



The Georgia Department of Education, Division for Special Education
State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG)
Family Engagement

Circle of Adults Focusing on Education (C.A.F.E.)

What is a C.A.F.E.?

A C.A.F.E., (*Circle of Adults Focusing on Education*), is a collaborative stakeholder team at the local school and/or school system level working to find shared meaning and solutions that focus on ways to engage families on education issues that will improve student achievement, particularly for students with disabilities and/or at risk of not graduating. This collaborative stakeholder team is comprised of family/educator/community members that combine knowledge from the inside track of real-life family experiences combined with educator know-how and topped off with community experience and resources.

Beginning with vetted, research-based materials and valid data; the C.A.F.E. members share views and common concerns to ultimately lead to a shared solution. Georgia's C.A.F.E. DIALOGUES are structured around the IDEA Partnership's Dialogue process developed by the national IDEA Partnership, an initiative supported by the US Department of Education and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. Georgia's C.A.F.E. DIALOGUES not only use the IDEA Partnership's nationally-recognized problem solving and shared work model but it trains and supports family members on the C.A.F.E. teams who typically are not involved in school improvement decision making.

What is a Mini-C.A.F.E.?

Taking the successful model described above, the Mini-C.A.F.E exhilarates the process to assist your new team to identify a goal that can be accomplished in six months that will ignite future activities.

How did CA.F.E.s Get Started?

Former State Superintendent Kathy Cox and the GaDOE family engagement team, with the support of the state PTA, created the C.A.F.E. concept in the production of a training family engagement video with Georgia Public Broadcast in 2006. The video features six Georgia parents in vignettes based on the Family Engagement National Standards.

In order to provide consistency and quality in local stakeholder work, C.A.F.E.s adopted a facilitation process developed by the IDEA Partnership, an innovative national project funded by the US Department of Education that brings state agencies and more than 55 national organizations together through shared work and learning. The Partnership's Dialogue process is a systematic communication application synergizing stakeholders to work on complex issues and develop shared meaning. A facilitator leads the C.A.F.E. utilizing the IDEA Partnership's "Dialogue Guide, Facilitator Handbook," published by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 2005." The Dialogue Guide and an additional resource, "Communities of Practice. A New Approach to Solving Complex Education Problems" is available for download at www.ideapartnership.org. or by contacting the IDEA Partnership.





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C.A.F.E. is a logical steps to national IDEA Dialogues!

IDEA Partnership sees the C.A.F.E. model as a natural stepping stone to implement its Dialogue Model on the local level. National Dialogues created by state and national level education partners allow varied opinion to come together and collaborate on national laws, particularly with IDEA 2004 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2004. The goal is to tear down territorial silos in national and state agencies and organizations and create shared meaning so to act in concert. To read more about Dialogues created by stakeholders on national regulations and policies, go to www.ideapartnership.org.

Training and supporting nontraditional family members in school leadership

Georgia's C.A.F.E. DIALOGUE is unique in that they not only use the IDEA Partnership method to bring stakeholders together under a proven problem solving model but train and support family members who are not typically engaged in school improvement decision making. The strategy is to train and support family team members of the students being targeting in the school improvement issue. These adults truly understand all sides of the complexity of the issues at hand. While the IDEA Partnership is successful in bringing together educators, state agency personnel, policy makers and *professional* family leaders, they quickly partnered with GaDOE to find ways to hear the "family stories" in local continuous improvement by identifying and supporting a new kind of parent in the decision making process for school system improvement.

GaDOE Announces C.A.F.E. DIALOGUE Pilots for Dropout Prevention

Georgia's State Personnel Development Grant, (SPDG) aimed at reducing dropout, is leading ongoing the dropout prevention C.A.F.E. DIALOGUE in three high schools as part of its work with the **National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities at Clemson University**. A document produced through federal research and published by the **National Dropout Prevention Center Network** in 2008 is the basis of the shared work in the C.A.F.E. DIALOGUE pilots. Statewide SPDG stakeholder members worked with the IDEA Partnership, also a SPDG partner, to understand the Dialogue process and then to develop reaction and application questions that reflect what is important for persons in the field and families. Meriwether, Bibb and Elbert County School Systems are leading the pilots as part of their SPDG team work. To learn more about the work of the SPDG and what is happening with C.A.F.E. teams go to the GraduateFirst website. <http://graduatefirst.com>

The goal in Georgia is - not just to look at school needs and answer them with traditional programs - but to meet these challenging issues with *all* the assets in a community, including the families most impacted.

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