



**Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council Meeting  
Title I Parent Meeting  
January 5, 2011**

**I. Introduction and Welcome**

Michelle Tarbutton, Parent Engagement Program Manager introduced Brad Bryant, State Superintendent of Schools, Dr. John D. Barge, State Superintendent of Schools-Elect and Dr. Mary Sue Murray, State Board of Education Member to the Parent Advisory Council. Superintendent Bryant expressed his gratitude for the meeting taking place during the transition of leadership rather than afterwards. He also commended all of the parents who were present for the signing of the resolution on parent engagement. Dr. Mary Sue Murray talked about how Dr. Barge's focus is student-centered and the person next to the student is their parent. Superintendent Bryant then introduced Dr. Barge by first explaining about how he got to know him on the campaign trail and how he is an alumnus from Berry College. He expressed that Dr. Barge is someone who's stepped into this role, knowing that it is all about the children. He also has a great résumé with experience in the school. He is going to bring excellent ideas on how we can do things better on behalf of our children.

**II. Discussion with Superintendent-Elect Dr. John D. Barge**

Dr. Barge opened his comments by expressing that he is very passionate about education and family. He explained that he went to Berry College on a scholarship and Martha Berry understood education. The college's philosophy is head, heart and hands. He stated that if we don't teach our children how to use the knowledge we're imparting, they can't be successful. He gave his personal experience of how he and his siblings are different although they were all raised the same. He is the only one that went to college. He stated that education is the great equalizer and he saw it as his ticket. He stated that it doesn't matter what your background is, you still have the same opportunity to get an education. As an example, he mentioned that he and his wife read to their daughter everyday and when she went to school, she was able to read. There are certain things that parents have to teach their children, he exclaimed. He stated that he used to be an English teacher, Principal, Curriculum Director and has worked in urban, rural and suburban areas so he could have a better idea of what the needs of each were. Ultimately, it has prepared him for his future position as State Superintendent of Schools. He then announced that his main focus once in office will be communication because there has been a major lack of communication to local schools and districts from the Georgia Department of Education and he would like it to be less of a top-down approach. It's going to take everyone's help to accomplish this goal. He also stipulated that he wants the Georgia Department of Education to be a customer service friendly agency. People should be able to go onto our website and find what they are

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looking for and have answers to their questions. He closed this segment by opening the discussion up for questions. He asked everyone for feedback on these two questions:

- How can the Georgia Department of Education improve service during my first 90 days in office?
- How can the Georgia Department of Education improve communication during my first 90 days in office?

Some of the responses to these questions were:

- The GaDOE website is very hard to navigate and the search engine is not effective

One parent responded to this suggestion by stating that GaDOE offers alternative methods of research. If you call, your questions are answered. Ask DOE is an effective tool and the service you receive is also great.

Superintendent Bryant also responded to this suggestion by stating that many concerns and issues can be addressed at the local level so it would depend on the matter at hand.

Another parent asked how GaDOE staff is notified and how the department communicates with them. She stated that perhaps the same method could be used to disperse information to local schools and districts as well as parents.

Dr. Murray responded by stating that most of the information at the GaDOE is communicated via e-mail and every family and household does not have a computer, although most seem to have cell phones.

- When you issue tasks to schools superintendents and ask that they inform their local schools and districts, it would be good to follow up and make sure that information is being distributed
- When creating a new website it is always good to have usability testing as many companies do
- For people with limited access to computers or are not familiar with using them, perhaps it would be good to give them user-friendly instructions and information

Dr. Barge stated that he would like for the department to create a GaDOE Application, so people can have instant access to information via their phones and through other technological devices

- Are we doing enough to let parents know that we really want them to be involved because many parents are saying that they don't feel welcomed at their children's schools

Dr. Barge stated that this issue goes back to leadership. Leadership styles differ and there could be two schools with the same demographics across the street from each other but one has better parent participation than the other and it's because of that school's leadership and the message it sends to parents.

Michelle Tarbuton added that the family-friendly schools initiative will be presented and discussed at length later in this meeting and has to be bought into by the schools' leadership team in order for it to work.

Dr. Barge suggested that it would be a good idea to survey parents, teachers, administrators and community members to see if they are getting the message that's trying to be conveyed.

Donna Kosicki spoke about the synergy and energy of the transition committee. She stated that a lot of good things are happening and we are moving towards having One Voice, One Georgia. A large part of it is about qualitative data and the stage is being set. How do we accomplish the family-friendly atmosphere? We have to look at what is working.

Julie Hollis stated that each district needs to be different and as parent leaders, it's important that we recruit other parents. We have to support our local districts first.

Dr. Barge spoke about the paradigm shift and how many have the mentality of "it's the school's responsibility." There are certain areas that the school can't control and it's going to take a parent.

- Getting out and visiting will give Dr. Barge a better feel of what's going on in the schools and districts. Getting on the ground level will be good because you will see that some people are not ready for change

Superintendent Bryant responded to that statement by saying that Superintendent Kox did an excellent job of that considering that there are 180 local districts and over 1100 board members in the state of Georgia. Not all of them want parent engagement and although they say they are for the children, many are doing service to man. We have to start thinking about how we are going to get local control and change that dynamic.

- Having more parents in the school increases the level of accountability. Is there a way to directly reach parents from the state level and show them what parent engagement looks like?

Michelle Tarbuton stated that parents have the new parent engagement resolution as a reference guide and there is also a quarterly newsletter that is dispensed from the department to local schools and districts for parents that has a host of information and suggestions for parents to utilize.

Jennifer Falk stated that it's important for parents to know how to navigate the school system and we need to educate them on how to do this.

Patti Solomon responded by stating that the GaDOE is doing a lot of things that were mentioned throughout this segment of the meeting; however, it's not being communicated effectively. It's also important for us to remember Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, the poverty levels, and limitations of our families. Some parents are not ready to be leaders.

- It would be great if someone with a marketing background could start creating a more appealing advertisement about GaDOE and the services they provide. Marketing strategies will help parents remember certain things better. Sometimes we expect too much from parents and we still need to guide them.

Dr. Barge assessed that a communication plan is the greatest need and stated that council members will be presented with a plan at the next meeting so we can continue discussing this need. He thanked everyone for taking the time to be here and providing much needed feedback. Dr. Mary Sue Murray also collected all the feedback the parents wrote down so she could ensure that all the comments and suggestions from this segment of today's meeting would be shared with the Transition Advisory Committee.

### **III. Break**

### **IV. Longitudinal Data System**

Bob Swiggum, Chief Information Officer, continued the discussion about the Longitudinal Data System (LDS), which was introduced at the previous PAC meeting in October 2010. He provided a visual guide and examples of what the system's capabilities would be and demonstrated how teachers, administrators and parents would be able to utilize this new system. He explained that the system will have the capability to keep educational data on a child forever. The demo presented reflected Effingham County Schools but the names and information had been changed. He stated that the technique would be similar to a parent portal, which many are familiar with using. It would just contain more detailed information for parents to see. He also stated that each person from the superintendent to the principal, teacher and parent would have a different level of access. If your child transfers to another school in the state, the records from their previous school will go with them and be accessible immediately. Parents were given a color coded map of Georgia, which highlighted whether certain areas have implemented the LDS, are pending implementation, vendor not ready (software needs to be changed) or do not wish to use. He explained that in the green areas, administrators definitely have access to the LDS and they have to rely on the districts to roll out the system to their teachers and parents once they implement the system. The LDS is optional to use, so it is not mandatory that everyone implements it. He asked parents what they would like to see added or included in the LDS. Their responses were as follows:

- Weekly lesson plans
- Grade comparison with other students
- Consistency with other classes as an accountability tool
- Link for GACollege411

- A place for comments to justify poor grades (illness, death in family, etc.)

He asked what teachers would like to see added or included in the LDS. Their responses were as follows:

- Common Core
- Digital Content

In conclusion, he thanked everyone for their time and attention to this matter and asked that further suggestions be submitted to the parent engagement program. Work has not yet been started on the parent portal yet, but he will be relying on parent suggestions to help design the portal when ready. In preparation for this, Michelle asked parents to bring their suggestions to the next meeting about what they would like to see in the state parent portal.

## **V. Lunch**

## **VI. Georgia's Family-Friendly Partnership School Initiative**

Michelle Tarbutton and Julie Hollis featured a workshop that educated participants about the importance of making their schools family-friendly. They stated that Family-Friendly Partnership Schools is an initiative and virtual program created by the Georgia Department of Education and Georgia Parental Information and Resource Center to improve parent engagement by assisting schools with developing a more welcoming environment. Everyone was asked to take a survey that analyzed the level of family-friendliness and then participants volunteered to share the final results. Through the self-assessment, some participants realized that their school was not as welcoming as it could be while others were quite pleased. Michelle stressed that when parents don't feel welcome or ownership in the school, they are not going to be as supportive in the school or get as involved. Julie Hollis presented some statistics and research information about low income families not being able to provide the necessities for their children and how this often impacts their ability to get involved. There were four core beliefs mentioned: 1) Parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them; 2) All parents have the capacity to support their children's learning; 3) Parents and school staff should be equal partners and; 4) Responsibility for building partnerships between school and home rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders. After featuring this information, participants were asked to think about where their school is with being family-friendly. There are five categories that help indicate the type of school one has: 1) Building relationships; 2) Linking to learning; 3) Addressing differences; 4) Supporting advocacy and; 5) Sharing power. It was then mentioned that the Georgia Family-Friendly Partnership School Initiative is based on the National PTA for Family-School Partnerships that provides the framework for what schools should do to involve parents- it is what parents, schools and communities can do together to support student success.

Following the presentation, a virtual walk-through was given to the participants. The schools that were featured in the virtual program were a rural elementary school and an urban middle/high school. Michelle and Julie demonstrated how participants can navigate the program, going from room to room and get an idea of the many improvements they can make to their individual schools. They also showed them the many detailed features of the program and tips that they can take back to use. Michelle stated that many schools may not have the funds or budget to completely re-construct their school to be family-friendly, but perhaps they can start by

focusing on one room at a time. Everyone in attendance was given a personal copy of the program on a CD and Michelle also showed them where they could obtain additional materials and handouts from the Parent Engagement Program website. Parents were then asked what they thought about the tool and many reported that they would take it back to their schools and see if it could be implemented.

## **VII. Local Board Governance**

Clara Keith, Deputy Superintendent for Policy and External Affairs presented on Local School Board Governance and what parents need to know. She began by telling a personal story of why her father is her hero - because he believed in her and she continues to make him proud today. She asked everyone in attendance to answer the following questions by a show of hands:

- How many of you know your local board representatives?
- How many of you know all of your board members?
- How many of you have attended a local board meeting?
- How many of you believe that your local board is focused on student achievement?

She proceeded by stating that the purpose of Senate Bill (SB) 84 and Local Board Governance Standards is to improve student achievement. The Senate Bill makes it clear to everyone what the expectations are of local school boards. She gave an overview to participants of what's been done, where they are now and what is going to happen next. This timeline included the Senate Bill 84 being signed by Governor Purdue on 5-25-10, the adoption of the Local Board Governance on 10-14-10, and the adoption of the Local Board Governance standards on 11-10-10. She stated that Georgia is breaking new ground to ensure that its local school boards are the best in the nation and understand how to respond. It is the board's responsibility to set policy, but the schools and districts responsibility to implement those policies. She stated that there are many new and different requirements for local boards of education and their members, some of which differ depending on when the board member was elected. To assist local boards in deciphering all that is required, the GaDOE created and frequently updates a Local School Board Governance portlet on its rules webpage. She demonstrated how this information could be located on the website. Currently, they are in the process of adopting the Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest Policies which must be done and submitted to the GaDOE by February 8, 2011. The GaDOE and State Board of Education are also refining training requirements that will be based on the local board governance standards already adopted by the State Board. The actual program will be adopted by July 1, 2011. She asked participants the following questions:

- How can we educate parents about the new requirements for local boards?
- How can parents play a role in communicating with their local school boards?

Their responses were as follows:

- Provide a quick facts sheet or disclosure
- Use plain simple language and print the information in multiple languages
- Board and Community Relations Policy

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- Local Board Members can come to open house to introduce themselves

Superintendent Bryant responded to the last suggestion by stating that often times, parents try to get Local Board Members to solve their individual problems when they go into the school and that can create a problem. However, it would still be a good method for getting to know your Local Board Members.

Dr. Murray stated that the Local Board serves as a court, but the problem comes in when Local Board Members step into the role of administrators.

Donna Kosicki stated that PTA requires that all of its members attend a Local Board meeting.

Clara Keith thanked everyone for adding their input and suggestions on how parents can be educated about the new requirements for local boards. She welcomed further questions after the session.

### **VIII. Wrap-Up**

Michelle ended the meeting by recognizing Superintendent Bryant for his service to the Superintendent's PAC as this was his last meeting and the PAC members honored him with a round of applause. She then reminded PAC members about the final meeting on May 5, 2011 and their assignment to bring suggestions about what they would like to see in the state parent portal. Instructions about completing the travel reimbursement forms were given and everyone was informed that the minutes along with the picture would be sent to them via e-mail and available online within the next couple of weeks. Meeting adjourned.