



# **FORUM NOTES**

## **PARENT INVOLVEMENT UNDER NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND (NCLB): NATIONAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES**

### **PROCEEDINGS OF THE GEORGIA APPLESEED KNOWLEDGE FORUM**

**September 17, 2007  
Held at Georgia Public Broadcasting  
Atlanta, Georgia**

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## PREFACE

On September 17, 2007, Georgia Appleseed convened a Knowledge Forum on Parent Involvement Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The event was held at the broadcast studios of Georgia Public Broadcasting in Atlanta, Georgia, and was sponsored by GPB Education and the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education.

The Forum participants were greeted by Sharon Hill, Executive Director of Georgia Appleseed, who stated that the program was a direct outgrowth of the report recently issued by National Appleseed titled *IT TAKES A PARENT: Transforming Education in the Wake of the No Child Left Behind Act* which concluded that many of the NCLB goals for parent involvement remain unfulfilled.

The Forum presented two sessions: a morning session addressing Federal Reauthorization of NCLB and Focus on Parent Involvement and an afternoon session with a focus on Parent Involvement Implementation in Georgia.

Both sessions were moderated by Edwin Darden, National Education Policy Director, National Appleseed, who began the sessions with a quick primer on NCLB. He also noted that the Forum was particularly timely because the federal legislative process of "reauthorizing" NCLB is underway and Congress will likely be considering some appropriate midcourse corrections based on the experience of implementing the law since its enactment in 2001.

The morning session's panelists were: U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson, an original author of NCLB; former Georgia Governor Roy Barnes, Co-Chair of the Aspen Institute Commission on NCLB, and Dr. Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University and a nationally recognized expert in the field of parent involvement.

In the afternoon, Dr. Epstein was joined by Dr. Diane Bradford, Deputy Superintendent, Georgia Department of Education, Office of Education Support and Improvement, and Laura Dobbs, Immediate Past President of Georgia PTA and National PTA Board Member.

In the pages that follow, these "Proceedings" provide a summary of the key points made by the panel members. The summary is not intended to be exhaustive. For interested readers, the full content of the Forum may be viewed by web cast available at [www.gaappleseed.org](http://www.gaappleseed.org).

The Forum concluded with remarks from Dr. Portia H. Shields, President *Emeritus* of Albany State University and Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors of Georgia Appleseed who challenged the participants to make a commitment to improving parent involvement in the Georgia public schools.

**MORNING SESSION**  
**FEDERAL REAUTHORIZATION OF NCLB**  
**And**  
**FOCUS ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

**ISSUE:**       **Why is parent involvement important at home and in the schools?**

**Barnes:**       At home: Children are often caught in a “cycle of failure” or a “cycle of success.” In the education context, studies indicate that children of parents who did not go to school or who were not successful in school are more likely to fail academically, while children of parents who are college-educated or otherwise successful in their education are more likely to succeed in school. Therefore, a parent's involvement in a child’s education can be an important part of breaking a cycle of failure and beginning a cycle of success.

In the schools: One of the things that distinguish us as a free people from other great civilizations is that ours is the first society which has fostered universal access to education. Active parental involvement in schools is important to maintain this key differentiating factor. Indeed, every school ought to be governed by a local board made up of parents, teachers and others from the community rather than through the current centralized system.

**Epstein:**       At home: Studies over the last 25 years or more have demonstrated that effective family involvement can lead to positive academic, behavioral, and attitudinal outcomes for children regardless of their starting point.

In the schools: Parental involvement in the school system can be viewed as the most important part of NCLB so that schools, school districts and state departments of education should offer effective programs that will involve all parents in their children's education in ways that will help students perform better in school. Effective parental involvement programs result from effective "partnerships" among school districts, local schools, and parents. Parents certainly have responsibilities but cannot be expected to figure out on their own how to be involved. Schools and school systems need to develop programs to encourage parental involvement in a way that all parents (regardless of socioeconomic status) can have the opportunity to assist their children in improving their academic performance.

**Isakson:** At home: A child will rise or fall based upon parental expectations. If Georgia parents asked their children whether or not they had done their homework (or needed help) five nights a week; showed up at school unexpectedly three or four times a year, and knew their children's teacher's home phone number and first name, there would likely be a dramatic improvement in student performance in the state.

In the schools: In his travels around the state observing the best schools and those that were in need of improvement, the single distinguishing factor in general was the extent of parental involvement in the schools with the highest performing schools reflecting the highest level of effective parental involvement and interest.

**ISSUE: With NCLB reauthorization coming, what aspects of the law are working and what needs to be changed?**

**Barnes:** NCLB was a "sea change." The greatest achievement of NCLB has been to end the divisive debate about whether education should be a national priority. It is a national priority, and it should be. For the most part, NCLB is working because it has established higher performance expectations and accountability.

With regard to needed changes, a "growth model" approach to demonstrating adequate yearly progress (AYP) should be used. That is, a school considered to be underperforming but which makes more than a year's worth of progress in one year and is reasonably closing the gap on deficiencies should be viewed as achieving AYP. He believes this change will be made in the reauthorization process (but in order for it to work, there will have to be adequate funding for an effective student information system.) He further urges that the information developed in this process be used to assess teacher performance as well as student performance.

An area that needs change and that is particularly relevant to parent involvement relates to Georgia student performance standards. His position on this is triggered by his view that: "We do not tell parents the truth." The state CRT [Criterion Reference Test] does not set a sufficiently rigorous goal for proficiency and can lull parents into a false sense that their children are doing well in school. Performance evaluation should be based on national American student performance standards. He rejected the idea that algebra is different in Ohio than it is in Georgia.

Effective education of our young people is critically important to our ability to compete as a nation over the next 50 years and, potentially, to whether in fact we exist as

a nation at all in 100 years. We are not now producing students in Georgia who will all have the ability to compete in the international economic competitive marketplace. There needs to be a sense of urgency (indeed, "a panic") to assure that we do everything we can to make all our children competitive. We need to put children first regardless of the impact of such action on the adults affected by the changes necessary to implement such a program.

**Isakson:** NCLB has been effective, although some changes are in order. Test scores indicate that math and reading skills have improved since the enactment of NCLB, especially in Title I schools.

The use of the growth model is appropriate and Congress is likely to pass the necessary amendments to implement this approach. He also expects changes in the law to allow more flexibility in the assessment of the disaggregated group of special needs students, as well as how the disaggregated non-English speaking student group affects a school's AYP status. He urged a change that would not count the performance of the non-English speaking group members for up to three (3) years or when they achieve proficiency whichever first occurs (although he doubts that this particular change will occur). He also would like to see changes in the law to allow for alternative certification systems for schools to demonstrate that they comply with the requirements for the employment of "highly qualified" teachers. It is important that reauthorization be done in 2007 because it is not likely to happen in the 2008 election year.

**Epstein:** She agreed with the other two panelists with regard to likely major changes to NCLB. She then focused on Section 1118 of NCLB which is the primary source of parental involvement mandates and which builds upon prior law. This section properly moves the focus on parent involvement from the parent to the school system. Section 1118 is a good base upon which to develop parental involvement but some improvements are needed. In particular, she believes the language should be revised to encourage greater leadership. Generalized statements stressing the importance of parental involvement are important, but the language should be strengthened to mandate “really making it happen.” She suggested some refinements that would mandate that school districts appoint leaders responsible for implementation of the mandate of the law. She is concerned that the word “teamwork” does not appear in Section 1118 but that teamwork and partnerships among principals, teachers and parents is a missing piece in the process of making parental involvement a reality for all parents. She also noted that a continuing issue is funding. She noted that the funding language is not bad but that funds are not always appropriated by Congress at the level authorized.

**Barnes:** He noted that there is sometimes an unfortunate unwillingness on the part of districts to share detailed information with the individual schools and with parents. He urged full transparency.

**ISSUE:        What is needed to make effective parental involvement a reality?**

**Isakson:**        He referred to a bill proposed by Senator Kennedy to authorize additional funding to empower districts and schools to bring in outside help to implement parental/community involvement ("Keeping PACE Act"). Persons engaged in the public policy debate have an obligation to talk about the importance of parental involvement in public forums. Parental involvement in school choice decision making or in the use of supplemental education services (SES) is appropriate and a start but it often comes too late in the process. Leadership at all levels, not only at the national public policy level but also at the state, district and school levels, must encourage effective parental and community involvement.

**Epstein:**        She described the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University, a program which she directs. (Seven Georgia school districts have joined the National Network.) Every member school is encouraged to establish a committee called the "Action Team for Partnership" as a subgroup of the local school council. Its purpose is to work specifically to involve every parent in the school in ways that will help their children do better at all levels of the K-12 system. Absent a specific group charged with implementing parent/community involvement programs, it is too likely that these programs will not be effectively carried out by the full school council. She believes that some systems may be "paralyzed" by the concept of attempting to reach *every* family without regard to socioeconomic status, language skills, etc. There are,

however, school districts making progress and it is indeed possible to work effectively toward achieving this parental involvement goal.

**ISSUE:** Does the NCLB emphasis on tests, AYP status and other matters overwhelm the parental involvement piece of the law? What can be done to put parental involvement on an equal footing with other aspects of the NCLB requirements?

**Isakson:** He characterized the assertion that districts or schools may be overwhelmed by other NCLB obligations so that parental involvement does not get a high priority as based on “excuses” rather than “reasons.” One challenge may be that effective parental involvement is more difficult to measure than some of the other requirements of NCLB. In addition, some involved in public education have some level of fear of enhanced parental involvement. He has said that the greatest deficit in American public education is not ADD [attention deficit disorder] but "PDD" [parental deficit disorder], i.e., a lack of knowledge on the part of parents as to how to be effectively involved. He restated the need for Congressional and Executive Branch leadership (including the President and Secretary of Education Spelling) to talk about the importance of parental involvement when education policy is being discussed.

**Barnes:** He cited Jim Hunt [former Governor of North Carolina and nationally recognized education expert] as saying that the way to improve education is fairly simple: (1) more time on task, (2) involvement by all concerned and (3) higher expectations. Unfortunately we insert artificial barriers in the way, in particular with regard to efforts to extend the school day and the school year. SES funds should be made available to extend

the day or to extend the year in the public school system rather than be limited to funding private providers. "Pay the teachers ..." for this additional work if they are willing to take it on.

**Epstein:** She advocated an amendment to NCLB so that SES funding would be available prior to school choice. The current system is "backwards." There is simply no need to wait until the school moves into needs improvement status for some period of time before helping individual students who are clearly falling behind in their academic progress. While "school choice" may be properly characterized as parental involvement, it is only involvement at a single point in time. NCLB should be interpreted to assure "every day involvement" on the part of all parents.

**Barnes:** "Choice just doesn't work." Early tutoring and other intervention are key so that the emphasis is on the school where they are, not moving them to another school.

**ISSUE:** **How do we enhance the capability of low-income and second-language parents to get effectively involved in their child's education and in the child's school?**

**Epstein:** The answer is to designate specific leaders to implement programs to reach out to these categories of individuals to assure effective parental involvement. Funding is generally available to support an effective parental involvement program. A challenge is the tendency on the part of many school systems to use "historic" budgeting procedures rather than turning to some sort of zero-based budgeting approach to consider new initiatives and requirements.

**Isakson:** Adequate funding to support parental involvement programs is generally available. The leadership just needs to have the strength to revisit and reestablish budgeting priorities to include parental involvement initiatives. It is important to “think outside the box.” He cited his experience as a member of the Georgia State Board of Education in attempting to come up with ways to allow for parent-teacher conferences outside of the normal school day to accommodate situations in which both parents were working. He also noted the effective work of the Gwinnett County School District in accommodating non-English speaking students and their parents in a highly diverse population.

**Barnes:** He reiterated the importance of leadership. In particular, he noted that the Aspen Institute Commission included in its recommendations one noting the importance of having a “highly-qualified principal” in place to assure that NCLB requirements, including parental involvement, are implemented. Sometimes principals become “bus loaders” as opposed to educational professionals. He urged a stronger consideration of leadership training for principals.

**Epstein:** Following up on Governor Barnes comments above, she agreed that principal leadership commitment is important to implementation of parental involvement programs. This finding is supported by data generated from over 600 schools. She also notes that principal turn-over can be a disruptive force. She notes, however, that this problem can be at least partially offset in systems with effective Action Teams for Partnership.

**ISSUE:** Shouldn't we mandate parental involvement in public schools as it is mandated in charter schools? (Question from Audience)

**Isakson:** The charter schools actually use an agreement among the school and the parents rather than a mandate. Indeed the charter school movement is premised in large part upon the willingness of parents to commit to involvement.

**Barnes:** There is no evidence that charter school students outperform students from other types of schools over the long term. He believes, however, that initial high performance by charter school students may be attributed to enhanced parental involvement. He also notes that home schooled students also show high performance levels.

**Epstein:** Effective parent involvement programs can be implemented in all schools—public, charter and private.

**ISSUE:** What can be done to address the feeling of some parents that they are actually not wanted at the schools? (Question from audience)

**Isakson:** To the extent that there is an atmosphere or climate that is not welcoming to parents, it generally finds its source in a principal problem. He does not believe that there is a federal legislative or regulatory answer to this specific issue, but good climate will come with good leadership.

**Epstein:** Schools in the National Network have a specific goal of establishing a welcoming climate of partnership. There are methods to achieve an appropriate welcoming climate. It just takes good leadership and hard work on specific actions.

**ISSUE:** The NCLB focus is K-12. What about early childhood (birth through 4 years) education? (Question from audience)

**Barnes:** Studies indicate that, in general, the “performance gap” that a student brings to the first grade cannot be closed by more than 50% by even the best K-12 educational experience. The problem is a growing one because more and more very young children are in day care out of the home. He would eliminate the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and spend all the money saved on enhancing 0-4 years programs. Greater flexibility should be afforded for the use of Head Start money in this area.

**Epstein:** Improved support for early childhood education is important, but it should also be noted that middle and high schools are not getting their fair share of Title I dollars. Parental involvement is important through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

**ISSUE:** How do you respond to the common criticism of the NCLB that it does not take into account the “above-average” or gifted student?

**Isakson:** There was no intent to deprive children who are doing well in school by implementation of NCLB. The purpose is to focus on assisting those who need help to improve their academic performance.

**Barnes:** The Aspen Institute Commission considered suggesting have a disaggregated group for gifted students but decided against it. This is a valid area for further discussion.

**Epstein:** The primary purpose of Title I is to equalize resources. Dealing with gifted or advanced children must be looked at in a different setting.

**ISSUE: Is it possible that IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act] and NCLB will be merged? (Question from Audience)**

**Barnes:** There are potentially conflicting provisions between the two laws and it is not likely that these statutes will be merged in the near term. While there is a need for flexibility in addressing the special needs student performance under NCLB, this group of students should not be exempted entirely from accountability requirements because that would mean that they may well be “forgotten.”

**Epstein:** Both of these laws require family involvement and, at least in this regard, school districts can address these requirements in a comprehensive program.

**Isakson:** A key factor related to this issue is the fact that Congress has not yet fully funded the special education provisions of the law and that needs to be done.

**AFTERNOON SESSION**  
**PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN GEORGIA**

**ISSUE:** Each panelist was asked to describe her role and that of her organization in parental involvement.

**Epstein:** She further discussed the work of the National Network of Partnership Schools mentioned in the morning session. The National Network emphasizes use of research-based practices, structures and processes that have been tested in the field to help the members organize their thinking and leadership on partnerships with parents and communities. The key focus is to have specific individuals appointed as “leaders for partnership” as an essential element of an effective parental/community involvement program. Also important is the establishment of an “Action Team for Partnerships” at the school level. The efforts of the National Network are intended to respond to the mandate of NCLB that practices put in place for parental involvement and other programs should be “research-based.” The National Network identifies structures that are needed and that are attainable to assist in implementing parent involvement goals. For more information on the National Network refer to [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org).

**Dobbs:** Parental involvement “drives” the PTA organization. Trying to get parents involved in their children's education is always going to be a challenge. The PTA serves as a platform for parents "to give them a voice." One of the PTA’s purposes is to open up the school house door and to assist parents in determining how they can navigate

the system and obtain the skill sets necessary to become effective advocates for their children.

**Bradford:** The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has established a separate division called “Parent Outreach” designed to be an umbrella unit that covers the multiple "pockets" of the state’s educational programs that involve parental outreach and communications. The intent is to be proactive in reaching out to parents and providing them information. Major changes are coming with regard to curriculum requirements and performance expectations for students. Included are Georgia performance standards and the "graduation rule." The role of the Parent Outreach division will be to assure transparency and to develop means of communicating in an understandable way these new requirements to parents.

GaDOE has an "Ask DOE" service available for parents to ask any question. This service can be accessed by phone (1-800-311-3627) or by e-mail at [askdoe@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:askdoe@doe.k12.ga.us). GADOE also has a very comprehensive website for those who have access to technology. There is an ongoing effort to make the website more “parent friendly.” GaDOE is also focused on assisting districts and schools to develop processes that improve means of communicating with parents.

**ISSUE:** How is Georgia performing in the implementation of parent involvement under NCLB?

**Dobbs:** The roll-out of the new curriculum associated with NCLB has been difficult for many parents to grasp. They perceive that their children are not learning in

the same way that they did in school and that is quite right. It is important to put in place at the district and school level a process that makes it easy for parents to find out what is happening and why it is happening. NCLB does have many specific requirements for parental involvement but there are “no legs” behind the requirement. It is important that the educational system be able to communicate to parents why educating their children is much more complicated than before and why the successful education of the children is important to the economy. We need to develop mechanisms and empower parents to ask questions like: "How does NCLB affect my child and what does it mean to me if my child is not being served by my school?"

**Epstein:** Section 1118 of NCLB has what she calls a “confusing trio” of terms (“policy,” “compact,” and “plan.”) that need to be clarified so that school systems can do a better job. The federal government has interpreted these terms in overlapping and somewhat vague ways. She is particularly concerned that the terms "plan" and "compact" are sometimes used interchangeably.

A parent involvement "policy" is the over-arching intention of running a program that welcomes all families and informs and involves all families. The policy should describe how each responsible level -- state, district and school -- should help implement the broad program.

The term “compact” in NCLB should more properly be referred to as “pledge.” A compact/pledge is actually a communication device by which schools may commemorate an agreement by parents to be good partners in the educational process. Such compacts should also be signed by teachers and the student.

Both "policy" and "compact" (pledge) need to be distinguished from a "plan." The plan is a detailed schedule of activities for how each school and the district are going to involve parents (when, how, who is responsible, etc.). The detailed schedule is specifically mandated in the law.

**Bradford:** In the spring of 2007, the GaDOE reorganized and brought all federal programs under one title. This change enhanced internal collaboration. The GaDOE must also respond to the strategic plan of the State Board of Education which includes a strategic goal of increasing parental involvement. GaDOE provides oversight to district implementation of NCLB requirements to assure, for example, that school choice and SES options are implemented appropriately. GaDOE also has a special unit in the organization devoted to school improvement which includes over 100 people out in the field. It provides support to schools including training to assist in developing strategies to improve performance.

Another strong statement from GaDOE is the development of "school standards." These are not to be confused with Georgia student performance standards. The Georgia school standards define what exemplary schools should look like and focuses upon the adults (administrators and teachers) inside the schools. The school standards include eight "strands," one of which is a parental involvement strand. The strand contains standards that define effective parental involvement programs.

**ISSUE:       How do you make parental involvement “real” in Georgia? (How do you deal with the challenge of sometimes inappropriate involvement by parents?)**

**Dobbs:**       Effective involvement of the whole community is important. “If parents spent the same amount of time and resources on children who were academically challenged as they do on children who are athletically gifted, our children would be better off.” Parents should not be viewed merely as the “fundraising arm” of the school. That is not why parents send children to school. We also need to make sure that we recognize that the term “parent” needs to be broad enough to reflect the reality that many students do not have parents in the household but are being raised by grandparents, siblings or other relatives.

While acknowledging the issue of potentially disruptive parental involvement, she would like to believe that most parents come to school for the purpose of benefiting all students. Parents do need to recognize that when they are at a school they are guests and should govern themselves accordingly. The key to effective parental involvement and effective overall community involvement is principal leadership.

It is important that schools make a special effort to utilize the talents of those parents who do make themselves available. In addition, the schools must provide information as to the significance of the data relating to student performance. Also schools must give real meaning to parental involvement on school councils. She noted that it is often important to an effective parental involvement program to “go where the parents are” (e.g., open community forums) rather than always expecting all parents to be willing or able to come to the school building.

**Epstein:** The challenges of the uninvolved parent and the arguably "too involved" parent are a function of the same underlying lack of structure at the school level. The uninvolved parent is not sure what to do and so simply awaits some direction from the school system. The over-involved parents (sometimes referred to as the "helicopter" parent because they are hovering all the time) know that they should be involved in the school system but also do not know how to do it and so they try multiple avenues of involvement. For the most part, parents do not have a lot of time to be in the school system. Most parents are looking for good information that they can use, first to assist their own student in his or her performance, and then to assist the school as a whole. Effective parent involvement results from effective leadership, effective planning, and hard work at implementation.

**Bradford:** As part of the organizational effort leading to the establishment of the separate Parent Outreach division at GaDOE, there was an extensive collaborative effort to draw good ideas from district and school administrators, teachers and parents and others in terms of developing ideas about how to improve parental and community involvement. GaDOE is developing materials to disseminate regarding performance standards, graduation rules, and other information to parents and providing directions to parents as to how they can get the help they need to understand the new requirements. GaDOE wants to make sure that tools and resources are available and then figure out how best to disseminate those tools and resources ultimately to the parents.

**Epstein:** It is important to note the limitations on the multiple "players" in the public education organizational structure. At the state level, a department of education can provide encouragement, guidance, and resources. More localized policies, guidance and resources can be provided at the district level. Of course, the most direct impact on parental involvement involves the local schools and the parents in those schools. The state level, district level, school level, and parent level structure is called a "nested system." This type of structure involves "shared responsibilities."

**ISSUE: How effective has Georgia been in communicating key NCLB information?**

**Dobbs:** She acknowledges that there are likely many examples around Georgia of districts and schools doing a good job of presenting the information. Communications need to be in layman terms. For example, the phrase "disaggregated data" mystifies many people as do detailed statistical analyses. There needs to be a very simple approach to communicating an individual child's progress, as well as that of the school.

She believes that most parents "send their best child to school every day." She believes that effective education teams must be formed and take the responsibility for assuring that teachers use the data generated by NCLB to "drive instruction" and realize that it is not acceptable to leave a child behind or to tell a parent that a child "just can't learn."

She also urged that student performance standards be set at a level that assures that all children are in a continuous improvement mode. Ultimately, the key questions that must be asked and answered in this process are "How much information does my

child know (and has not just learned for the test)?" and "How much has my child learned that can be carried over to the next grade and be relevant to her or his life?"

**Bradford:** It is important that we come to agreement on common terms, common understandings, and common definitions. Part of the charge of the Parent Outreach unit at GaDOE is to assure that materials are developed and written using a “parent-friendly” vocabulary. (She also noted, based on her experience as a principal, that she believes that parent conferences continue to be a very important part of the educational process and parental involvement.)

**Epstein:** This is one of the hardest parts of NCLB. In addition to the traditional “report card” provided to each child, NCLB now requires report cards of performance at the state, district, and individual school level. There is wide variability on the content and format of these report cards. Some state departments are working on a report template that can be used by each district and, in turn, each school so that there is a consistent approach to reporting on a statewide basis. Another critical problem is that there is often a significant delay between the time the testing is done and when the information concerning the results of the testing is communicated to students and parents. (She noted that the requirement of NCLB for annual testing is unnecessary and that school progress can be measured effectively with less frequent testing).

**Dobbs:** Underscored the concerns about the timing of reporting, noting especially that late notification that a child may not advance to the next grade really upsets parents.

**Bradford:** She believes that Georgia is doing very well on the timely compilation and dissemination of annual test results and school AYP status. Georgia reports its AYP data out first of all the states nationally. She recognizes, however, that this same level of timeliness may not be reflected at the local school level.

**ISSUE: Restructuring under NCLB – what do we do for truly failing schools?**

**Dobbs:** The fact that a school has reached a point where restructuring is necessary reflects a fundamental long-term failure. Why were changes not implemented sooner?

**Bradford:** There are a number of approaches to restructuring. To date, GaDOE has focused on trying to build capacity with existing leadership at the district and school level to improve performance. Parent involvement is mandated and is in fact implemented in the restructuring process.

**ISSUE: Should parental involvement policies be required in all schools in a district as opposed to Title I schools?**

**Epstein:** There is often a big gap between the content of policy statements (at the state, district, and school level) and actual implementation of the policy. She notes that it is important to recognize that there cannot be a “one size fits all” approach here because school districts vary in size and resources. However, effective parental involvement policies can be in fact implemented in school districts of varying sizes. Key is establishing a structure for leadership and accountability for implementing the policy.

**ISSUE: What will be the effect of the new "65% rule" on parental involvement? (Question from audience)**

**Bradford:** The rule states that 65% of monies received by a school must be spent on instructional materials. GaDOE expects that districts will comply. She did not opine on any effect on parental involvement.

**ISSUE: How can the various groups who are interested in and working on parental involvement issues work together? (Question from audience)**

**Dobbs:** All individuals and organizations with a common goal, i.e., to make a difference for our children, need to be able to come together on a frequent basis to develop a common plan. Put aside individual and organizational agendas and work

toward a “dream” of having Georgia student performance be ranked at the top nationally.  
Working together is not only smarter but makes a greater difference.

**ISSUE: How to measure the effectiveness of parental involvement programs?  
(Question from audience)**

**Bradford:** One key measure is to evaluate the “climate” in the schools. One approach is to run “climate surveys” asking specific questions about the parents’ views about the climate for parental involvement in a particular school. In her experience, the level of parent involvement in PTA is a good indicator of the overall effectiveness of the schools parent involvement program.

**Epstein:** The National Network of Partnership Schools is attempting to translate research tools into practical tools. There are realistic and practical means of assessing the effectiveness of parental involvement programs at the district and school levels in addition to commissioning expensive third party evaluations. She discussed various types of “built-in” evaluations that can be used at the local school levels. These tools are discussed in more detail in *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (Corwin Press 2002). Also, the Network provides to its members annual assessment materials based upon survey data collected from the members.

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