Talent Search."

"The Elevator Speech" – Ask each team member to prepare a message short enough to be delivered in the time it takes to travel from one floor to the next on an elevator. Each speech should include the participant's name; the participant's job, role, important characteristic(s), etc., that make him/her who s/he is; and the participant's primary reason or motivation for agreeing to join the C.A.F.E. team. Each team member then delivers his/her elevator speech to

the group. If the facilitator feels that C.A.F.E. team members may be reluctant to introduce themselves, participants may introduce themselves (elevator speech information) to a partner before each partner introduces the other to the group.

"The Talent Search" – Ask each participant to introduce him- or herself and relate a talent or interest outside of his or her current role or reason for being on the C.A.F.E. team. The facilitator charts the talents, interests, and connections, etc.; tallies the information during a break; and presents the results to the team at the end of the session. This talent chart becomes a group artifact that can be referred to when planning communication strategies, looking for specific skills to meet the needs of the team, etc. Figure 4 shows an example of a talent chart.

	Member's Positions	Talents/Interests
_____ School C.A.F.E. Team Talent Search August 1, 2013 Facilitator: Sue Smith	Principal Counselor/Graduation Coach Special Education Teacher Parent Mentor Mom of recent dropout Dad of football player failing English Chamber President General Education Teacher Team Chair Technical College President Ministers (2) Hardware Store Owner Newspaper Editor Grandmother raising two high school aged grandchildren County Sheriff High School Football Coach	4 educators with a combined 70 years of classroom experience 10 lifelong community residents 1 conference planner with 25 years of experience 2 writers & 1 photographer 3 computer techies 8 members of local civic groups 4 people with leadership positions in the community 10 members with at least one child in the school system 1 nationally known Christian motivational speaker 2 volunteers in Big Brothers 1 with 10 years experience working for Medicaid 2 sports coaches 3 Sunday school teachers 1 schoolbus driver 1 former state beauty pageant winner

Figure 4. Sample C.A.F.E. Team Members Talent Chart

Developing the Change Vision and Strategy

The success of a C.A.F.E. is predicated on working together toward a common vision, so arriving at that vision through a timely and systemic process is essential. Working together with the IDEA Partnership and a statewide stakeholder group, Georgia developed a set of reaction and application questions for C.A.F.E.s to use to establish the dialogue process and begin the collaborative journey toward meaningful change (see Figure 5).

Georgia C.A.F.E. Questions
Reaction Questions
1. What attracted you to this C.A.F.E. dialogue?   2. What does family engagement mean to you?   From the family perspective, what are some of the common views of engagement?   From the school perspective, what are some of the common views of engagement?   From the student/youth perspective, what are some of the common views of engagement?   3. Does it mean different things in different cultures?   How can we be sensitive to these differences?   4. How will we agree to use the word "engagement" from this point forward in our dialogue?   5. Researchers have shown that all parents can have an influence on their child(ren)'s academic success regardless of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and educational background for students of all ages.   Can you share your experience related to family engagement in reaction to the statement above?   6. In your experience, are there stakeholders who may not want to engage with schools?   Please describe an example that illustrates this point.   7. In your experience, are there any stakeholders who may not need to be engaged with schools?   Please describe an example that speaks to this point.   8. In your view, who is responsible for promoting engagement?   Who might agree/disagree with this view?   9. In your experience, what groups report being successfully engaged in family-school collaboration?   What can we learn from this?   10. What does it mean to communicate high expectations?   11. Consider the following excerpt from our source document. "While some parents are informed about some things some of the time by some teachers in some schools, some families still feel 'lucky' to be informed about or asked to participated in activities with their children." What is your reaction to this statement?

Application Questions
1. What are some of the most successful strategies for engaging families in support of their child(ren)'s academic success? What might this look like for older students? 2. What does a comprehensive approach to family engagement look like across the grade span? What does family engagement look like in high school? What does family engagement look like in middle school? What does family engagement look like in elementary school? What does family engagement look like in preschool? Do you have other thoughts on this? 3. The research says that all parents, regardless of income, education level, race/ethnicity, or cultural background, can have a positive impact on student achievement by engaging with their child(ren)'s school. What types of activities might build the capacity for staff to work with all families? What types of activities might create a school culture that considers the needs and assets of all families? What types of activities would build the family capacity to work with educators? If these activities do not exist, who should develop them? 4. What kinds of interactions allow the development of a core set of values with respect and dignity for all families? 5. What are some observable behaviors that make families more/less invited in schools? 6. What is the role of the community in promoting deeper family engagement? 7. Several stakeholders have reported a "no news is good news" approach to engagement between family and school. Some feel this comes about because schools/families have taken/assumed separate roles. Others feel that families retreat because they're uncomfortable or don't feel competent in educational aspects of their child's lives. Are there other explanations? What are some ways to approach each of these perspectives on common behaviors observed in family-school interactions? 8. If there was a trust relationship between the school and family . . . How could student attendance be encouraged? How could more productive discipline strategies be developed? How might expectations be jointly communicated? 9. What are some specific examples of how families can support learning at home? 10. Several stakeholders stated the need to promote more understanding and interaction between families and staff members that move beyond the typical kinds of engagement. What are some ways to support families as they try out new behaviors? What are some ways to support or coach staff through these changes?

Figure 5. Georgia C.A.F.E. Questions

The C.A.F.E. facilitator leads the dialogue process by asking the questions. Facilitators may change the order of the questions and may direct the questions to the team members in any

order. Dialogues do not permit cross talk between team members; however, the facilitator may expand or go deeper on a question by asking follow-up questions.

C.A.F.E. dialogues are grounded in research from the National Dropout Prevention Center – Network (NDPC/N). Reaction questions are designed to determine where each member stands on issues; and, as such, disagreements or even hostilities may surface. Facilitators moderate these tensions, ensure that all team members sit and listen respectfully, and enforce the "no cross talk" expectation so that all questions can be answered. Following the reaction questions, the facilitator asks the application questions to allow members to offer ideas about how they might resolve some of the issues that surfaced during the earlier part of the dialogue. Again, cross talk is prohibited.

The main points of the dialogue should be recorded, preferably by someone other than the facilitator. Following the dialogue, the facilitator refers to these dialogue discussion points and circles common or recurring themes from the dialogue. Next, the C.A.F.E. team uses these common themes to determine a vision of where they want the school to be.

The challenge of determining a common vision with common goals often involves moving from dreams and wishes to a focus. Facilitators can invite C.A.F.E. members to participate in C.A.F.E. goal setting by first invoking their dreams and wishes. Ask, "If you could wave a magic wand and have your wishes come true, what would you wish for as an outcome of our C.A.F.E.?" Facilitators can then channel these dreams and wishes to help formulate the overall vision.

Once the C.A.F.E. has established its vision, the team needs to work together to focus the work toward this vision. The facilitator may begin by brainstorming with the team to determine why students are at risk. The facilitator records all responses before any discussion takes place, and then leads an examination of the data in relation to the responses of the group.

All C.A.F.E. goals must be based on the school's data. The major roles of the C.A.F.E. team are to target populations, focus energies, and solve the right problems to improve student outcomes. Consequently, the C.A.F.E. needs to connect the team's responses to the data.

First, the team examines and screens the data and responses to determine any problems or root causes that are outside the purview of the C.A.F.E. For example, generational poverty is not a problem that can readily be addressed through a C.A.F.E. These external issues are then eliminated from the work of the C.A.F.E.

Next, data that reveal issues that can be addressed in direct and meaningful ways within the context of the C.A.F.E. are identified to provide the starting point for setting short and long term goals to work toward in order for the school to realize its established vision.

For both short and long term goal setting, the team can follow the SMART Goals format to ensure that the established focus is maintained and results are quantifiable. SMART Goals are designed to meet the following criteria:

Specific	State the desired outcome or performance goal based on the data, making sure that the goal leads to a single outcome or result.
Measurable	Include a performance measure for which data has been or can be collected. When possible, include a baseline along with the desired targets.
Attainable	Determine targets that are challenging and also doable. Make sure to include both interim and longer term targets in order to chart progress.
Relevant	Make sure the goals, data, and specific targets all align with the focus of the C.A.F.E. and the predetermined priorities of the school and the community.
Time-oriented	Include specific dates for achieving the desired results, as well as milestones or progress checkpoints.

Communicating for Understanding and Buy In

Successful C.A.F.E.s extend their influence beyond their members and their meetings to reach other families and community members, and they do this by making connections through effective communication. Together, the C.A.F.E. members determine who should receive its message and how this can be accomplished.

First, the C.A.F.E. determines the content of the message. What is at stake? What are the relevant issues: Is it attendance? Graduation rate? Performance in mathematics?

Once the content of the message has been determined, the method of communication must be established. For the content to reach its desired audience in a meaningful way, the methodology must be focused and memorable. A C.A.F.E. may choose to brand its message in much the same way a company brands its products. Branding may include creating a catchy phrase or slogan. For example, one C.A.F.E. used the motto "Determine your Fate – Graduate!" A C.A.F.E. may also elect to design a logo so that any communication from the C.A.F.E. can have instant recognition in the community whenever/wherever the logo appears. Appendix D contains examples of C.A.F.E. promotional materials.

When the content and the method of communication have been established, the group next decides on the means of communication. What vehicles will be used to get the message out? Do families and community members have the technology to access email or different forms of social media such as Facebook or Twitter? What means or multiple means of communication

will reach the most families and community members: Posters in local businesses? School newsletters? Messages from the pulpit? Phone trees? Each C.A.F.E. must decide the best means to reach the greatest number of families and community members and then formulate an action plan to make this happen.

Finally, the C.A.F.E. team must decide what to do with the results of their communication efforts. When will C.A.F.E. members report back to the group about progress in getting the message out? How will they review the results of the communication? How will they assess the impact of the communication efforts on meeting the C.A.F.E.'s established goals?

Empowering Others to Act

As C.A.F.E. members move from meeting to action, it is crucial that every member be an active participant. The group can inspire and ensure individual responsibility by motivating one another. By delineating activities and action steps, responsibilities, resources, and timelines at the end of every meeting, C.A.F.E. facilitators can make sure each member has a role to play, understands his/her individual responsibilities, and knows what steps to take to meet these responsibilities.

- Activities/Action Steps – What activity will support the initiative? What steps need to be taken to complete this activity? Facilitators should take care to ensure activities are both innovative and appropriate for various motivation levels.

- Responsibilities – Who will do the work? Because many people will be involved in carrying out the work, it is important to assign and list specific tasks and activities to one or more team members up front. This helps create ownership and sets the expectations for participation that will ensure the work gets done.

- Resources – What is currently available? What/who else is needed to carry out the activity?

- Timeline – What will be done by when and how will progress be communicated?

Each C.A.F.E. member should leave every meeting with a personal plan of action that specifies what s/he will accomplish as a fully participating member of the team. This makes commitment visible and real. In addition, the facilitator should remind the team that public relations and visibility are on-going tasks for each team member.

In addition to empowering C.A.F.E. team members to act, the team should take steps to involve and empower other families and community entities in addressing the C.A.F.E. goals. One way

to accomplish this is by mapping community resources. This type of asset building can often defuse or combat existing or potential barriers or negatives that can prevent or delay the success of the C.A.F.E. objectives. This mapping is a whole group activity that can be conducted over one or two meetings of the team to allow team members to take stock of what's available in the community. Figure 6 provides an example of a potential mapping chart for this activity.

What resources (human and material) do we need to accomplish our goals?	Who in the community can provide these human resources: knowledge and skills?	Where in the community can we obtain the material resources we need to accomplish our goals?

Figure 6. Mapping Community Resources

Producing Short-Term Wins

C.A.F.E. members, as well as the public watching the C.A.F.E.'s efforts, need to see success almost immediately. Once the team has established its goals, the facilitator should lead the members in screening these goals to determine at least one accomplishment, benchmark, or progress check that can be achieved within the first 30 days. Getting the word out to the community about the C.A.F.E. via the slogan and/or logo could, for example, be achieved in a relatively short time.

Other short-term wins can be realized by taking time at each meeting to recognize the percentage of members who have completed their individual action plans. Remember, however, to recognize percentages rather than people to avoid embarrassing individuals who may not have completed their action plans.

Progress toward a longer term goal can also be recognized as a short-term win. For example, if attendance is an issue, positive changes in absences and tardies can be recognized at each C.A.F.E. meeting.

Finally, every team should develop a plan for monitoring and acknowledging small, incremental successes toward the larger team goals and should decide how wins should be celebrated. Will the successes be displayed on a sign or banner? Will they be announced via email, social media, or the news media? Will they be celebrated with coffee and donuts or other treats at team meetings?

Not Letting Up

Change is difficult, and it is easy for a C.A.F.E. team or individual team members to become discouraged. When this occurs, it is important for the facilitator to direct the team back to its reason for being. Re-examining or reflecting on the data may accomplish this task. Taking time to tell or retell the individual stories that brought participants to the group or specific stories about students that can benefit from the work of the C.A.F.E. can often re-energize a team as well.

Occasionally, the facilitator should ask, "How is our C.A.F.E. work going?" to check the pulse of the group. Responses can be recorded first, and then the team members can discuss and explain the overall feelings of the group.

If some members appear to be losing energy, the C.A.F.E. might create a board of successful stories. Distribute sticky notes to all team members and ask them to write "plus" comments and then stick these comments on a poster board with the heading "SUCCESS." The facilitator can then read the comments aloud and affirm all that is going right with the C.A.F.E.

Creating a New Culture and Making It Stick

The changes initiated by the C.A.F.E. will only make a lasting difference if they are embedded in the way a school operates over time. Consequently, it is important to reflect on and communicate how the work of the C.A.F.E aligns with a school's overall vision and improvement plan frequently.

Sustainability can also be achieved through accountability and continuous monitoring. The C.A.F.E. team's accountability plan should delineate when and how the C.A.F.E. process and outcomes will be assessed. Assessment data should be collected at regular intervals, but the team needs to decide whether this will be quarterly, two times per year, etc. Data collection times are often dependent upon other factors, including but not limited to, when the data are available.

The team also needs to determine which data to collect. Collectable data include

- Measurable data directly related to the SMART Goals, such as absences, standardized test data, etc.;

- Anecdotal data that conveys the personal impact of the C.A.F.E.;
- Perception data; and
- Process data related to the internal functioning of the C.A.F.E.

C.A.F.E.s should also look for ways to realize benefits from unexpected goal-related outcomes. When the work of the C.A.F.E. yields a positive, but unexpected, outcome or achievement, the team needs to assess this outcome/achievement to determine whether it provides the basis for a new or expanded goal. The team can address the following questions to make this determination.

1. What occurred that we did not expect?
2. How does this promote one or more of our goals?
3. Can this be further developed to enhance the impact of the C.A.F.E.?
4. If we address this, can it be integrated into our current plan or do we need to make a new plan?
5. Would the amount of time and effort required to act on this be a reasonable addition to the work we have already planned?

Important Points to Remember

1. Communicate between school, home, and the community by jump starting an awareness campaign to build understanding around dropout and graduation rates and then leverage this to enhance the C.A.F.E.'s work to support students.

2. Map school, community, and family resources and identify intersections that will lead to more focused planning to find solutions for student success.

3. Sustain the work through an ongoing, comprehensive plan that is led by school, home, and community and that has expected, measurable outcomes.

4. Embed all initiatives into the school's ongoing technical/academic work, as well as in the district's strategic plan, to make the work sustainable.

Appendices

Appendix A: PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships

STANDARD 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.

STANDARD 2:   COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY
Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way meaningful communication about student learning.

STANDARD 3:   SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS
Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and health development both at home and at school and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

STANDARD 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.

STANDARD 5:   SHARING POWER
Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.

STANDARD 6:   COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY
Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

National Parent Teacher Association. (2001). *National standards for parent/family involvement programs*. Chicago, ILL: Author.

Appendix B: Sample Meeting Invitation

CONGRATULATIONS

Ms. Leader, principal of Success High School, is pleased to invite you to the first meeting of the school's Circle of Adults Focusing on Education (C.A.F.E.) Dialogue team. Together with other family, school, and community members, our team will focus on dropout prevention at our school.

    DATE:

    TIME:

    PLACE:

    RSVP:

A C.A.F.E. is a collaborative stakeholder team that will be working to find common ground on issues facing the students at our school, as well as on resolutions to these issues that will improve student achievement.

This consensus-building process combines knowledge from the inside track of real-life family experiences, the day-to-day experiences of educators, the decision-making know-how of administrators, and the big picture viewpoint of community members.

Please join us in our work to support our students.

Appendix C: A Synthesis of the Research on Family Engagement

Family Engagement Overview

Today's call for families to become more involved in their children's education both at home and at school is not new. For decades, federal programs such as Head Start, Follow Through, Chapter One/Title One, and special education have mandated that parents/families be closely involved. Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) has shown positive effects on student achievement at the middle school level. Unfortunately, in many cases there is no partnership between home and school.

Family Engagement is Needed

Some schools and teachers have not made significant progress in reaching out to families. While some parents are informed about some things some of the time by some teachers in some schools, some families still feel "lucky" to be informed about or asked to participate in activities with their children. In addition, some schools and communities do not fully understand the problems parents and families encounter and the importance of reaching out to them in order to build the kind of relationships that engage parents as true, active partners early in their children's education. Clark (1993) found that the way children spent their time at home is the strongest predictor of school success. Home learning time activities such as homework, reading, and using the dictionary are common among high achievers.

Schools and school districts, which are successfully involving families, began by responding to the qualities, characteristics, and needs of the parents in order to overcome the barriers that interfere with communication. These barriers include parents' levels of 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.

Steps to Effective Family Engagement Programs (Henderson and Mapp (2002)

1. Recognize that all parents, regardless of income, education 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, focus efforts to engage

families on developing trusting relationships, 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 (Mapp, 2004).

Benefits of Family Engagement

The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has identified the following benefits of family engagement in education when parents are involved:

- Students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents' education levels.
- Students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and complete homework more consistently.
- Students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior.
- Students have higher graduation rates and greater enrollment rates in postsecondary education.

Different types of parent/family involvement produce different gains. To have long-lasting gains for students, parent involvement activities must be well planned, inclusive, and comprehensive.

Educators hold higher expectations of students whose parents collaborate with the teacher. They also hold higher opinions of those parents in programs that are designed to involve parents in full partnerships.

Student achievement for disadvantaged children not only improves, it can reach levels that are standard for middle class children. In addition, the children who are farthest behind make the greatest gains.

Children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better when parents and professionals collaborate to bridge the gap between the different cultures.

Students are more likely to fall behind in academic performance if their parents do not participate in school events, develop a working relationship with their child's educators, or keep up with what is happening in their child's school.

The benefits of involving parents are not confined to the early years—there are significant gains at all ages and grade levels. Junior and senior high school students whose parents remain involved make better transitions, maintain the quality of their work, and develop realistic plans

for their future. Students whose parents are not involved, on the other hand, are more likely to drop out of school.

The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is able to create a home environment that encourages learning; communicates high, yet reasonable, expectations for their children's achievement and future careers; and becomes involved in the student's education at school and in the community (Schargel and Smink, 2001, pp. 52-54.)

Clark, R. M. (1993). Homework-focused parenting practices that positively affect students' achievement. In N. F. Chavkin (Ed.), *Families and schools in a pluralistic society* (pp. 85-105). Albany, NY: State University of New York.

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.

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Appendix D: Examples of C.A.F.E. Promotional Materials
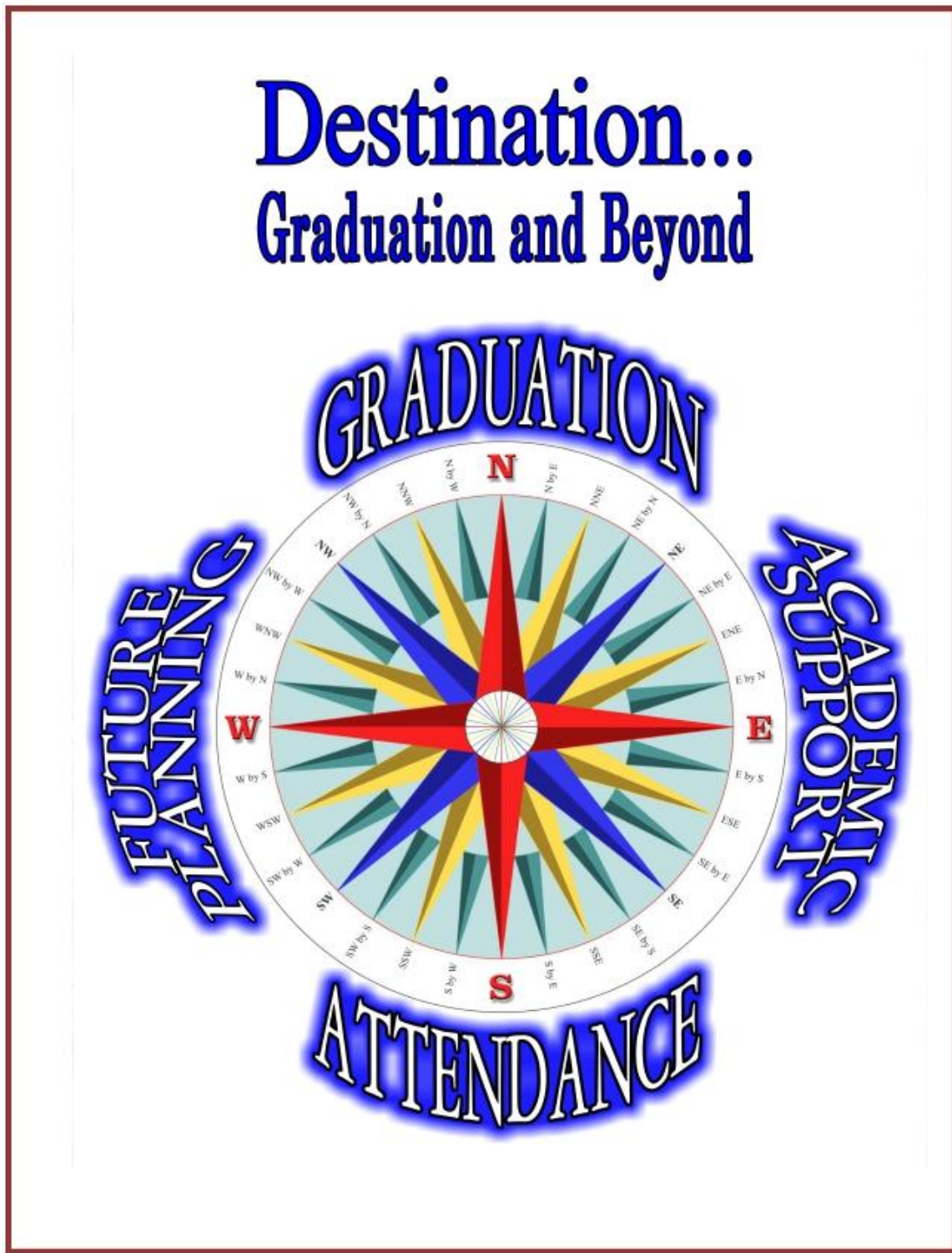
WE ARE WAYNE COUNTY !

Our Destination...
Graduation and Beyond

The Importance of Regular School Attendance

It's a fact that students who attend school regularly learn more and are more successful in school than students who do not. Parents who make regular school attendance a priority also are helping their children learn to accept responsibility. And that's an important lesson for a successful life.

Attendance patterns are formed early in life. Students who miss school miss out on carefully planned sequences of instruction. They miss out on active learning experiences and class participation. They miss out on the opportunity to ask questions. They are more likely to fall behind. And they are more likely to drop out.

Why Your Child Should Make Attendance a Priority

- Dropouts were more than twice as likely than high school graduates to slip into poverty in a single year and three times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed...

- Dropouts are more than *eight* times as likely to be in jail or prison as high school graduates.

- Dropouts are four times less likely to volunteer than college graduates, twice less likely to vote or participate in community projects, and represent only 3% of actively engaged citizens in the U.S. today.

- Dropouts are four times more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system.

- In 2010–2011, Georgia had 61,500 dropouts; "the lost lifetime earnings in Georgia for that class of dropouts alone will total nearly $16 billion."

What Parents can do.

1. Let your child know that you expect him/her to attend school every day. Explain that, just as you have a job, it's his/her job to go to school and learn.
2. Set a time for doing homework each evening and a time for going to bed. Unfinished homework and too little sleep are common reasons why parents hear the words, "I don't feel good," on school mornings.
3. Get involved with your child's school. Check attendance and grades regularly. When he/she sees you taking an interest he/she will understand that school is important.
(The Parent Institute 2003)

Please feel free to contact your child's adviser whenever you have questions.

Other important contacts:
Wayne County High School – (912) 427–1088
Jav Brinson – Principal – jbrinson@wayne.k12.ga.us

For Additional Parent Resources contact:

April Lee – Parent Mentor SPED – alee@wayne.k12.ga.us

Every 26 seconds a High School Student drops out of school!!

86% of Prison Inmates do NOT have a high school

More males drop out everyday than females

1 in every 4 students will NEVER complete high school

Don't be a statistic!
Stay in SCHOOL !!

Appendix E: Family Engagement in Georgia

Georgia Family Engagement Strategies

Strategy 1: Embed sustainable family, school, and community engagement initiatives into school improvement work to increase student achievement.

Strategy 2: Scaffold communication between home, school, and community through strategic communication planning, training, and collaborative activities that meet the cultural needs of families, educators, and community members.

Strategy 3: Build capacity and leadership by activating the National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships and targeting leadership opportunities for parents of the students being identified for improvement.

Georgia Family Engagement Initiatives

The Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership is an 11-year family/school/community initiative led by the Georgia Department of Education. More than 100 parents, each raising a child with a disability, work for approximately 90 local school districts in Georgia as team members for increasing effective communication and improving student results. Parent Mentors are trained in embedding family engagement into achievement work; student-led IEPs; cultural competency; and Futures Planning, including person-centered planning and MAPs.

Activities, stories, links, and information on school, family, and community partnerships are available on the Parent Mentor website at www.parentmentors.org. Two published toolkits on the work of the GaPMP, produced by the Southeast Regional Resource Center (SERRC), are also available on this website.

GaPMP partners with Georgia's Parent Training Information Center (PTI), Parent to Parent of Georgia (www.p2pga.org), and works nationally with the IDEA Partnership in association with the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD).

360 – Degrees of Family Engagement is a Georgia Department of Education collaborative plan that uses the Crosswalk for Parent Programs to assist professional family engagement specialists in Georgia in developing a full circle plan to execute sustainable family policies and programs to impact student achievement. The state collaborative model involves partners from Pre-K to postsecondary in a synergistic evaluation of current actions taking place in

schools/districts in order to determine their effectiveness and to devise new ideas to facilitate family engagement.

Appendix F: Georgia C.A.F.E.s

Haralson County Middle School

According to the Haralson County Middle (HCMS) school principal, who is also the 2013 MetLife/GASSP Georgia Middle School Principal of the Year, the HCMS C.A.F.E. has focused on reaching out to marginalized segments of the community and helping parents of at-risk students become more engaged in their child(ren)'s education. They recruit parents of at-risk students to serve on the committee both because they tend to have a greater understanding of the challenges families face and because they tend to take the work of the C.A.F.E. very seriously since this is often the first time they have been asked to serve in such a role.

Through the C.A.F.E., Haralson County Middle School developed several initiatives, including:

Coming Home Tours – Teachers ride an afternoon bus route to get a firsthand look at the conditions many of the students live in without disrespecting the basic human dignity of the families.

HCMS Road Show – School faculty take laptop computers into the housing projects, community buildings, and other outside locations in Haralson County to meet parents where they are and help them gain Power School access. They meet with parents, answer questions, and establish relationships with parents who did not previously have access to the school. This program expanded to the HS last year, and now the school sets up a laptop station at many of their on-site events as well.

Club 52 - The C.A.F.E. also supports Club 52, which is essentially a group of at-risk students participating in the GraduateFIRST Program. These selected, at-risk 8th graders have changes made to their educational program based on achievement data throughout the year, and they are supported with regular check-ins and rewards for progress.

Manchester High School

Through a major push from the state-initiated C.A.F.E. Dialogue team problem-solving model, Manchester High School, nestled in a rural farming community of 22,000, increased its graduation rate for general education students from 60 percent to 94.6 percent in less than four years. In addition, the graduation rate for students with disabilities increased from 28 percent to 63 percent. Moreover, this high school, once trapped in federal Needs Improvement status, started making Adequate Yearly Progress under federal guidelines after the C.A.F.E. began its work.

These gains in student achievement occurred after a Georgia high school principal stepped outside his comfort zone and invited community and family stakeholders into his building to see first-hand the data on declining test scores, high absenteeism, and low graduation rates. Not only did he invite them into the building, he also took the next, crucial step and asked for their help.

Georgia's State Personnel Development Grant's (SPDG) GraduateFIRST initiative anchored Manchester's success. This five-year initiative partnered highly-qualified GraduateFIRST collaboration coaches with more than 140 schools, including Manchester, willing to do the intense work of data drills and strategy sessions and to implement research-based best practices, specifically those from the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD). Manchester, however, took the work a step further by building a family, school, and community team to help resolve the many issues around student support.

Various factors contributed to the significant improvement in graduation rates in Georgia's SPDG over the five years of the grant, but Manchester High School, where 100 percent of the students receive Title 1 free and reduced lunch, gives most of the credit to its unique team of C.A.F.E. leaders.

The principal of Manchester High School during this time identified his C.A.F.E. team and its dialogue process, developed by the IDEA Partnership, as the conduit responsible for the change. He explained that tossing old school patterns of communication and culture aside and replacing them with an invitation to the community to come into the school and see the blemishes, led to a team of new players, new ideas, and new resources. The C.A.F.E. team immediately experienced success as a result of using proven school improvement tools such as thorough data drills and complete transparency.

Manchester, as well as other C.A.F.E. schools, went beyond traditional school communication methods and delivered information by scaffolding communication in various mediums, frequencies, and delivery methods to adapt to changing and diverse school audiences. C.A.F.E. teams, such as the one at Manchester, created "equal access to information" for many who had not previously had it. In Manchester, for example, the 30-plus area churches became part of the school improvement process by working with families in their congregations on their responsibility to get students to class and by offering loyal volunteers to mentor students in the school.

Georgia's experience reveals that critical factors for successful teams include

- A principal/leader who believes in the process and is willing to stick with it;

- A trained facilitator who can support the team process; and
- A seasoned Parent Mentor who is trusted by both his/her community and the school partners and who can do the day-to-day work to keep the process moving.

In short, success depends upon getting the right people to the table at the right time.

Resources

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