

## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION MAKES A LIFELONG DIFFERENCE

By Ellen Henry, Family Engagement Chair of the ECCC PTA

Successful schools across East Cobb encourage active parental involvement in their classrooms. When parents and teachers work together, learning is enhanced. Whether through an email to a teacher, attending a meeting for your Parent Teacher Association (PTA), or volunteering in your child's classroom -- parents have many opportunities to further the learning of their children. As their child's first and lifelong teachers, parents need to **Be Active, Be Intentional, and Be an Advocate** in order to ensure a successful education. This article will address the home perspective and how parents are their child's first and lifelong teachers.

**Be Active** and volunteer your time at your child's school. Your child's teacher and/or principal will appreciate it, and you will positively affect the overall school climate. A traditional way to volunteer is to be present at the school. You can serve as a classroom aide, read stories in the classroom, assist in the library, or find other ways to share your talents at the school. Contact your child's teacher, the room parent, committee chair or PTA president to let them know that you would like to volunteer.

If your time is more limited (work, pre-school children, or other commitments), help after school with school functions such as field day, open house, student government, fund raisers, or summer activities. If you prefer unscheduled time, devote your energy towards activities like calling school alumni, baking goods, translating materials into another language, designing fliers or publishing the PTA or school newsletter, PTA Facebook Page or PTA web site. All of these activities are well worth your time, for they help the school and consequently your child.

**Be Intentional** by incorporating habits into your daily life that provide your child with a rich learning environment away from school. Become familiar with the curriculum (found on the school's district's website) and what your child is learning at school. This way, you can ask your child specific questions, such as, "How did the American Revolution start?" Spark open-ended conversations by asking what was the most surprising thing learned today. Have your child read aloud from a textbook or homework. Make the conversations a casual part of life while sorting the laundry, preparing dinner, or talking on the phone. The objective is to decide what works for you and your family and do it!

Additionally, look for creative ways to reinforce learning at home. Make the subject or topic relevant for your child in their world, today. During vacation time, integrate topics from school into your travel like currency exchange or cultural differences. The Georgia PTA states that children's enthusiasm flourishes when they realize that school learning explains the world

and equips them to deal with it successfully. Your efforts to expand school learning will bring learning to life for your child, give it personal meaning and enrich your child's experiences!

**Be an Advocate** for your child and every child in East Cobb. It is easy and every East Cobb school offers numerous opportunities to get involved on multiple levels. Join the PTA. Attend a curriculum workshop offered at your school. Serve on or lead a committee. Work with other parents to champion policies that benefit all students. Talk with a legislator or school board member about the needs of students and schools in your community. You can even help sponsor a forum or Lunch & Learn about district standards, child development, or other school-related issues.

In your neighborhood or at work, campaign to find other volunteers to share their time or talents at your child's school. Ask people in your everyday life from businesses where you shop, civic organizations that you belong to, or groups that you participate in -- to help support your school.

Children realize their greatest academic success when parents are actively involved in learning and decision-making. Engaged families produce students who have higher grades, test scores and graduation rates; better school attendance, motivation and self-esteem; and increased college enrollment. A child's education depends on the important partnership between home and school. Take time this school year to be **Active, Intentional**, and an **Advocate** for your child, school, and community.