Dublin High School: Changing the World One Tiny House at a Time
Building the Future

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Life’s Teachings!

There is a story many years ago of an elementary teacher, her name was Mrs. Thompson. And as she stood in front of her 5th grade class on the very first day of school, she told the children a lie. Like most teachers, she looked at her students and said that she loved them all the same. But that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard. Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed that he didn’t play well with the other children, that his clothes were messy and that he constantly needed a bath. And Teddy could be unpleasant. It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would actually take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X’s and then putting a big “F” at the top of his papers.

At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child’s past records and she put Teddy’s off until last. However, when she reviewed his file, she was in for a surprise. Teddy’s first grade teacher wrote, “Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners...he is a joy to be around.” His second grade teacher wrote, “Teddy is an excellent student, well liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle.” His third grade teacher wrote, “His mother’s death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best but his father doesn’t show much interest and his home life will soon affect him if some steps aren’t taken.” Teddy’s fourth grade teacher wrote, “Teddy is withdrawn and doesn’t show much interest in school. He doesn’t have many friends and sometimes sleeps in class.”

By now, Mrs. Thompson realized the problem and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents, wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy’s. His present was clumsily wrapped in the heavy, brown paper that he got from a grocery bag. Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing, and a bottle that was one quarter full of perfume. But she stifled the children’s laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on, and dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist.

Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, “Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my Mom used to.” After the children left she cried for at least an hour. On that very day, she quit teaching reading, writing and arithmetic. Instead, she began to teach children. Mrs. Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy. As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class and, despite her lie that she would love all the children the same, Teddy became one of her “teacher’s pets.”

A year later, she found a note under her door, from Teddy, telling her that she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life. Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. He then wrote that he had finished high school, third in his class, and she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life. Four years after that, she got another letter, saying that while things had been tough at times, he’d stayed in school, had stuck with it, and would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors.
He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had in his whole life.

Then four more years passed and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor’s degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter explained that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had. But now his name was a little longer -- the letter was signed, Theodore F. Stoddard, M.D. The story doesn’t end there. You see, there was yet another letter that spring. Teddy said he’;d met this girl and was going to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple of years ago and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit in the place at the wedding that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom. Of course, Mrs. Thompson did.

And guess what? She wore that bracelet, the one with several rhinestones missing. And she made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together. They hugged each other, and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson’s ear, “Thank you Mrs. Thompson for believing in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference.” Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back. She said, “Teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn’t know how to teach until I met you.”

This is one of my favorite stories and it reminds me that what we do in our role as school board leaders makes a difference. So as that leader, we must show up with a positivity, perseverance, perspective and patience. Not only do the students need us to do the right things, our teachers, administrators, staff, the community, etc. rely on us. As we move beyond tolerance of the educational status quo, let’s embrace the ultimate responsibility of building for the future. Kids come as they are. We have to find out what’s right with kids and focus less on what is wrong with kids, we should never underestimate his or her value. 
Valarie Wilson,  
GSBA Executive Director

The Right to Learn

W.E.B. DuBois said, “Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental...the freedom to learn...has been bought by bitter sacrifice. And whatever we may think of the curtailment of other civil rights, we should fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn, the right to have examined in our schools not only that which we believe, but what we do not believe; not only what our leaders say, but what the leaders of other groups and nations, and the leaders of other centuries have said. We must insist upon this to give our children the fairness of a start which will equip them with such an array of facts and such an attitude toward truth that they can have a real chance to judge what the world is and what its greater minds have thought it might be.”

One of the core beliefs of Georgia’s school board members should be the belief that every child has the right to learn. Moreover, board members should believe Georgia’s 1.7 million public education students have the right to learn in school districts that value them, and prioritize their needs. Most importantly, Georgia 1100+ school board members should believe that strong research based and pedagogically informed instruction from highly qualified and motivated adults insures that every student can/will learn at their highest intellectual potential. State legislators, board members, administrators, educators, staff, business leaders, faith leaders, community partners and parents all across this state should be committed to these children’s right to learn. Each group has a vital role to play.

Board members, however, must consistently prioritize this “right to learn” more than any of these other stakeholders.

Much like the rest of America, Georgia’s public school system remains the target of attacks from private reform groups labeling it as a failure. These private reformers choose to ignore the latest accountability outcomes that speak to improvements across the board in Georgia’s student performance. They continue to ignore the innovative practices taking place all across this state designed to engage all students as they prepare for life after k-12. Instead, they focus on the challenges board members and school districts work daily to address with tight resources; challenges such as poverty, chronic absenteeism, low parental engagement, persistent low scores for specific subgroups, etc. These private reformers also give little attention to the fact that in some of the most touted “reform remedies” these challenges continue to persist. Perhaps they persist because somehow we have lost our belief that every child has the right to learn.

As the chief policymaker in school systems, it is critical that board members master skills and gain a level of competency in areas such as analyzing data; understanding the impacts of trauma brought on by poverty; recognizing the social emotional strategies necessary to reach children experiencing neglect; managing financial resources; and, successful research based governance practices to name a few. Well-informed and prepared school board members are critical to ensuring every child’s right to learn, and GSBA is committed to assisting you with this work.

Every child can learn, and every child has the right to learn. Never before has the success, perhaps even the survival, of our great nation been as closely knitted to this particular right of our children. We, at GSBA, are all in; I know you are too.
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News Literacy: Knowing Which News Source is Credible

These days we are bombarded with information. If we do not know the answer, we can Google it. If we want to know who a person is, we can quickly find them on social media. Emails hit our inbox at an alarming rate. There is an unspoken expectation that we are always available and accessible in this enlightened age of smart phones. We constantly receive notifications, texts and advertisements. News runs ad nauseum, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

With all of this information swirling around, how can we know what is credible? According to the Center for News Literacy, Stoney Brook University School of Journalism in New York, news literacy is defined as, “critical thinking skills in order to judge the reliability and credibility of information, whether it comes via print, television or the Internet.” News literacy has always been an important skill, but over the past five years we have learned that this skill has become absolutely critical for our way of life in navigating the information highway – especially for kids and students who have never known a world without the Internet and smart phones. As educators, we have a responsibility to help students recognize what is – and is not – credible and to help them build their news literacy skills.

Here are four of the biggest challenges for consideration that illustrate the point from the Center for News Literacy at Stoney Brook University:

The Digital Age poses four information literacy challenges for civil society:

1. The overwhelming amount of information that floods over us each day makes it difficult to sort out reliable from fabricated information.

2. New technologies to create and widely share information make it possible to spread misinformation that looks like it’s from an authoritative source.

3. The conflict between speed and accuracy has escalated. We all want information as quickly as possible, but accelerating the distribution of information in the Digital Era has also increased the chances that the information will be wrong.

4. The Internet and social media make it much easier to select only the information that supports our preexisting beliefs, reinforcing rather than challenging them.

How do we filter all of this information? There are three things to consider when determining if something you are reading is trustworthy on the Internet: reliability, credibility, and accountability.

You must also determine whether or not a story is hard news or an opinion piece or editorial. Ask yourself, where is the information coming from – is the source credible? Is it from a recognized news outlet? If you don’t recognize the source or are unsure, online resources such as snopes.com can help you determine if something is fact or fiction. Credible journalism is written using high standards set by the industry and academia.

Finally, take a moment to process the information you read before pressing the “send” or “share” button. After reflecting, it may not be necessary to pass on something that might have consequences down the short information highway.

It is up to us as responsible citizens to ensure we are exercising appropriate judgment when reading, believing and sharing news and information. Many news outlets have allowed biases to creep into their platforms. In this digital age, anyone can be a journalist. Just be sure that – as a consumer of information – you apply an objective outlook first to determine if the information you are reading is really worthy of your attention.
Meanwhile in Washington

While the focus of Georgia’s school boards has been on the Gold Dome in Atlanta over the last 40 days, several significant events have occurred and are in process in Washington that will have a direct legal impact on Georgia school districts. Two years into the administration, many of the initiatives of the DeVos Department of Education are taking effect.

In addition to advocating for federal policy decisions to promote parental choice, the United States Department of Education over the last two years has undertaken an intensive and extensive review of what it describes as “non-regulatory guidance” from the previous administration. Board members will remember that this non-regulatory guidance often was referred to as Dear Colleague Letters and many more such letters were sent by the last administration than had been the case in previous ones. This article will focus on three areas where the new administration has taken steps to eliminate or substantially modify that previous guidance.

Perhaps most significant is the publishing of proposed regulations addressing Title IX claims involving student-on-student allegations of sexual harassment. Aggressively addressing this issue was a major policy initiative under the previous Department of Education with a focus on protecting the rights of victims. The comment period for these proposed regulations is over, and the formal process now requires the issuance of regulations (possibly with some changes from those initially published) by the Department. Anticipating that there will be few if any changes, here are some of the key points for school districts:

1. The definition of sexual harassment covered by Title IX will be narrowed to conform to the definition first set forth by the Supreme Court in Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education. Instead of the broad definition proposed in Dear Colleague Letters, the regulations would require that harassment be severe, persistent and pervasive, with the emphasis on the word “and” that was “or” previously. The harassment also must take place at school or a school event and be initiated by what the regulations call a “formal” complaint.

2. Court decisions also require that a district official with authority to take corrective action, have actual knowledge of the harassment and react with deliberate indifference for a Title IX violation to occur. Here is where the new regulations raise potential concerns as they would have every teacher be such an official with authority, which is much farther than any court has gone.

3. There is also an emphasis on preserving the rights of students accused of sexual harassment. This may mean more Title IX complaints made by male students charged with acts of sexual harassment, with the student claiming that the act was consensual.

4. These regulations will require redrafting of board policies on Title IX, sexual harassment, and even a code of conduct to insure that sexual harassment is defined consistently. Other sexual misconduct will need to be described and appropriately addressed through the discipline rules.

Among the higher profile roles played by the Secretary of Education over the last year has been chairing the Federal Commission on School Safety. The ultimate conclusion of the Commission is that states and local school boards are better prepared to make policy, budget and safety decisions for schools instead of the federal government. But, among the recommendations made by the Commission was one directed at the Office for Civil Rights and its policy towards Title VI and student discipline. Another high profile policy position of the previous administration was to address disparities in student discipline based on race or national origin. Their approach to this issue was to turn every OCR complaint involving racial discrimination into a school or system wide investigation, especially where the data indicated a disparity between the treatment of students of different race or national origin.

The Safety Commission suggested that this approach had caused teachers to be hesitant to address discipline prob-
problems. It recommended that the guidance that suggested that a disparity in data could be sufficient alone to support a finding of a violation of Title VI be rescinded. Shortly after the Commission’s report, the Department of Education withdrew the previous guidance and announced that it would no longer use data alone in this way. As a practical matter, this should mean that school districts facing an OCR investigation are less likely to become involved in a multi-year system-wide review of every discipline decision made.

Finally, OCR has twice during 2018 revised its Case Processing Manual that internally controls how investigations of schools are conducted. The March version, issued under the former Acting Assistant Secretary, included a provision that allowed OCR not to investigate claims initiated in mass by one person or advocacy group. School districts became aware of this type of claim due to the large number of Americans with Disabilities Act investigations by OCR involving websites that were not accessible to disabled citizens.

Although the ADA still clearly requires accessible websites, for a while it looked as if OCR investigations and extensive remediation orders concerning website accessibility would be ended by this administration. But in November, a newly appointed, and permanent, Assistant Secretary revised the Case Processing Manual and removed this provision. Now the administration just has to decide what standards to use in future investigations.

OCR has a very important function to play in enforcing the civil rights laws of the country. School districts generally seek to respond positively and work toward an appropriate solution when faced with complaints of violations of those laws. Hopefully, these changes in guidance and practices at the USDOE, and specifically at OCR, will make for a better partnership between the federal agency and local school districts that are faced with such allegations. A much more in-depth discussion of these changes and their effect on school board policy will take place at the Policy Workshop in Savannah on June 5th. We look forward to seeing you there.
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Dublin High School: Changing the World One Tiny House at a Time

By Scotty Brewington, Contributing Writer, MarketJet, LLC
At Dublin High School, a retired electrical inspector is teaching students more than just construction skills - he's helping them make a permanent impact on their community.

Last year, David Kersey approached Dublin City Schools Superintendent Dr. Fred Williams with an idea to teach Dublin High School's construction class. The pitch was simple: Rather than spend a semester teaching students to build a project that would ultimately be demolished, why not instead build tiny houses for the community's homeless and working poor?

Before moving back to the city in December 2017 with his wife, Kersey - a Dublin native - worked as a contractor with the City of Savannah as its chief electrical inspector. While there, he reviewed Savannah's plans to build 72 tiny houses for the homeless that will sit on three acres in its own tiny community.

Kersey loved the idea and wanted to do something similar in Dublin, but with high school students instead of professional contractors. The idea was to incorporate students into the construction process so that they could learn marketable skills while also giving back to the community.

The school district and high school were all in.

“As a charter system, we pride ourselves on exercising flexibility and innovation to improve outcomes for our students,” said Williams.

“When we were approached with this concept and had the opportunity to use that flexibility to hire someone industry-certified to teach building concepts to students – skills they can employ throughout their lives – we felt it would be great for our students and the community.”

Dublin City Tiny House Project

Kersey, now Dublin High School's construction teacher and tiny house project director, started building the first tiny house with a group of students in late September after spending the first few weeks of the school year reviewing construction safety and procedure with them.

The first house was completed by the end of the first semester, with students working on it during one two-hour and another one-and-a-half hour class.

The second house is now almost complete and a third home is about halfway done, Kersey said.

Funds have already been secured for a fourth home.

“The students build the homes from the ground up and they are doing a great job,” Kersey said. “We are in the trim stage of the second home now and putting siding on the third. We’re about to start wiring and plumbing the bathroom wall.”

Each tiny home includes a twin bed, complete bathroom and kitchenette and costs between $7-10,000 to construct.

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So far, the funds for all four homes have been provided by Widows Oil Ministry, a local faith-based non-profit that helps the homeless, working poor and recovering addicts get back on their feet.

Widows Oil Ministry Director Pamela Otts and Kersey met several years ago as part of a local coalition to discuss ways to improve the homeless situation in and around Dublin. They have remained friends ever since. His tiny house project was close to her heart.

Widows Oil Ministry owns and manages three tiny homes of its own that are used as transitional housing. Residents are allowed to stay for a limited amount of time – typically three to six months – until they can save enough money to support themselves. While living there, they are asked to “pay forward” a small donation to the non-profit to cover expenses for the next resident.

“The homeless situation can’t be fixed with a hot meal and a cot – it has to be prevented,” said Otts. “Tiny houses are a great way to help move people back into society and towards a sustainable life.”

Residents of the Dublin High School tiny homes will complete an application process and will have to work a program to be eligible. The program will include several mandatory classes such as money management, GED tutoring and how to interview for jobs.

Currently, Otts is working with the City of Dublin council members and the City of Dublin Land Bank to find a site in town where all four tiny houses can be set up together in a “village.” The hope, she says, is to reach a deal with city officials to either buy a piece of condemned property for a greatly reduced price off or the land to be donated. If that plan falls through, Otts said the organization will begin looking for property just outside of Dublin. The goal is to have residents in the homes by the end of the year.

“If God is willing, we hope to see these mini communities planted all around town,” said Otts.

continued
“The city has lots of condemned property. It’s a win-win. If we can plant these tiny houses in the community, part of the program will require residents to give back by trimming yards, painting neighbors’ porches and other community service projects to help offset any expenses accrued by living in the homes.”

**Growing Pains**

Originally, Kersey’s idea was to have his two construction classes compete to see which could finish its tiny house first during the semester. Kersey eventually adjusted that expectation to having both classes work on one completed tiny house each semester.

Like with any new program – and this is the first program of its kind in the state – Kersey and his students are working out the kinks and learning a lot as they go. One thing the students are learning is that construction is hard work – and it isn’t for everyone.

“It sounds great in the beginning, but I warn kids before they get in this class that this is real-world construction. You’re going to be out there in the weather when it’s hot and cold,” Kersey said. “Some of them get it and this is what they want to do after high school. For others, this is just not their passion. I am trying to tell those kids that you have to find what you love.”

On the other hand, Kersey says, students are learning that basic construction skills are something that – even if they don’t carry into a job after high school – they can still use to save money by being able to make simple repairs and renovations to their own homes.

“We were putting floors down and they were surprised how easy it was,” Kersey said. “I told them – you’re right! Your moms and dads don’t necessarily have to hire someone the next time you need a floor put down. You can do it! You can help save your parents money – or do work on your own house – by knowing the tricks of the trade.”

**Making Their Mark**

Not only will the Dublin High School tiny houses provide housing to the city’s homeless and working poor and teach students basic construction skills in the process, but the project also gives high school students a way to give back to their community in a permanent, meaningful way.

“A lot of the students take photos in class and go home and tell their moms and dads what they have been doing,” Kersey said. “When the kids see these houses planted out in the community and they can drive by 10 years from now and say, ‘I helped build that,’ I think they will be very proud of what they have accomplished.”

Today, the houses sit right outside the school’s gymnasium and serve as a great source of pride for the school. Recently, there was a ribbon cutting ceremony with various government and school officials, as well as the students who worked on the houses and some of their parents.

“This program was definitely ‘out of the box’ – even pushing the boundaries of flexibility. It was a little scary in the beginning, but really exciting,” said Dr. Toney Jordan, principal of Dublin High School. “Creating something so permanent and giving students skills they can take out into the workforce has been very rewarding. The kids take a lot of pride in this.

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They are proud of what they have done and the impact it will have on the community.”

For Otts, seeing the impact working on the houses has made on the students has been an exciting part of the process.

“For me, that has been one of the biggest plusses – to see these students recognize that they are capable of whatever their dreams may be and that there is nothing holding them back from achieving great things,” Otts said. “You can see a sparkle in their eyes when they talk about these houses and you can hear it in their voices. These tiny houses are changing their lives.”

Jaquarius Plummer, a junior at Dublin High School who has been in Kersey’s class since the beginning, plans to stay in his class next year and continue working on more houses. After graduation, Plummer wants to enter the Air Force. Then he might consider a career in some type of construction.

“It makes me feel good to tell someone that I helped build this and that someone will benefit from something I have done,” Plummer said. “I have worked on every part – from electrical to plumbing, hardware, roofing, painting – everything. We recently had a problem in our kitchen under the sink and because of this class, I was able to fix it. I started my own project at my house.”

Fulfilling the Vision
Kersey’s long-term goal for the project is to have 100 tiny homes built over the next 20 years at Dublin High School alone. Ideally, he said, other schools in Dublin and the surrounding area will also join the project, which would increase the number of homes being built in the community to as many as 12 or 16 each school year.
All four of the homes at Dublin High School – including the fourth one, which construction has not yet begun – were purchased by Widows Oil Ministry. Both Otts and Kersey hope that other civic groups, businesses and non-profits will also get involved.

“The hope is that when we get the first homes planted, there will be more individuals and groups that will see how positive this is for the people building them – as well as the people living in them – and they will jump in and invest in more tiny houses through the school,” said Otts. “We would like it to become a virus. We want the city and county to catch that virus and for it to be hands-on and personal. We can change the world one tiny house at a time.”

For Kersey, this is all a labor of love.

“I had this vision to come back to Dublin and give back to the community. I see how people struggle each day and

I want to help,” Kersey said. “It’s not just the homeless, but the working poor that are in my heart. Those who give back to the community and are right on the edge of losing everything they have. They just need a little help to get them over the hump.”

Kersey admits that transitioning from a contractor in the field to a teacher in the classroom was not without its challenges.

“I’ll be honest – at the end of my first week, I came home and told my wife that this might be the worst mistake I have made in my life,” he said with a laugh. “But at this point, I’m in a position in life where I can do whatever I want, and I really wanted to make a difference. The students in my class who really ‘get it’ make it all worthwhile. That’s why I enjoy doing this.”

Dr. Williams, who has served as Dublin City Schools Superintendent for four years and lived in the community for the past 26 years, began his career as a PE teacher. He said the support for the project from the city and community has been overwhelmingly positive.

“It would have been awesome to have had something like this when I was in school,” said Williams. “Just to be able to spur interest in the construction industry in a unique and innovative way using our charter flexibility. That’s what we’re all about – building skills and connecting kids to future careers. For me, that would have been tremendous. When something breaks at my house, I have to call somebody.”

To watch the Dublin Tiny House Project Video, visit gsba.com.
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- Member profiles & friend connections
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Member Engagement: Building Relationships One Board at a Time

Julie Rhame, Director of Member Engagement jrhame@gsba.com

Leigh Crow, Member Engagement Specialist lcrow@gsba.com

In 2017, the GSBA Board of Directors charted a new course of direction through the development of a 3-year strategic plan. Part of this plan was the creation of a new department, one that would provide a personal and interactive experience with our members. The Member Engagement Department was born, and its primary objective is to build even stronger relationships with our members in order to create greater awareness, understanding and relevance of association services and priorities to help them become even better governance team members.

How do we do that? We’re going above and beyond your typical, two-way communications and developing an ongoing, collaborative process in which we work with our members to build understanding and active involvement in GSBA.

We’re crisscrossing the state to meet board members in their communities, helping them achieve board development goals, fully utilize services of the association and build stronger relationships with members and districts. We want to deepen member involvement and provide support with consistency and purpose.

And we’re working closely with all other GSBA departments to connect programs across the organization to all members and create, implement and measure these programs for greatest member impact.

Engaging New Board Members One of the highlights of the Member Engagement Department is connecting with the newly elected school board members from across the state. Through the GSBA Mentor Program, board members are assigned a mentor who provides guidance and helps keep them on the right path to good boardsmanship throughout their first year in office. Former GSBA Executive Director, Jeannie (Sis) Henry, and former GSBA RMS Director, Trudy Sowar are leading this program.

Director of Member Engagement, Julie Rhame, who is a former school board member and was brought in as head of the department in October of 2018, says “When I began my board service many years ago, I wish I’d had a mentor to guide me through some of the difficulties I went through as a board member. We are here to help all board members wisely navigate through their years of board service, and we want to make sure we’re delivering the services they need. That’s why it’s so important for us to build these relationships to gain their personal input and feedback.”

The Member Engagement Department is here and excited to serve you, our members. Our intention is to thoughtfully engage each of you to help you collectively be better governance team members for the students in your school district. If we can ever do anything to better serve you and your board, do not hesitate to connect with us.

Are you on The GSBA HUB? If so, connect with us today! If not, contact our office to get set up. The HUB is a FREE community exclusively developed for members of GSBA and is intended to be an online community of learning and collaboration, facilitating more efficient and effective board governance.

Leigh Crow was hired as the Member Engagement Specialist in November of 2018. She has worked in the nonprofit industry for more than 10 years, with a focus on health, human services and education. During her time at United Way, she developed an invaluable relationship with her local school system and advocated regularly for collaborative programs that would support student achievement and well-being in her district. Her passion for public education stems from a long line of family members that have served in appointed and elected roles in public education throughout the state of Georgia since the 1920’s.
It’s Not Too Early. It’s Never Too Late. Planning For Next Year’s Success: A Checklist

This school year has moved by quickly, and I hope yours has been a successful one. As we move toward graduation and, of course, preparation for the next school year The Georgia Vision Project offers a short checklist for your preparation for great governance and success in the coming school year. And it’s never too late to make a course correction this year if needed!

1. Get your strategic plan in order.
   Most districts have a strategic plan that focuses the efforts of the district in important goal areas, with student achievement as the top priority. Review your plan and see if your actions follow your plan. Do the items on your board agenda connect to your strategic plan priorities? Is your work aligned for success? In other words, are you hitting your targets?

2. Make sure your message is aligned to your work.
   School systems all over Georgia are seeing the value in messaging and branding the core work of school – student success – in their local communities. It has been inspiring to read the stories of student success we have received from so many local districts all over Georgia. The successes of our graduates, especially the ones who are known locally, add energy and positive momentum to local district efforts, not to mention credibility. As we have learned by experience, if you don’t tell your own story you may be letting someone else tell it for you.

3. Connect for success.
   Whether it’s messaging, professional development or policymaking, our mutual efforts can make a powerful difference in our state’s work with our students. We have already seen how powerful our voices can become when they are unified in support of good policy or in opposition to bad legislation. Our messaging of the importance of a strong public school system in our state is vitally important, and it’s just as important that we stay on message.

   - Link your district’s work to the Vision Project by listing the Vision Project link (gavisionproject.org) on your school system homepage. NOTE: We once had over 150 district links but that number has declined as many systems have redesigned their websites. Check with your system technology department if you are not sure.

   - Connect your local messaging work to the Spark messaging campaign. Sparkgaedu.org

4. Celebrate and promote your district.
   If you are not participating in the GSBA Board Recognition program you are missing a great opportunity to communicate the leadership in governance you are providing in your community. Whether you are a Quality Board, Distinguished Board or Exemplary Board, you are worthy of that recognition. Make sure your community is aware of it! If you are eligible for the new Governance Team of the Year Award, by all means...APPLY!

Check all the boxes for success and you will do your part to ensure that our public schools, both locally and all over Georgia, have a bright future.

As I write this final Agenda article before my retirement June 30th, I want to share a personal and heartfelt note of gratitude for your support for GSBA and the work of The Georgia Vision Project. Working with local governance teams all over Georgia has been a privilege and a pleasure, and I leave this position knowing that our public schools are in great hands because of your leadership. Thank You.
How is PUBLIC EDUCATION making a difference in Georgia?

The Georgia Vision Project
for Public Education
gavisionproject.org

Spark
sparkgaedu.org
Dr. Curtis Jones Jr. Named the 2019 AASA National Superintendent of the Year!

Article courtesy of Bibb County School System and The School Superintendent Association (AASA)

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, announced Dr. Curtis Jones, Jr., as the 2019 National Superintendent of the Year® during the National Conference on Education in Los Angeles, Calif., on Thursday, February 14. Now in its 32nd year, the National Superintendent of the Year® program, co-sponsored by AASA, VALIC and First Student, celebrates the contributions and leadership of public school superintendents. Hundreds of school system leaders attend AASA’s national conference to discuss the most critical issues in public education.

The four finalists for the 2019 National Superintendent of the Year® were:

- **Curtis Jones Jr.,** Bibb County School District, Macon, Georgia
- **Mary Ann Ranells,** West Ada Joint School District #2, Meridian, Idaho
- **Brian Woods,** Northside Independent School District, San Antonio, Texas

Dr. Jones was named 2019 Georgia Superintendent of the Year in December 2018 by the Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA). The award was presented during a luncheon at the 2018 Georgia School Boards Association/Georgia School Superintendents Association’s Winter Conference in Atlanta.

“I am thankful and humbled by this recognition. I also know that this selection is because of the great work that teachers, principals and students are doing in the classrooms every day. It is because of the hard work that the senior cabinet and central office do to support school every day. And it is because of what parents and the community have done to support our efforts to increase reading proficiency, improve discipline and make our schools safe, secure and fun places to be,” Dr. Jones said. “Our Board of Education has been fantastic to work with. Their leadership and commitment is tremendous. So, I know this is not about me. It is about what we as Bibb County Schools are doing day in and day out. And, none of this could happen without the support and love of my family. Evelyn and my family have been so supportive. We are truly a ‘Victory In Progress’ that I am so proud and so happy to be a part of, and I am thankful.”

“We are so honored that Dr. Jones has been named Superintendent of the Year. His commitment to servant leadership and teamwork has established that foundation that will help our district continue to flourish for years to come,” said Lester Miller, President of the Bibb County Board of Education.

Dr. Jones, a passionate educator dedicated to developing students as scholars, leaders and good citizens, joined the Bibb County School District in April 2015. Using his classroom and administrative experiences, Dr. Jones developed the Bibb County School District’s strategic plan, “Victory in Our Schools.” The strategic plan has five goal areas: increasing student achievement, increasing teacher and leader effectiveness, being a reliable organization and learning and growth. This plan drives the district’s continuous improvement efforts through shared accountability for all stakeholders and resource alignment.
We Believe in Public Education | Spring 2019

Dr. Jones works to ensure the district’s instructional practices meet the needs of students and prepares them to be college or career ready. Early on, he established one of the district’s main priorities as “getting students reading on grade level.” Through his guidance, district administrators have addressed equity issues by ensuring students have access to similar instructional practices, interventions and supports. Additionally, the development of a District Literacy Plan has led to student growth on the Georgia Milestones Assessments and an increase in the percentage of students reading on grade level.

When he joined the district, Dr. Jones set one of his first long-term goals as raising the district’s graduation rate to 90 percent by 2025. The district has made great gains in improving its graduation rate, which was 58.9 percent in 2014. In 2018, the district graduated nearly 1,300 students with a graduation rate of 78.5 percent. Three of the district’s six high schools had graduation rates greater than 80 percent in 2018, putting the district on track to achieving this goal.

Dr. Tanzy Kilcrease, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning expressed, “Dr. Jones is an exemplary instructional leader. He has a vision for teaching and learning, and he continuously communicates the vision to all stakeholders. He analyzes instructional data on a weekly basis to monitor progress, and he is instrumental in making mid-course corrections to ensure instructional practices will meet the needs of students.”

“Dr. Jones has been instrumental in building the capacity of leaders through an intentional administrative professional learning community guided by the district’s strategic plan. All administrators now focus on the same mission and vision, which has ignited consistent systemic gains as measured through our graduation rates, attendance, student Lexile levels and overall CCRPI scores,” stated Northeast High School Principal Steven Jones.

Under his leadership, the Bibb County School District has been cited for its work to advance the district and its students. The District also received the 2018 Digital School District Survey Award for Large Student Population Districts category, and its Board of Education has been twice-named a Distinguished Board by the Georgia School Boards Association. The district’s work with elementary schedules was featured in District Management Journal, in an article titled “Raising Achievement and Addressing Equity at Bibb County Schools” and the district was featured as a case study with K12 Insight for its work in improving stakeholder communications through its use of the Let’s Talk! platform.

“Dr. Jones is, by far, a leader who is on the cutting-edge of 21st century educational leadership. He embodies an undeniable passion for teaching and learning, and has a keen sense of how to encourage and cultivate gifts in teachers, support staff and leaders. His no-nonsense approach to leadership and accountability has created a high-performance culture in Bibb that has ultimately led to marked growth and improvement — both in our performance and in stakeholders’ perception. As a BCSD graduate and current employee, I am pleased in the direction Dr. Jones is leading us. I am confident that his leadership will continue to create significant strides toward college and career readiness for the students of the Bibb County School District,” said Dominique Nichols, 2018 Georgia Teacher of the Year Runner-up.

Dr. Jones is an educator with more than 20 years of experience. He began his career in education as a JROTC instructor with the Griffin-Spalding County School System in Griffin. He became a high school principal and then advanced to assistant superintendent, then superintendent before coming to Bibb County. Before his educational career, Dr. Jones served in the United States Army, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel. He is a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point and earned a doctorate degree in educational leadership from Nova Southeastern University.

Dr. Jones is engaged in numerous professional and community organizations. He is married to Evelyn, a retired elementary school principal. They have three children and are the proud grandparents of two granddaughters and a grandson.

Dr. Tanzy Kilcrease, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, and Dominique Nichols, 2018 Georgia Teacher of the Year Runner-up.
All for the kids.

To most, that sign by the road says Parrish is a school builder.

However, what many don’t see, is the passion our team gives back to each of our communities through volunteering, mentoring, educating. Parrish is more than a builder of schools. We build futures.
Phil Hartley and Ron Hopkins Announced to the 2019-2020 National School Boards Association (NSBA) Board of Directors!

Two GSBA representatives were elected to leadership roles during the National School Boards Association (NSBA) Annual Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in April.

The NSBA Council of School Attorneys (COSA), the national network of attorneys representing K-12 public school districts, elected new leaders and directors at its annual meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Phil Hartley will serve as Chair of COSA. Hartley is a managing partner in Harben, Hartley & Hawkins LLP. He is also the general counsel for GSBA and legal advisor to GSSA.

Current GSBA Treasurer and two-time GSBA past president, Ron Hopkins, will serve as the southern region director on the NSBA Board of Directors. Hopkins has served on the Jefferson City Board of Education since 1979. He is an attorney and managing partner with Davidson, Hopkins & Alexander, PC, in Jefferson, Georgia.

Phil Hartley

Ron Hopkins
Join Us in Historic Savannah, Georgia for

the 2019 GSBA
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Shipping knowledge to bright minds!

Pre-Conference Workshops
June 6

Exhibits
June 6 - 7

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Article photography by Chris Triplett
Pre-Conference Workshops

Policy Workshop
June 6 ($230) | (6 hrs)

Communications Workshop
June 6 ($230) | (6 hrs)

Best Practices in Local Governance
June 6 ($230) | (6 hrs)

Support Staff
June 6 ($175)
(No credit provided)

Registration Information
The conference registration fee is $350. On May 18, the fee increases to $420. There are no refunds for cancellations received or postmarked after May 18, 2019. Late Fee Policy: The $70 additional fee applies to those who also register for the conference (not for workshops) on-site in Savannah.

Lodging Info

Doubletree Hotel Historic District
411 West Bay Street
Savannah, GA 31401
912-790-7000

Hampton Inn Historic District
201 East Bay Street
Savannah, GA 31401
912-231-9700

Hilton Garden Inn
321 West Bay St
Savannah, GA 31401
Hilton Garden Inn
912-721-5000

Holiday Inn Express
199 East Bay Street
Savannah, GA 31401
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611 East River Street
Savannah, GA 31401
912-355-0025

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201 West Bay Street
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Savannah, GA 31421
912-201-2000

When making your hotel reservations, indicate that you are attending the GSBA Summer Conference in order to get the special negotiated rate.

Visit Exhibitors
Meet companies and organizations who are knowledgeable about products and services that address the needs of your schools and your communities. Exhibitors provide solutions for one or more of your major concerns such as: responsible financial stewardship, raising student achievement and effective school safety.

Register for Pre-Conference workshops at gsba.com/event-registration
Schedule – At – A – Glance *(schedule subject to change)*

**Thursday, June 6**

7:00 a.m.  
Registration Opens

8:30 a.m.  
All Pre-Conference Workshops Begin

9:30 a.m.  
Exhibits Open

12:00 p.m.  
Lunch

12:00 p.m.  
Board Chair Luncheon

1:00 p.m.  
All Workshops Resume

4:00 p.m.  
All Workshops Adjourn

**State of the Association:**
*Speaker: Valarie Wilson*

**Friday, June 7**

7:00 a.m.  
Conference Registration and Exhibits Open

7:30 a.m.  
Voluntary Devotional

8:30 a.m.  
First General Session  
*Speaker: Mara C. Tieken*

11:15 a.m.  
Second General Session  
*Rural Task Force Update*  
*Speaker: Richard Woods*

12:15 p.m.  
Luncheon  
*Speaker: Dr. Curtis Jones, Jr.*

12:30 p.m.  
Exhibits Close

1:30 p.m.  
Third General Session

**Saturday, June 8**

8:00 a.m.  
Breakfast General Session  
*Speaker: Rich Donnelly*

10:45 a.m.  
Conference Adjourns

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Keynote Speakers  For more info on the speakers, visit The GSBA HUB or gsbasc2019.sched.com

Rich Donnelly
Former Major League Baseball Coach & Motivational Speaker, Rich Donnelly, talks about his family, faith, baseball career and how life-changing experiences have shaped his life and career.

Dr. Mara C. Tieken
Dr. Tieken is an Associate Professor of Education at Bates College and an the Author of “Why Rural Schools Matter.” Her research focuses on racial and educational equity in rural schools and communities.

For session descriptions, speaker bios and details on the conference, visit The GSBA HUB. The GSBA HUB can be accessed through the website (gsbahub.eboardsolutions.com) or downloaded in the Apple Store for iPhone and iPad, or the Google Play Store for all Android mobile and tablet devices. If you haven’t signed up for The HUB, or you’re having trouble logging in, staff at the conference can assist you.

You can find the conference information on SCHED at gsbasc2019.sched.com
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