# Improving Family and Community Engagement Through Sharing Data

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## Introduction

As data collection, analysis, and decision making expand on state and local levels, so does the expectation of effectively communicating data to the families of school children and their communities. Surveys indicate that people value receiving information on their schools (Owens & Peltier, 2002). They want to know how their schools are doing and are interested in receiving more detailed information (Owens & Peltier).

Data reporting can serve as a viable means of promoting family and community support and actions that increase student achievement. State educational agencies (SEAs) are increasingly expected to provide data to families and communities in ways that lead to enhanced understanding and action. Sharing data is an effective strategy that schools and districts can use to engage families and communities for school improvement (Data Quality Campaign, 2011; The Education Trust, 2004; Means, Padilla, Gallagher, & SRI International, 2010; Owens & Peltier, 2002; Taveras, Douwes, Johnson, Lee, & Caspe, 2010).

Below is a discussion of the procedure for identifying literature on the topic of sharing data, limitations regarding the literature review, the significance of family and community engagement, considerations and recommendations for sharing data with stakeholders, and related resources.

## Summary

It is clear that families and communities play key roles in student achievement and school improvement efforts. Across the nation, states are leading initiatives to improve communication and engagement with these stakeholders through effective data sharing.

## Key Points

- Maintaining close ties with family and community is recognized as one of five critical supports for school improvement (Bryk, 2010).

- Data sharing can help parents and families understand how their children are performing and where gaps exist in student achievement as well as guide them in taking appropriate action to support academic success (The Education Trust, 2004).

- Decision makers should consider taking steps to understand the needs, wants, barriers, and motivations of stakeholders; develop community or family action plans; create materials that are customized for recipients; and incorporate social marketing concepts into data dissemination practices (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2011; National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research, 2001; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2009).

## Procedure

To identify literature for studies on improving family and community engagement through the sharing of data, staff at the Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) conducted searches of EBSCO's Academic Search Elite database, the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and online search engines (i.e., Bing, Google, Google Scholar, and Yahoo). They used combinations of terms that included achievement, community engagement, data sharing, demographics, dissemination, family engagement, infographics, knowledge translation, performance, reports, results, scores, surveys, and tests. The initial search returned 23 resources spanning the past 12 years, only one of which focused specifically on the use of data to facilitate home-school communication and family/community engagement. A subsequent search using the terms data sharing, data use, families, parents, parent training combined with the Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" produced a wide array of more general resources that were then screened for information specific to the sharing of data with parents. This screening, review of bibliographies from screened resources, and search of Web sites of entities focused on family and community involvement such as the Harvard Family Research Project, and the National Policy Forum for Family, School, and Community Engagement, yielded 25 additional reports, newsletters, case studies, and Web sites addressing the sharing of data.

In addition, SECC staff contacted the states served by SEDL's Southeast and Texas Comprehensive Centers—Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas—to highlight state work in this area. Refer to the State Highlights section of this paper for information that was submitted by Alabama and Georgia.

## Limitations

It is important to note that only 1 of the 26 resources used in preparation of this paper was from a peer-reviewed journal. This article was a descriptive report of findings from a survey of parents and guardians in a single southwest state. Additional literature reviewed included 2 research syntheses; 2 articles from non-peer reviewed journals, primarily serving K–12 school administrators; 1 case study; and 1 report of findings from a U.S. Department of Education survey of a nationally representative sample of 529 school districts regarding how school staff use data systems to impact instruction.  The remaining documents included a collection of informational resources such as newsletters, blog posts, and practitioner commentaries on data use and sharing data with parents.

The focus of this briefing paper is on strategies and approaches to improve the sharing of data with family and community to foster improved engagement.  Despite the current emphasis in public education on testing, accountability, and data use, a focus on the sharing of this data in a way that is understandable and actionable for the lay person, especially parents, is new.  As such, little rigorous, empirical research is available that could provide results of specific methods and approaches to improving data sharing. Therefore, this briefing paper relies heavily on reports from practitioners regarding their thoughts about and successes and challenges in using data to promote increased parental and community involvement.

SECC staff identify limitations to assist clients and other stakeholders in making informed decisions with respect to the information presented. SECC does not endorse any strategies or programs featured in this paper.

## Significance of Family and Community Engagement

For more than 30 years, the evidence on the importance of engaging family to improve student achievement has been mounting. SEDL's fourth publication in the series, A New Wave of Evidence, provides a synthesis of 51 studies that clearly confirm the benefits to students' achievement when schools, families, and community groups work together (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).  "With several decades of research confirming that students perform better in school when their families are engaged in their learning, the field of family and community engagement is poised to engage in a new conversation about how school, family, and community partnerships fit into the educational landscape. At the heart of this issue is whether or not schools' and teachers' practices can engage family and community members in students' learning, and whether school-family-community partnerships translate into improved student motivation and achievement" (Sheldon, 2011, p. 1).

According to Weiss, Lopez, and Stark (2011), family engagement in education is characterized by families' ideas, beliefs, and practices for advancing their children's education coupled with the opportunities schools and districts provide to reach out and engage families in building student success. The authors also indicate that student benefits associated with effective family engagement include "improved school readiness, higher student achievement, better social skills and behavior, and increased likelihood of high school graduation" (p. 15).

Close ties with family and community are identified as one of five essential supports for school improvement according to a study conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. The study emphasizes that each support contributes equally to the school improvement effort and that the absence of any one support significantly diminishes results (Bryk, 2010). "The absence of vital ties [between schools, families and the community] is a problem; their presence is a multifaceted resource for improvement. The quality of these ties links directly to students' motivation and school participation and can provide a critical resource for classrooms" (Bryk, pp. 24–25). In conjunction with a coherent instructional guidance system, professional capacity of school faculty, a student-centered learning climate, and leadership that can drive change, stakeholder engagement is a necessary ingredient in the recipe for student success (Bryk).

## Emphasis on Data for Decision Making and Continuous Improvement

The use of data for school improvement has been adopted as one of the major education reform priorities of the U.S. Department of Education (Means et al., 2010). Since 2001, states, districts, and schools have significantly scaled up their data systems in order to track academic progress (Taveras et al., 2010).

Data-driven decision making can support schools and districts to facilitate more informed decision making, enhance overall school performance, and improve student achievement. Furthermore, it can help to engage family and community in the process of addressing achievement gaps, improving teaching and learning, and motivating students (Wayman, Stringfield, & Yakimowski, 2004). Data-driven decision making can also help districts maximize the use of limited funds for the greatest impact on student achievement (Wayman et al.).

The concept of data-driven decision making in education is not new. Measurement driven-instruction, site-based decision making, and strategic planning are all precursors to our current reform emphasis: standards-based accountability. In the present accountability climate, the use of data by districts and schools is significantly increased, as is the pressure to improve student test scores (Marsh, Pane, & Hamilton, 2006).

According to Marsh et al. (2006), Total Quality Management, Organizational Learning, and Continuous Improvement—successful practices from industry and manufacturing—serve as models for data-driven decision making in education. The authors stress that these practices "emphasize that organizational improvement is enhanced by responsiveness to various types of data" (p. 2).

Today, educators access multiple types of data including input data, such as student demographics; process data, such as data on the quality of instruction; outcome data, such as dropout rates or student test scores; and satisfaction data, such as opinions from teachers, students, parents, or the community (Marsh et al., 2006). Analysis of these data provides educators with the information necessary to support instructional decisions. Through a process of synthesizing and prioritizing this information, educators are able to address multiple concerns and determine appropriate courses of action in response to those concerns. "Once the decision to act has been made, new data can be collected to begin assessing the effectiveness of those actions" (Marsh et al., p.3). Taking the data beyond school walls and sharing it with parents and families offers the opportunity for valuable input and may be a way of engaging them in the decision-making process.

## Sharing Data to Engage Families and Communities

The potential value of data systems lies in the use of the information collected to improve outcomes for students. When effectively shared with families and community members, these data may influence the ways that families support their individual child's progress and impact communities' efforts to support education.

According to The Education Trust (2004), "Without data, you are just another person with an opinion" (p. 2). Data is the only way to communicate an accurate picture of our schools. We need more than stories, impressions, and the community grapevine to adequately portray the truth about student progress, teacher quality, and school climate. Data is useful to engage families and communities to improve education. It can help stakeholders understand where schools are doing well and where improvement is needed, providing direction for actions to improve schools. Data is also useful to engage families and communities in improving individual student progress. Data helps families to understand how their children are performing and where gaps exist in student achievement. Data also can be used to guide parents and families to take appropriate action to support the academic success of their individual child. Thus, state educational agencies must design effective methods of communicating data to families and the community at large and providing guidance and assistance to local educational agencies to do the same.

The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) underscores the importance of sharing data to empower parents and stresses that states have a responsibility "to provide parents with access to timely, useful data" (DQC, 2011, p.1). DQC tracks state progress toward developing longitudinal data systems and features state efforts to provide parents with access to data, such as the following:

- Eight states provide customized, role-based access to student-level data from their state longitudinal data system
- Other states (numbers below) provide parents with customized reports and information about their children:
  - 20 – "Growth reports (achievement over time)"
  - 18 – "Diagnostic reports (strengths and academic needs)"
  - 5 – "Student progress meeting college enrollment requirements"

- 4 – "Early warning reports (risk of failure or dropping out)"
- Twenty-nine states provide parents or students with training on how to access, analyze, and use data via online or printed material from SEAs, Web-based tutorials or courses from local agencies, on-site training from state agencies, and partnerships with higher education and nonprofit organizations.
  (DQC, 2011, p. 2)

The literature indicates that to be effective, data must be delivered in a way that leads to increased knowledge and informed action (Alderman et al., 2007; Barton & Coley, 2008/2009; DQC, 2011; The Education Trust, 2004; Wayman et al., 2004). Families and community members must be able to make the information their own and use the knowledge gained. This is most likely to be the result when information is of personal or social significance to the recipient. "Dissemination is an evidence-based craft whose bottom line, always, must be understandability and utilization" (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities [NICHCY], 2011, p. 2).

## Considerations in Communicating and Sharing Data

To ensure that information shared with families and communities is both useful and effective, decision makers should take time to define the target audience and determine their informational needs, understand the characteristics of successful dissemination efforts, and examine the various methods and tools available for disseminating information.

According to the NICHCY (2011), effective dissemination efforts share the following elements:

1. The information is provided by a trusted source.
2. Recipients are collaborators in the information dissemination and problem solving.
3. Components that engage and support the recipient in applying the information are included.
4. A strong user-oriented or social marketing perspective is used.
5. Content and format are modified for differences in need, culture, and context.

### Utilizing trusted sources

As government entities, state departments of education and school districts are widely accepted as trusted sources of data. When a lack of trust is a concern, efforts must be made by the SEA or LEA to gain trust. SEDL has extensive experience working both locally and nationally to assist educational organizations to gain trust and build positive relationships with families and the community.

Based on SEDL's experience in family engagement, staff have found that one way to gain trust is through the open and honest sharing of data. This opens the door to focused conversations on identified strengths and weaknesses as well as collaboration to devise efforts that address concerns and raise student achievement.

Another strategy of providing trusted sources for data dissemination is to partner with reliable and reputable individuals who are not employees of educational organizations. This strategy of changing or sharing the role of messenger helps to build trust and foster support. Trusted community members may be enlisted to assist educators in designing easy to understand data formats, assembling the target audience, and effectively delivering the data. These may include faith- and community-based organization leaders, civic organization officers, business leaders, and family members, such as parents or grandparents who are well known, respected, and active in their communities.

### Collaborating with target audiences

In addition to using trusted sources, collaborating with the target audience will increase the likelihood that the data will be understood and used. Families and community members can be included in the development of a dissemination plan to ensure that the data are presented in an understandable format. Key elements of the plan may include goals of the dissemination effort, objectives, target groups, content, medium of delivery, success factors, access and availability issues, and possible barriers (National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research, 2001; NICHCY, 2009). SEAs and LEAs may also choose to use their Title I parent advisory groups, school improvement council members, and other members of the target audience to review and suggest revisions to their data publications and presentations.

## Implementing engagement support efforts

SEDL's experience in family and community engagement indicates that one purpose of sharing data is to promote a better-informed public and encourage action that supports improved outcomes for students. Although data sharing is useful for identifying and defining an education issue, it will not lead to appropriate action without engagement and support. SEAs and LEAs have implemented engagement and support efforts such as the following:

- Collaborating to identify possible causes of problems
- Hosting data sharing forums in community settings
- Sharing in the actions that the SEA, LEA, or school is taking to address the problem
- Developing community or individual family action plans
- Asking for support from the community or individual families
- Sharing lists of supportive actions that a group or family might take
- Sponsoring follow-up meetings to share progress and results

## Incorporating social media techniques

State and local educational agency staff do not have to be marketing experts to incorporate social marketing concepts into their data dissemination practice. The Social Marketing National Excellence Collaborative sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2009) identified the following basic principles of social marketing:

1. Understand the audiences' needs, wants, barriers, and motivations.
2. Be clear on what you want target groups to do.
3. Offer something very appealing in return for behavioral changes.
4. Recognize the competition; the audience can always choose to do something else or nothing.
5. Realize that policies, rules, and laws can affect efforts to achieve social or behavioral change.

In addition to employing the above principles, decision makers should consider personalizing their communications to enhance effectiveness. Alderman et al. (2007) offer several examples of personalized data dissemination strategies, such as (a) employing various delivery methods; (b) using convenient dissemination sites (i.e., buses, self-service laundries, pharmacies, grocery stores, fast food restaurants, etc.); (c) modifying materials; (d) hosting one-to-one interactions (such as parent-teacher conferences); and (e) varying the levels of dissemination frequency.

Based on the aforementioned principles, effective social marketing is user-focused, and successful knowledge transfer efforts implement a consumer-based approach rather than a traditional, top-down hierarchical practice (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2009).  Other key considerations in sharing data are decisions regarding the content and format of communications and materials.

## Tailoring content and format

"Many consumers are at risk of information overload, or otherwise disinclined to make good use of publically reported information. Much remains to be done to make public reports accessible, understandable, and relevant" (James, 2012, p. 4). One way to accomplish these objectives is to employ delivery methods that the targeted audience uses frequently (i.e., cell phones, computers, etc.).

Providing information to families and communities in a variety of forms is an important strategy (NICHCY, 2009). However, selection of the most effective strategy depends on the characteristics of the target audience—age, education level, culture, socioeconomic factors, etc.  Information dissemination efforts are diverse and employ multiple methods of delivery, such as those detailed in Table 1.

| Table 1. Information Delivery Methods | |
|---|---|
| Blogs | PDFs |
| Brochures | Podcasts |
| Chats | Posters |
| Community forums | Presentations |
| Community newspapers | Print publications |
| E-mails | Radio announcements |
| E-newsletters | Social networking sites |
| E-mail lists | Television messages |
| Flyers | Videos |
| Group meetings | Web sites |
| Guest presentations | Webinars |
| Individual meetings | White papers |
| One-page infographics | |

## Presenting data clearly and effectively

### Terminology

Regardless of the delivery format, content should be presented in a clear manner. In addition, consideration should be given to the use of terminology (and the provision of definitions, if necessary) as well as the way that data is displayed. The ultimate goal is for families and community members to understand the data and take action to support student achievement. As such, transparency in terminology use and display of data are useful in promoting understanding of data.

Throughout the U.S., states use different terms and methods to report achievement levels and schoolwide performance. Some states identify schools as *low-performing* to *high-performing*, others issue a letter grade such as A–F, still others use terms such as *priority* or *outstanding*.  Stakeholders need a clear understanding of each state's terminology and methods.

States also differ in how they identify student achievement levels. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires states to identify at least three achievement levels; however, some states identify six or more levels. The Education Trust (2004) uses the terminology, *advanced*, *proficient*, *basic*, and *below basic* in its guide for parents and communities. The authors found that this fourth category "is very useful for identifying students who have not [achieved] even the basic level" (p. 14). Using clear language and categories for education data will help to increase understanding.

Barton and Coley (2008/2009) suggest that looking at the whole distribution of scores by percentiles is more informative than using cut scores. Cut scores are used to identify categories, such as pass/fail or low performing/moderately performing/high performing. Reporting that focuses on the cut point provides no information about progress of students who remain above or below the identified point (Barton & Coley). The authors suggest that calculating average scores for each quartile and tracking changes would provide an even stronger report, and add that, "When the results of standardized tests are reported in terms of average scores or the percentage reaching a particular cut point or level, students, parents, and even teachers are left pretty much in the dark about what, specifically, a student is able to do at any particular point" (p. 34).

In addition to considering the terminology and methods employed, decision makers should consider the use of graphic objects to aid in displaying data.

### Graphic Objects

There are various graphic objects for visually presenting data, including tables, charts, and graphs. However, each differs in its ability to convey certain types of data. Prior to selecting a graphic object, decision makers should take into account the amount and type of data in addition to the individual characteristics of the graphic object.

In Table 2, Visual Representations of Data, descriptions of graphic objects that are often used to present data are provided along with suggestions for their use.

| Table 2. Visual Representations of Data | |
|---|---|
| **Graphic Object** | **Description and Suggested Use** |
| Histogram | Histograms are used to display the frequency or proportion of cases that fall within defined intervals or columns. The bars on the histogram can be of varying width and typically display continuous data. |
| Bar Graph | Bar graphs are used to compare values across categories or to track changes over time. |
| Line Graph | Line graphs are used to display the relationship between two types of information. Line graphs can also be used to compare changes over the same time frame for more than one group. |
| Pie Chart | Pie charts are used to compare parts of a whole. They do not show changes over time. |

Note. Adapted by SEDL with permission from Using Graphs and Charts to Illustrate Quantitative Data, July 2008, *Evaluation Briefs, No. 12*, p. 2. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## Infographics

"Information graphics or infographics are graphic visual representations of information, data, or knowledge. These graphics present complex information quickly and clearly" (Newsom & Haynes, 2004, p. 236). Typically, one-page infographics use color, symbols, size, placement and other graphic techniques to convey information. "A good infographic will not only inform readers, but will also create interest" (Krum, 2010, p. 1).

According to Johnson (2011), the purpose of an infographic is to take complex information and make it easier to understand by using graphics to strengthen the presentation. In addition, Johnson (2011) and Krum (2010) recommend that infographics possess the following characteristics:

- Concise, convey a single idea well
- Simple, readers easily understand the point of the display
- Transparent, always cite the data sources
- Accurate, use the proper size of the symbol to indicate scale
- Central focal point, readers can easily understand the main point
- Attractive, interesting to the reader

Infographics are often used to help the data tell a story in visual form. They show data in a different context to increase interest and understanding. In a couple of recent blog posts, Sweetser (2010, 2011) shared multiple examples of infographics related to education issues. Hyperlinks for the posts are provided in the list of references for this paper.

## Conclusion

People want to know how their schools compare to others and how individual students are achieving. As a result, state and local educational agencies are increasingly expected to convey data in understandable formats that lead to enhanced knowledge and positive action. Engaging families and communities by designing understandable data presentations and effectively communicating information about academic achievement are key ways that educational agencies can enhance their school improvement efforts.

Findings from the literature reviewed for this paper suggest that both families and community members may have an impact on student success and school improvement. Also, sharing data with stakeholders may serve as a viable means of engaging family and community support in actions that increase student achievement.

There are a number of promising strategies for improving data sharing with families and communities, several of which are noted in the Resources section below. In addition, data sharing efforts in two states served by the Southeast Comprehensive Center—Alabama and Georgia—are featured in the State Highlights section of this paper.

## Resources

### The Art and Science | Heart and Soul of Dissemination
http://nichcy.org/dissemination

This Web site by the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities is dedicated to sharing lessons learned about effective dissemination. It includes information targeted to families and communities, early intervention providers, educators and school administrators, such as a dissemination research base as well as links to relevant topics, publications, disability and education laws, and state and national organizations.

### Data Driven: Making Student and School Data Accessible and Meaningful to Families (August 10, 2010)
http://www.nationalpirc.org/engagement_webinars/archive-webinar3.html

This webinar, the final session in the three-part series Achieving Excellence and Innovation in Family, School, and Community Engagement, provides an overview of data dissemination to families and communities as well as examples of field-based dissemination efforts. The series is provided by the National Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC), which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, SEDL, the Harvard Family Research Project, National PTA, and United Way.

### Data Quality Campaign: Using Data to Improve Student Achievement
### Executive Summary: All States Could Empower Stakeholders to Make Education Decisions with Data—But They Aren't Yet
http://dataqualitycampaign.org/stateanalysis/executive_summary/

In its seventh annual analysis of state efforts to develop longitudinal student data systems, Data Quality Campaign highlights achievements and areas for improvement, such as linking education and workforce data, creating policies to share data across agencies, and collaborating with institutions of higher education to share teacher performance data.

### Plain Language.gov: Improving Communication from the Federal Government to the Public
http://www.plainlanguage.gov

The Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN) is a group of federal employees from various agencies that supports the use of understandable communication in government writing. This Web site is provided to assist government employees in developing easy to understand publications. It includes federal plain-language guidance, training resources, and tips and tools for starting a plain-language program or a plain-language Web site.

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# State Highlights

Below are summaries of data dissemination efforts for the states of Alabama and Georgia.

## Alabama

Judy Bohannon, Federal Programs Section, Alabama State Department of Education, submitted the information below.

### Alabama Discovers the Need for Conversations with Title I Parents the Missing Link

In previous years, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) monitored local school systems (local educational agencies) for parent involvement compliance through an on-site review of plans and paperwork as well as interviews with central office and local school staff.  In addition, we looked for evidence that activities took place.  We expected to see sign-in sheets and agendas (showing that training was taking place) that were designed to guide parents in helping their children to achieve. Likewise, we expected to see evidence that the LEAs were providing training for principals and teachers to help them work better with parents.  Our monitoring instrument was thorough, covering all the key parent involvement requirements of NCLB.  However, as we evaluated the work we are charged with, we agreed that there was a missing link—a direct conversation with Title I parents.

### Conversations with Title I Parents

Beginning with the 2009–2010 school year, ALSDE formally included parent interviews as part of its on-site monitoring process. Now, when an LEA is going through monitoring, it invites 6 to 10 Title I parents to participate in a conversation focused on Title I. The parents selected must reflect the LEA's demographics.  For example, if the LEA has a significant English learner (EL) population, EL parents (with an interpreter, if needed) are included.  If there are any schools in improvement status, parents from those schools are also part of the interview.  The conversation is intentionally led in such a way as to put parents at ease.  We are most interested in learning what they know about Title I and their rights as Title I parents.  The entire conversation lasts about an hour.

### Outcomes

We monitor over 40 LEAs each school year, which allows us to cover all LEAs in the state within a three-year cycle.  This year (2011– 2012 school year), we are monitoring our last 40 LEAs that are having their first experience with the parent conversation.  However, from the 80-plus LEAs that have already been through this process, we know that there have been some amazing outcomes. Clearly, our LEAs have trained their parents on exactly what the Title I law wants parents to know.  Parents can tell you exactly what the term "1% set-aside" is, what it means to be a Title I school, how a compact is to be used, what a continuous improvement plan is, and most importantly, about their rights to be involved in planning and how money is spent.  One of our most telling moments was when we were thanking a group of parents for their willingness to learn some of the more complex parts of the law, and they quickly responded with how interesting they found it to be and that they had enjoyed learning about how Title I works.

## Georgia

Michelle Tarbutton Sandrock, Parent Engagement Program manager, Georgia Department of Education, submitted the information below.

### The Georgia Parent Involvement Coordinator (PIC) Network

As a part of Title I, Part A, the Parent Engagement Program at the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) is focused on working with our partners in local educational agencies and throughout Georgia's communities to provide parents with the best opportunity and resources available to help their children succeed in school. The goal of the Parent Engagement Program is to increase student achievement by engaging and empowering parents and other stakeholders to become actively involved in their children's education across all grade levels. To achieve this goal, the Parent Engagement Program:

1. Develops and delivers communications to parents and families on the factors that influence student success
2. Creates collaborative partnerships with external organizations and agencies that support parent and family engagement initiatives to provide needed services, support, and resources to LEAs and families
3. Provides technical assistance, training, materials, and professional development opportunities on parent engagement to district and school administrators, parent involvement coordinators or liaisons, and other family engagement professionals
4. Collaborates and coordinates plans with other GaDOE programs to ensure that parent engagement is a focus of various initiatives across the agency and that LEAs are equipped with knowledge of these programs to share with parents and their children

The research is clear that when schools and families support each other, students of all backgrounds and various abilities achieve at higher levels.  However, we also know that forming these family-school-community partnerships does not come easily but is a process that involves constant nurturing and support from all of us.  And these days, it also includes data probes, targets, and trends.

In Georgia, no longer is the business of parent engagement about random acts of kindness, but it is about sparking ideas for aligning parent engagement efforts to improvement goals, infusing research and data into parent engagement policies, and working across departments to maximize parent engagement resources.  For the first time in many of Georgia's LEAs, they are increasing student success by truly embedding their work of parent engagement into the school improvement plans, which in turn is impacting the achievement equation.  Engaging parents is no longer seen as something nice to do or an isolated project, but it is now part of a process that brings a more cohesive and impactful union between student achievement and parent engagement.

## The Georgia Department of Education

At GaDOE, we do not just communicate about how much we want parents to be involved, but we track concrete examples of what parent engagement does, can do, and should look like.  In addition, knowing that one size does not fit all 195 school districts across our state, GaDOE has created a system of support for LEAs through the development of the Georgia Parent Involvement Coordinator Network. This network links more than 900 schools and district Title I parent involvement coordinators, federal program directors, family liaisons, and parent professionals, as well as 90 parent mentors serving families in special education. Almost 1,000 strong in number and working in a 360-degree approach, these family engagement professionals are equipping educators and families with the necessary tools to make the difference in students' and parents' lives across the state.

The PIC Network began in Fall 2010 and is the only professional development program of its kind offered by an SEA for family engagement professionals.  To assist LEAs and school staff with easier accessibility to trainings, the PIC Network is divided into five regions based on the state's school improvement regions.  Meetings are held semiannually in each of the five regions every other year, with a statewide family engagement conference held in the off years with the purpose of bringing the regions together for a more robust three-day meeting.

Each PIC Network meeting is hosted by a school district in its corresponding region. GaDOE identifies host school districts as ones that excel in family engagement practices and are willing to present their promising practices at the meeting. As hosts, they provide the space, but GaDOE handles all meeting logistics.  Meeting attendance is typically between 100 and 200 participants, depending on the size of the region.  The meetings run from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and typically consist of the following elements:

- Icebreaker Introduction Activity
- Learning from Each Other: Promising Practices in the Field from Host School District
- Research-Based Strategies Presentations and Learning Activities
- Networking Conversations: Small Group Table Sessions

Evaluations are collected at the end of each meeting to assess the relevance of meeting presentations and discussions as well as to solicit input for future meeting topics.  Participants always rate the networking conversations as the most beneficial part of the meeting, especially in the more rural regions of our state.  This is because for many of these family engagement professionals in rural areas, they are the lone ranger in family engagement, trying to figure it out on their own, while those in more urban populations may have 40 parent professionals in the district to meet with regularly. Therefore, these meetings provide an opportunity for participants to share ideas with those in neighboring counties and build a system of support for their work outside of their school district.

The regional meetings have been such a success, that this year GaDOE, Title I, Part A, in partnership with the Georgia Parent Teacher Association (PTA), hosted Georgia's first statewide family engagement conference in February 2012 for over 750 parents and educators.  The conference, Building Connections: Striving for Excellence, Empowerment, and Equity in Education, featured three well regarded and nationally recognized keynotes, over 47 fascinating breakout sessions, and numerous family engagement exhibitors from across the country.  Also, parent leaders were showcased as members of the State School Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council. These leaders facilitated workshop sessions, sharing experiences on parent leadership panels, and were highlighted in other capacities throughout the conference.  Those who are already part of the Georgia PIC Network saw this event as a perfect way to learn engaging ways and sound best practices for family engagement in preK–12 education.

In addition to the regional meetings and the statewide conference, GaDOE also provides ongoing support to the Georgia PIC Network throughout the year through:

- A new PIC 101 Training held at the beginning of the school year to provide new PICs (or those in similar roles) with a solid knowledge base of Title I, Part A, parent involvement compliance, in addition to sharing the most recent research, tools, and strategies for successfully wrapping school, home, and community engagement around student achievement outcomes
- A PIC Mentor/Mentee Program that pairs a new PIC with a more experienced PIC to help the individual navigate and develop new strategies for parent engagement challenges over the first year
- Monthly webinars highlighting promising practices, teacher and administrator family engagement professional development modules, or make-and-take parent workshops
- Frequent e-mail communications that share relevant resources, best practices, and current GaDOE parent engagement initiatives

For more information about the Georgia PIC Network or other GaDOE parent engagement initiatives, please visit GaDOE's parent engagement Web site (http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/tss_title.aspx?PageReq=ParentEngagement).