The Georgia School Boards Association

Agenda Magazine

Winds of Change in Public Education

Featuring

Winds of Change
Doug Roper, GSBA & Vidalia City BOE

The Changing Faces of Georgia and What It Means for Education
Mike Carnathan,
Atlanta Regional Commission

Join Us for

the 2016 GSBA Summer Conference & Delegate Assembly
Georgia Power understands a strong educational foundation is the first step in creating a brighter future for the next generation and a prosperous economy for our state. That’s why we support organizations such as GSBA and programs around the state that develop leaders, improve teacher quality, promote STEM fields and ensure a trained and motivated workforce for the future. Working together we can continue to build a state we are all proud to call home.
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A Message from GSBA’s Executive Director

The times they are a changing! I keep hearing that refrain in my head, whenever I sit through a presentation at an education conference, or read an article on education issues, or talk with my peers from across the country, it gets louder and louder. But in no place do I hear this refrain more, than when I talk with young people, or speak with educators, or visit a classroom. Students are different, parents are different, educators are different, communities are different, expectations are different, and, the knowledge base necessary for success in today’s world is different. Recognizing those differences exist, the GSBA senior staff and I sat down in late August and worked as a team to identify those differences and how we as a staff could help you, boards of education and superintendents, become, and/or, enhance your performance as highly effective governance teams in this changing environment. We recognize that as the chief advocates for your local school systems, the responsibility lies on your shoulders to create a vision and strategic plan to implement that vision for your respective districts.

At GSBA, we are moving forward in these changing times, understanding that governance teams must be grounded in a strong philosophical foundation that believes success is achieved beginning in the boardroom and ending in the classroom. A philosophy that believes the educators’ (board members, superintendents, staff) moral purpose is simple: “We educate all students to high standards.” In order to do this, we, GSBA, believe strong teams are imperative at every level: board and superintendent governance teams, administrative teams, and school level teams. The leaders at every level must be willing to engage in frequent professional learning opportunities aligned to the district’s strategic plan in order to ensure everyone hears the same message and is heading in the same direction. When this happens, continuous improvement is triggered. Focusing on, and establishing a cycle for continuous improvement with measurable targets allows for accountability and enables effective governance teams to monitor progress and make adjustments during rapidly changing times.

Recognizing that as your professional association, we must serve as a compass for our membership as you navigate this change. To that end, we at GSBA are practicing what we preach. In January GSBA invited over 25 people, made up of representatives from boards of education, superintendents, business community, philanthropy, and the legislature, to the table to assist us in developing our strategic plan to support our membership as they face changes in the education environment. We spent two days with them focusing on our vision, mission, beliefs, and guiding principles. We asked them to examine GSBA with a focus on challenges and opportunities, keeping in context the issues of poverty, shifting demographics, rapid fire changes in technology, and the consistent attacks on our public education system. They concluded that the GSBA vision clearly lies in the Georgia Vision Project’s vision: Public education in Georgia will provide all children an equitable and excellent education that prepares them for college, career and life. They overwhelmingly agreed that our mission, “…to ensure excellence in the governance of public schools by providing leadership, advocacy and services, and by representing the collective resolve of Georgia’s elected boards of education.” was on target. And most importantly, they affirmed that if we focus on our beliefs and guiding principles, we could and would develop strategic priorities that would support our membership through any and all change. Beliefs such as, “Every human life has value” or “Society has a duty to care for all children” or “Trust is vital for effective leadership” or “Wise decisions are based on ethical principles” to name a few. And Guiding Principles such as, “We will always encourage high academic achievement” or “We will always strive to serve the needs of local boards” or “We will always strive to lead the dialogue on the deliverance of education to children” or “We will always collaborate with other stakeholders to continue to improve public education” and my favorite, “We will always support the state’s constitutional responsibility to meet the educational needs of all students”.

Change is constant; count on it. But count on this too, GSBA, YOUR state association, will be right here with you, working to support your efforts in this changing environment.
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If you look around the world, everything seems to be changing at break neck speed. Industries are changing, consumer products are changing, communication channels are changing and do we dare mention technology? It seems to be changing daily! None of us are exempt from feeling the effects of these changes; some for the better and some for the worse, but nonetheless, we are all affected. So how does this impact us as school board members and superintendents? The answer to this question is simple. How we respond to the answer is critical.

The answer, public education in our state and country, is encompassed in the winds of change; it too is not exempt from shifting tides and we must be willing to act. Public education today looks significantly different than it did 10-30 years ago. While curriculum is different, class sizes are different, demographics are different, and poverty levels are different, these are not the main changes that concern me. The area that has seen the most dramatic change and is most alarming is the lack of support for public education. How we respond to this phenomenon is absolutely essential to the future of public education.

The days of community support for public education being automatic and assumable are over. Therefore, our roles must adapt and change as well. Outside of hiring a superintendent and setting policy, our chief role is that of advocate. We, as board members and superintendents, must work diligently as governance teams, to educate all stakeholders within our communities of the vital role they play in a healthy, thriving educational system. Our role is to engage our communities, strengthen relationships, create atmospheres for meaningful dialog, and build trust with those we serve.

What does that look like and what are some ways to fulfill that role? Here are a few ideas for you to consider:

- Facebook/Twitter – social media now has the ability to disseminate information quickly and to large audiences.
Speaking to civic groups within your community – many times the leaders of local communities are involved with such groups. This is a great way to educate those individuals and network.

Op Ed/Letter to Editor – submitting articles to your local papers can also be an effective way to engage your community at large.

PSA’s – many radio stations have quotas in this area and are in need of announcements to meet their numbers. Consider this as a way to reach a broad number of listeners.

Websites – if you know of any local business that uses a website as a means of disseminating information to the community, see if they will consider publishing articles on education.

Talk radio – many communities have local radio stations that have segments about what is going on in the “local” community. Pursue being a guest during one of those segments to discuss public education.

A large portion of engaging the community is telling the story of public education programs and successes. As you consider using the various communication channels named in this article, think about how the stories can be personalized. This will allow your communities to identify with the content and provide them an emotional connection and a source of pride. Community engagement is a two-way discussion that is in a constant cycle of messaging and feedback. It is not a spectator sport; it takes genuine interest and involvement.

I once worked for a man that challenged his employees to get off the sidelines and into the ballgame. The same applies to us. We can no longer sit on the sidelines and hope people will miraculously change their perception of public education and have their support reignited. We must control the narrative, initiate the dialogue and educate our communities. Why? It is simple: “Whom shall I send and who will go for us? Here I am, send me.”

1. Isaiah 6:8, King James Translation
We Believe in Public Education

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Local Control and the Federal Government?
By Phil Hartley, GSBA General Counsel, Harben, Hartley & Hawkins

For local boards of education, seeing the two terms together is an oxymoron: federal government/local control. At least since 2001 and the passage of No Child Left Behind, and many would say since the funding influx of the 1960s turned into the regulatory extremes of the 1970s (think IDEA and FERPA, just to name the two best known), much of a local school district’s time and effort has been spent responding to and complying with mandates coming from the federal government. This article is not about to suggest that day is over, not with many districts throughout the State struggling with OCR investigations and day long IEP meetings during the Spring of the year. But, the almost miraculous, bipartisan passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act holds out at least the hope that the inevitable pendulum of educational policy is finally moving back toward more local control.

Of course, in Georgia, that hope is also glimmering. Local boards have chosen flexibility options by becoming either a charter system or a strategic waivers system. While state politicians have not been shy about giving speeches telling local boards how they should pay their staff, the actual budget likely to pass continues to shrink (but not eliminate) the austerity reduction and provides local boards with flexibility as to how to use the funds to benefit their staffs. At the time of this writing, both houses have passed legislation amending the teacher evaluation law. While the publicity has been about reducing the percentage of a teacher’s evaluation, based on standardized tests, the bill also authorizes the use of the flexibility contracts to allow local districts more control over how student growth will be defined and measured, at least in classes where there is no state mandated assessment.

Of course, given our federal system of government, the ESSA actually gives most of the new found flexibility and control to the states and not directly to local districts. Perhaps the most important event that will occur over the next year or less for educational policy in our state will be the development of Georgia’s accountability plan required by the ESSA and to take effect, once approved, in the 2017-18 school year. While mandated assessments remain a part of the law, each state will determine, among other things, the student achievement and academic goals as well as at least one non-academic goal by which schools will be measured. But the plan will also address, how the 95% participation rate requirement for testing will be implemented and enforced, whether parents will be allowed to “opt-out” of mandated testing, intervention strategies for lowest performing schools, curriculum standards and so much more. While Georgia’s CCRPI provides a framework for such a plan, there will no doubt be much discussion as to how much of what is included in Georgia’s current NCLB waiver should be rewritten, tweaked or simply readopted. There is the risk that the control and flexibility that seems to be sanctioned and encouraged by the new federal law will be simply transferred to state administrators under the new state plan.

Continued on page 27
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Throughout the 2016 session of the General Assembly, one of the recurring themes was the right of school board members to speak their minds about board decisions. This controversy was a surprise. I have never had a complaint from a board member about not being able to speak out, but I heard plenty over the last three months about the issue from legislators who have received complaints.

As Americans, we learn from birth that we have a right to speak our mind, and we treasure that. As we mature, we learn to temper that right with common courtesy. In relationships, we also learn to use common sense in exercising that right. When working together as a group, the individuals have to balance those things to function well.

The core of the problem for some school board members seems to be around the way a statement in the Code of Ethics is sometimes used. Domain V, #7 says: Express opinions before votes are cast, but after the board vote, abide by and support all majority decisions of the board. That statement was intended to strengthen the board.

Some board members have said that fellow board members and superintendents have used it as a way to force them to keep silent when they disagree. The Code of Ethics certainly does not direct board members to refrain from communicating with others. To the contrary, it states the board member agrees to “seek regular and systemic communications among the board and students, staff and the community (and to) communicate to the board and the local superintendent expressions of public reaction to board policies and school programs.” (Domain III) Those two statements are just as much as a requirement as the one listed above that has created the issue.

The Code of Ethics was central to the reforms related to school boards in 2010. State law required the State Board to create a model Code of Ethics and required local boards to adopt that model at a minimum within three months. The model allows the local board, with a 2/3 vote, to conduct a hearing to determine whether a member violated the policy and to determine an appropriate sanction if they find the board member has done so.

Candidates for school board are required to sign an affidavit at qualifying that they have read and understand the Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest policies and agree to annually disclose compliance with them. School board members are required to sign an annual disclosure of compliance and send it to the Department of Education. In addition, the State Board has “Standards for Effective Governance of Local School Systems” and the local board must meet the standards of any accrediting association to which the district belongs. The behavior of board members and of boards matters.

Clearly some boards are having issues. Board members are elected as individuals but are required to serve as one body. That can be a tall order when board members do not know each other, do not trust each other, do not respect each other, or do not like each other. It is nice when everybody likes each other, but it is not necessary. It is nice when everybody agrees, but it is not necessary. It is, however, necessary to work together to make the best decisions for the students, employees, and taxpayers.

How a person serves on the board, particularly in the beginning, usually reflects their purpose for running for office. People often run because they do not like something that is happening and they intend to fix it. After a campaign, the stage may be set for things to get off to a negative start. Sometimes people are passionate about one thing in particular and that is their sole focus as they come on the board. No matter the topic at hand, it always comes back to this issue for this type board member.

Veteran board members sometimes feel they have been put on the defensive. On the other hand, new members sometimes feel they are being dismissed when they are told things such as “we’ve tried that before and it didn’t work; just wait till you’ve been here a while and you’ll understand;” etc. Even worse sometimes is the nonverbal language used in meetings. Those are all very human reactions, but they do not have to create drama. The local orientation and whole board training requirements are crucial tools in working through some of the issues.

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That is why these two sessions are required. Make the time productive. Work with the whole board trainer to customize the session to your needs.

There is usually a steep learning curve for board members as they begin to understand what their job is and what it is not. Veteran board members may have forgotten what it was like to be new. Be patient and treat each other as you wish to be treated. Statutes, State Board rules, and local policies can require certain actions but cannot dictate attitudes. Each of us decides how we will respond to something.

Being a school board member is a hard job, as is being a superintendent. Creating an effective governance team with the two entities each doing its job is even harder but our children are worth it. You have the right to speak out and have taken on the responsibility for doing so. You are a role model 24/7 -- What kind of leader are you teaching our students to be?

Here are some suggestions for working together:

First, respect the office each of you holds. Each of you was elected by the majority of those who voted. All of you are leaders and role models. Respect that.

Second, express your views in the board meeting. That is why you are there. Votes do not have to be unanimous. Do not, however, be part of voting the opposite of others just to be different “from them.”

Third, if you disagreed with the decision of the majority, you are never required to say otherwise. When asked by constituents, you can simply say that you made your arguments but the majority felt this decision was the best one. If you choose to continue to argue your point publicly, ask yourself why and how it helps the students.

Fourth, do your best then let it go. Focus on the issues, not the personalities. Do not let the disagreement over one thing carry over to other issues and meetings.

Fifth, if a board member is determined to be argumentative, disrespectful, or oppositional all the time no matter what the rest of you try, accept it and focus on the job at hand. Do not let one or two people derail the work of the district. Do not automatically dismiss their comments either. They may go about things in a way you dislike, but that does not mean they have nothing of value to offer.
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The Changing Faces of Georgia and What It Means for Education

By Mike Carnathan, Manager, Research & Analytics Division
Atlanta Regional Commission

Much of the national angst that we see played out in the presidential debates and election period punditry can be traced to one simple, but profound, phenomenon – demographics. I know that doesn’t sound like much, but the changing demographics of the state and nation will reshape how we do things in the future - how we provide services, how we develop communities, how we work together and, yes, how we educate our children.

In Georgia, we are getting older as the Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) continue to retire in record numbers. Yet with Millennials (generally considered as those born between 1981 and 2000) now outnumbering the Boomers, we will still remain relatively young, particularly in metro Atlanta. We are also becoming more diverse, and that diversity is concentrated in the younger age cohorts like the Millennials and the as-yet unnamed generation after them (the group that we at the Atlanta Regional Commission call Gen Z, those who were born 2001 and later).

We recently released our Series 15 regional population forecasts out to 2040, and what we see over the next 25 years is a lot different than what we saw during the past 25 years. In 1990, for example, metro Atlanta was essentially a bi-ethnic place – with a White majority (about 70 percent), a Black minority (about 25 percent) and not many others. By 2040, there will not be a majority race or ethnicity. Of the 2.5 million new residents we expect in the region by 2040, we forecast that practically all of that growth will come from non-white populations, with Hispanic and Asian populations expected to capture the most growth. The same will be true for the state as a whole.

The most profound of these demographic changes are being played out in our public schools. Today, 60 percent of students enrolled in public schools in Georgia are non-white, which is a reversal from just 20 years ago. Not coincidentally, about 60 percent of Georgia students are living in poverty, which represents a dramatic increase over the past decade.

Mind the Gap

Why does all this stuff matter? One of the strongest predictors of student achievement is poverty. There are actually lots of things that affect student achievement, but poverty consistently bubbles up as a primary culprit for chronically low-performing students. One quick look at the achievement gap between those considered to be “economically disadvantaged” and those who are not confirms this.

Within the Atlanta region, around 77 percent of students who are not economically disadvantaged exceed the 3rd grade reading standard, com-
pared to 39 percent of students who are economically disadvantaged. That is an achievement gap of 38 percentage points. As recent demographic and socio-economic trends show, childhood poverty isn’t going away any time soon, so we need to mind that gap, but it isn’t going to go away either without our concerted efforts.

Our Kids – A Case for Collective Impact

Robert Putnam, a noted social scientist, recently wrote about these and other demographic changes in his book, Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis. In it, he makes the case for collective action in caring for all of our kids, not just for our biological kids, because in this increasingly connected and interdependent world, we need all kids succeeding in schools. And because so much of what happens inside a school is actually determined by factors outside the school, this approach makes sense. We know that poverty affects student achievement, but so do a myriad of other factors like health, housing, family structure, parental education, transportation, crime, and the list goes on.

In metro Atlanta, a group of regionally focused organizations has joined together to develop Learn4Life, which is a data-driven collaborative effort that brings together school systems, local communities, business and non-profits to improve education outcomes based on common goals and shared benchmarks. Its overall goal is to improve workforce readiness and student achievement using a data-driven, collective impact approach. It focuses on a cradle-to-career pipeline, with several check-ups along the way, like kindergarten readiness, 3rd grade reading proficiency, 8th grade math proficiency, high school graduation and college enrollment and completion. We need this collective action because, in reality, all kids are our kids.
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Pre-Conference Workshops

New Board Member Orientation – June 8-9 ($295)
Establishes a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of school board members. Topic areas range from school law, school finance, parliamentary procedure, superintendent evaluation, and much more. Participants will earn 9 credit hours.

Communications Workshop – June 9 ($230)
Provides an in-depth look at how you can design and improve your district’s communications. Participants are guided through best practices and tools on how to engage your community and build relationships. Participants will earn 6 credit hours.

Policy Workshop – June 9 ($230)
Reviews recent legal and legislative developments with policy implications and gives suggestions as to how you and your boards should address them. Participants will earn 6 credit hours.

Speakers

George Thompson - President and chief operating officer of the Schlechty Center. George joined the Center in 1995, serving as senior associate and vice president prior to his appointment as president in 2000. George came to the Schlechty Center after 19 years of service with Gwinnett County Public Schools in Georgia. George has served as a teacher, community school director, elementary school principal, high school principal, administrative assistant to the superintendent, and superintendent.

Hank Stewart - Emmy, Promax, and Gabby Award Winning Poet Hank Stewart, carries multiple titles: Philanthropist, Community Leader, Humanitarian, Author and Activist. This Jacksonville, Florida native has come a long way in the eloquence of words since 1991. He is the founder of The Stewart Foundation, Love Jones Sundays, Five Men on a Stool, Hank’s Muse and the “IT” factor. He has authored seven books and produced a DVD. He has performed for many well known dignitaries and officials.

Registration and Hotel Information

Register for the GSBA Summer Conference at gsba.com. The GSBA Summer Conference Registration fee is $350. For additional hotel info, please visit gsba.com/conferences.

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Look out for more detailed information on the GSBA website and in the upcoming Summer Conference mailer!
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Why Messaging the Good Work of Public Schools Matters—and What You Can Do About It!

By Stan DeJarnett, Ed.D, Executive Director of the Georgia Vision Project

Every day educators and those who lead them focus on the success of the students in their classes, schools and systems. That gives us purpose.

Every day educators and those who lead them look at data and improvement plans to keep track of how our students are doing as they travel that road to success. That gives us focus.

Unfortunately, every day educators and those who lead them hear from our detractors that we are failing at our jobs—sometimes from a parent who is frustrated at the lack of achievement or motivation in their own child, but usually from a citizen or group who either doesn’t know how we are doing, or doesn’t care.

What are we doing about that?

THE VALUE OF FOCUSED MESSAGING

Today’s media is in the hands of everyone who has a smart phone. Joe Citizen is not just a consumer, but a producer of news stories and point of view editorials. And in too many cases they are driving the conversation about public schools in your community. If we want to counter the negative or uninformed opinion about our public schools we have to be proactive in our messaging. And we have the tools to do just that.

SPARK! MESSAGING CAMPAIGN

The Georgia Vision Project’s SPARK! messaging campaign was initiated in 2014 to help change the conversation about public education to a more positive one. We committed to accurate, data-based messaging that can drive a proactive, compelling story about the great work going on in public schools all over Georgia. Here is what we have developed to date.

1. Talking Points that focus on the successes of Georgia’s public schools. EX: The 2015 Graduation Rate of 78.8% is the highest in the history of our state. Nationally, we are on track to graduate 90% of our students by the year 2020.

2. A Message that is focused on these three premises: a) Great Teachers who changes lives still work in our schools; b) Leadership Matters; and c) We are innovating every day. This message – Teachers + Leaders + Innovation = Success – is a message that every school system can use to build their own brand.

3. We have enlisted great teachers, leaders and innovators to help us tell our story. If you watched the Georgia High School Football playoffs and championships you saw a few of them speaking on our behalf. Super Bowl MVP Hines Ward, Georgia Teacher of the Year Amanda Miliner, business CEO Stewart Rodeheaver and Georgia PTA President Lisa Marie Haygood are four of the many who have stepped up to speak on our behalf.

4. The Georgia School Public Relations Association has developed and curated a SPARK! Toolkit that anyone can access to find tools for local messaging efforts. The link is available on both their website (www.gspra.org) and ours (www.gavisionproject.org)

In January 2016 we enlisted the services of the marketing group ADDO Worldwide to help us generate more tools. They are finishing the first phase of their work and you will see the fruits of their labor soon.

1. Compelling stories about our public high school graduates who are succeeding in their chosen vocations and are making a significant contribution to the quality of life of our state.

2. Videos about the inspirational work our classroom teachers do every day.

3. Tools you can use at the local school system level to help us coordinate our messaging for a more powerful, unified voice for public education.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

If you are reading this and thinking “We don’t need to spend time on messaging,” I urge you to reconsider. If you are not conducting coordinated messaging about your schools you are leaving that job to someone else whose interests might not benefit our students or our schools. If you are reading this and thinking, “We have our own messaging campaign here,” then I ask you to do two things.

1. Coordinate your local messaging with the Spark! Campaign. You are right that your community will find local stories about your great teachers, programs, graduates, etc more compelling than those from another part of Georgia. That said, our voices must speak together or they will have no impact at the state level. This coordination requires participation from educators, parents and the business community.

2. Contribute your stories, videos and other messaging tools to our SPARK! Toolkit. A great idea shared is that much more powerful. The websites have the necessary information on how to submit work to the GSPTA Spark! Toolkit.

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But there is the opportunity to use the newly sanctioned flexibility of individualized contracts to allow local districts more of a direct role in responding to and meeting remaining federal requirements.

Thus, while the nation is focused on a raucous and at times apparently dysfunctional Presidential election and state politicians jockey for position for the next gubernatorial election, local boards will be focused on using the waivers included in their individual state contracts to make decisions that best serve their communities and students. With “control” comes responsibility. Determining how to pay and evaluate teachers in a way that keeps and encourages the best, competes for the shrinking number of professionals entering the field and allows a fair process for getting rid of those who are not benefitting students, is more and more a local issue. Pay scales and formulas, due process and tenure rights and determining credentials and qualifications have for years been issues primarily left to the State. Now local boards, relying on careful study and recommendations from the superintendent and input from staff and community, have the option of taking control of these decisions and others.

As another school year draws to a close and preparation is made for the start of what will be a transition year in the implementation of the new federal education law, local boards, individual board members, superintendents, educators and everyone who cares about education should focus on the opportunity to develop a plan for the State of Georgia that can take the best of the accountability systems of the last 15 years and make them more understandable, realistic and useful. We have become so used to a road with constant detours and construction, that we have forgotten what it is like to follow a thought out route on an up to date map. While those efforts are taking place at the State level, local boards and local districts can take control of their own trip with a new focus on strategic planning and more tools at their disposal based on the waivers and flexibility provided to them as charter or strategic waiver systems.
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