

## **Family Engagement is Much More Than Just What Happens at Home**

Studies have shown a significant correlation between family involvement in schools and student success. In fact, when parents are engaged in schools students are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and pass their classes
- Achieve higher test scores
- Attend school regularly and enroll in higher-level classes
- Develop stronger social skills
- Graduate from high school
- Go on to post secondary education
- Secure productive work and rewarding careers

In recognition of the importance of family engagement, the National PTA developed the **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS**, which are: 1. Welcoming all families; 2. Communicating effectively; 3. Supporting student success; 4. Speaking up for every child; 5. Sharing power; and 6. Collaborating with community. These standards were implemented in 2012 as a roadmap to help schools successfully engage families in their school communities.

In addition, the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) celebrates November as “Parent Engagement Month” and this year launched the “**I CAN Play A Role**” campaign with Georgia’s First Lady, Sandra Deal, to raise awareness of the important roles parents play in education. The “I Can Play a Role” campaign offers excellent recommendations for how parents can become more involved in their schools – with the goal of improving academic achievement. Some of these suggestions are listed below:

### **1. VOLUNTEER AT SCHOOL**

Schools and PTAs often send home lists of various ways that parents can volunteer. If they don’t, let your child’s teachers, principal, counselors or PTA know your special skills and ask what you can do to help.

### **2. SHOW YOUR CHILD THAT YOU CARE ABOUT HOW THEY ARE DOING IN SCHOOL**

Have a conversation with your child about school and homework regularly. Ask specific questions that inform you about your child’s day. Know what classes your child is taking, who your child’s friends are, and other essential information.

### **3. KEEP IN TOUCH WITH THE SCHOOL**

Get to know your child’s teachers, principal, counselors and school’s parent involvement coordinator. Make it a point to stay in contact with them throughout the school year.

### **4. EXPRESS HIGH EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS**

Encourage your child to take challenging courses and monitor your child’s academic performance (homework, grades, and test scores) throughout the year. Emphasize effort and

achievement.

### **5. ATTEND SCHOOL MEETINGS, FUNCTIONS, AND EVENTS**

Make time to attend parent-teacher conferences, parent fairs, curriculum nights, award ceremonies and other school events. Your attendance and support matters to your child.

### **6. SEEK OUT INFORMATION**

Request a meeting with your child's teacher regarding any aspect of your child's education. If you have other questions, ask the school by calling or sending a note so they can link you with the appropriate person who can respond to your needs.

### **7. BE AN ACTIVE PART OF DECISION MAKING COMMITTEES**

Participate in parent or school leadership organizations. Ask your school about the PTA, school council, or other parent organizations and then join one.

### **8. MAKE SCHOOL IMPORTANT**

Talk positively about school with your child. Send your child prepared for school each day with pens, pencils, notebooks, and homework completed. Make school a priority by ensuring they are at school every day and arrive on time.

### **9. BE SEEN AT SCHOOL**

Arrange a visit to your child's classroom, have lunch with your child at school. Your presence matters and shows the school that you are invested in your child's education.

### **10. BE INFORMED AND RESPONSIVE**

Ask, collect, read, and respond, if needed, to all information (school policies, field trip information, student handbook, etc.) that is sent from your child's school or teacher. If you need to receive information in a language other than English, call or visit the school.

### **11. VISIT YOUR SCHOOL'S WEBSITE**

Access all kinds of information, including homework assignments, class schedules, lesson plans, test dates, and grades on your child's school website.

### **12. PARTICIPATE IN WORKSHOPS THAT ARE OFFERED**

Look for great opportunities to meet other parents at school through workshops that cover topics such as child development, school standards, and other shared parent concerns. If workshops are not offered regularly, help plan one or suggest ideas to your school counselors or parent involvement coordinator.

### **13. PROVIDE A RICH LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AT HOME**

Make time for meaningful dinner conversations, trips, games, reading time, family sports, and daily routines. Activities like these will contribute to your child's academic achievement at school.

### **14. DROP IN ON AFTER SCHOOL OR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

Pick your child up from after-school activities or stop by a few minutes early to watch your child

in action, if you are unavailable during the school day. It is also important to know your child's after schoolteacher, instructor, or coach.

### **15. INVITE THE COMMUNITY TO PARTNER WITH THE SCHOOL**

Encourage local businesses, churches, clubs, or civic organizations that you are involved with to volunteer or financially support the school. Have community partners provide schools and families with information about services and resources they provide that support student learning such as mentoring, tutoring, and service learning activities.

No matter how much time parents have, there are many ways they can use their talents and resources to help their children and schools succeed. For more information about the National PTA's National Standards for Family School Partnerships, see:

<http://www.pta.org/programs/content.cfm?itemnumber=1804> . To learn more about the Georgia DOE's "I Can Play a Role" campaign visit:

<http://gadoeparentengagement.edublogs.org/2014/10/21/i-can-play-a-role/>. Family engagement in our schools makes a difference and is much more than just what happens at home.

*Amoni Witcher has been a Cobb county resident for two years and has a child and sibling in the East Cobb County school district. She is active in both schools and also serves as the family engagement chair for the ECCC PTA.*

