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Highlight

A Board Member!

The business of school boards is one of the most important foundational elements of a healthy community. We, as a collective, guide and mold the future of students who will lead us into the next generation of our national economic, governmental, technological and faith-based initiatives.

I look forward to serving alongside all of my fellow school board members in Georgia this year. I encourage you to stay focused on your work, to serve your community to the best of your ability and to encourage other leaders to ensure students remain successful.

Frank Griffin, GSBA President and Chair, Lee County Board of Education

GSBA exists to serve the membership of all school board members in this great state. We are committed to your success.

• How long have you been on your board?
  I started my service on January 1, 2005.

• When/or how did you decide to run for the Lee County School Board? It was fairly well-known in our county that I had a desire to serve in some capacity. My family has a history of service in our county. My father, WF Griffin, although not in any elected capacity, had served Lee County in numerous ways on boards and committees for more than 50 years. In fact, at the time of his death last December, my father had the distinction of being the longest-serving tax assessor in the state of Georgia, if not in the country. He had served on the Lee County Board of Tax Assessors for 55 years. In early 2004, my school board representative, Kitty Bishop, decided not to seek re-election. At Mrs. Bishop’s request and the request of the other board members, I gave consideration to running for the seat, especially since it was apparent there would be no opposition in that election. I have had the privilege of running unopposed in every election cycle since. I pray that streak continues!

• What motivated you to run for your local Board of Education? I am a life-long resident of Lee County and a graduate of the Lee County School System. My oldest son recently graduated from our system and my two younger children are currently students in our system. My service on the BOE is directly tied to my desire to ensure all the children in Lee County, and, more specifically, my children, get the best education possible today and for years to come.

• What do you wish your community and/or the state knew about your school district? The Lee County School System is a tremendous organization, in which the BOE plays a small part. Our system is filled with education professionals who
strive to do their work in the most effective and efficient ways, from the janitor to the superintendent. The BOE provides the policy and corporate direction needed and allows those who are charged with the daily functions to, in fact, do the work necessary to create the best environment for learning.

**Do you have any local partnerships that have been helpful in assisting your students achieve success?** Like most systems, we have numerous partnerships that make significant differences in the lives of our students and our teachers. One that stands out to me is the relationship our FFA program has with a few local farmers and producers. These partnerships ensure that the future of the largest industry in our county and in Georgia is bright. Fewer students have the opportunities at home to learn about agriculture as I did, but the collaborative work of our FFA program and our local farmers is providing educational opportunities for our students that will pay dividends for the agricultural industry and the state for years to come.

**Why did you decide to run for the GSBA Board of Directors?** I ran for the GSBA BOD after learning from another Lee County board member, Mrs. Sylvia Vann, of the work of GSBA. Mrs. Vann had termed out of her service on the GSBA board and she asked that I consider running for that seat. I agreed, and I have come to see my service on the GSBA BOD as one of the most informative and fulfilling positions I hold. GSBA is the best provider of board training and, quite frankly, the GSBA board of directors is one of the best examples of effective corporate governance in the state of Georgia.

**What is some advice you would give to other school board members?** My only advice for board members would be to have a clear understanding of your role as a school board member in a public school system in the state of Georgia. Your role is not to run the school system or the schools within it. You hire educational experts for the daily administration of the school system. You are part of a governance team, including the entire BOE and the superintendent, that sets policy and performance goals for the system. Your only roles are to ensure that policy is followed and that the mutually agreed upon goals are attained.

**What do you think will change with public education over the next five years?** I pray that we see more effective corporate governance within all GA school systems. The challenges we face with inadequate funding, teacher shortages, technological shifts, etc., can only be successfully met if we, as school system governance teams, work effectively as a team, not ineffectively as individual agenda seekers.

**What do you do when you aren’t working? What are some of your hobbies and/or favorite things to do?** First and foremost, I am an imperfect disciple of Jesus Christ. From that position, I strive to be the best husband, father, son, brother, friend, banker and board member I can be. I love to eat good southern food, read biographies and other non-fiction, attend concerts, watch high school and college football and explore the Southeast while camping with my family.

**What might (someone) be surprised to know about you?** I love to play the piano to relieve stress and relax. My love for playing the piano comes from being a huge fan of Elton John, Billy Joel and other great piano men. As a teenager, I moved the old family upright piano into my bedroom, put my stereo system on top of it and learned to play by banging out what I heard while listening to CD’s of Elton John, Billy Joel and Bruce Hornsby.
I LOVE LEARNING!! Whether it is learning about new strategies to support our work at GSBA or learning about the amazing work going on in any of the 180 public school districts GSBA supports, the learning process never fails to excite me!

During this past summer, I met with executive directors of state school board associations from all over the country for our annual professional development time. I am always grateful for this opportunity because I learn so much about the work of associations and the common bonds we all share for our members. The work of our association, just as our peer associations, is focused on supporting boards of education as they do the difficult job of leading the school systems they represent. In July, we dug deeper into how we better assist board members in identifying their leadership strengths, tapping into them, and then using them to enhance their teams. It was fascinating!

Another great learning opportunity was at the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE) Critical Issues Forum. During the forum held in September, I had the opportunity to learn about the relevance and research behind Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies for leaders. The morning was filled with great information, sharing and discussion focused on strategies to support a leader’s social and emotional health as they lead in whatever capacity they serve. This session was particularly interesting to me because as board members lead in their districts and develop policies that will dictate the climate and culture of said districts, those board members must make the connection between how their own life experiences impact their thinking. But it does not stop there; board members must also acknowledge that their life experiences are different from many of the students and staffs within their districts. This session was insightful and has sparked great conversation within GSBA.

Most recently I had the opportunity to witness thoughtful exchanges between board members from across the state, some of our leading school administrators and staff, and experts on the topic of mental health. GSBA hosted a Mental Health Summit in collaboration with the Cherokee County Board of Education and school system that was attended by almost 100 participants. The summits are opportunities for education, business, faith, law enforcement and other community stakeholders to come together to discuss issues that impact our children and youth. We learned about the need for training, not just for teachers, but for all staff that interacts with the students in our buildings. We also learned about strategies being employed by some of our Georgia districts to address student mental illness. And, finally, we learned about the need to ensure that we are putting the appropriate staff in place to serve on the front line as schools tackle the issue. I learned a few days after that session that two more students in two separate Georgia districts committed suicide that week. Now more than ever, we need to learn all we can to assist us in developing programs and plans to address our student and staff mental health issues.

Why am I talking about learning? Learning is at the core of everything we do, and not just for our students and staff. We approve budgets that include professional development funding for teachers, administrators and superintendents because we believe they need to stay immersed in the current teaching and learning strategies to support our students. Likewise, board members must hold themselves to that same standard, remaining current on the multiple issues we must engage in at the governance level. That is why GSBA’s Board Development and Training Department is committed to and focused on developing relevant curriculum for regional workshops, pre-conference training sessions, and most importantly, whole board governance sessions. GSBA is here for our members!

Valarie Wilson, GSBA Executive Director

Always Learning
From The Executive Director
The Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) is pleased to announce the finalists for the 2019 Governance Team of the Year Award. This prestigious award is presented annually to one Georgia public school district’s board of education and superintendent who have achieved all-around success in their district. This recognition is deeply rooted in the components of the Georgia Vision Project’s research-based recommendations for Georgia’s public schools.

These finalists are vetted through a rigorous application process and visited by an impartial review team to confirm the information in the application.

“This group of governance team finalists from Georgia sets a high bar for best practices, student achievement and community engagement. We are proud of the accomplishments of these teams and the example they set for all of us.” said Frank Griffin, GSBA President and Chair of the Lee County Board of Education.

The winner will be announced at the GSBA/GSSA Annual Conference at the Renaissance Waverly Hotel in Atlanta, Wednesday, December 4, 2019, during a banquet honoring these outstanding governance teams. There were 48 Georgia school districts that qualified and 9 that chose to submit applications.

The winner will be chosen by a panel of national experts who perform various leadership roles in the field of public education.

“These 9 finalists who have chosen to apply for the GSBA Governance Team of the Year have met stringent criteria and passed a thorough review,” said Valerie Wilson, GSBA Executive Director. “While only one wins, each has exemplified school district success through high-functioning governance teams.”

**2019 Governance Team of the Year Finalists**

- Bleckley County
- Columbia County
- Dade County
- Dawson County
- Effingham County
- Fayette County
- Forsyth County
- Jefferson City
- Oconee County

Governance Team of the Year
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GSBA RECEIVES 2019 NSBA LEADING EDGE AWARD

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) recognized the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) for their development of innovative projects that promote and advance public education by naming them as a recipient of the 2019 Leading Edge Award. Established in 2018, the Leading Edge Award honors state school boards associations for creating a statewide initiative program that provides needed services to support the work of local school boards. This year the award recognized the Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB) for its School System Snapshot tool and GSBA for its Georgia Vision Project. The two state associations received their awards at NSBA's Summer Leadership Seminar held August 15-18 in Chicago.

“The Leading Edge Award recognizes the invaluable services our state associations provide to their local school boards,” NSBA Executive Director and CEO Thomas J. Gentzel said. “The School System Snapshot tool and The Georgia Vision Project both advance public education’s mission by engaging partners in addressing critical issues in each state.

“Working collaboratively with the Georgia School Superintendents Association, GSBA led the development of the Georgia Vision Project by creating and messaging a coherent vision for public education. The Georgia Vision Project is built on the foundation of the following seven components:
The Georgia Vision Project organizes the resources and energies of Georgia’s stakeholders to effectively focus on preparing students to become contributing members of a democratic society and global economy.

GSBA also recognized the need to launch a statewide messaging campaign known as Spark to engage communities. The Spark campaign aims to ignite a spark in Georgia public school students by highlighting positive stories on how students capitalize on opportunities as a basis for a successful future.

“We are so proud of the accomplishments of the Georgia Vision Project and the Spark campaign,” GSBA Executive Director Valarie Wilson said. “Having a solid foundation and a vision for Georgia’s public education system sets a high level of success for students but also establishes a blueprint for the future.”
How Three Innovative Georgia School Districts are using Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) to Serve the Whole Child

Scotty Brewington, Contributing Writer, MarketJet, LLC

When students come to school, they bring with them a wide range of social and emotional issues and traumas. Some originate at home, while others – like bullying – begin at school but continue outside of the classroom. The results can be devastating.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, youth suicide rates in the U.S. have reached an all time high.

A new study released by the CDC reports that the suicide rate among youth ages 10 to 24 increased 56% between 2007 and 2017. In fact, suicide was the second leading cause of death among those ages 10 to 24 in 2017 behind unintentional drug overdoses and motor vehicle accidents.

Suicide rates in those ages 10 to 14 almost tripled between 2007 and 2017.

Though mental health experts don't know exactly what is behind the increase in youth suicide, most agree that a rise in adolescent depression, stress, drug use and social media are all contributing factors.

As anxiety and depression rises among students, school districts nationwide are moving mental health to the forefront, acknowledging that a student’s overall emotional health and well-being is an important part of their overall academic success.

But what is the school’s role in a student’s overall mental health? What can school districts and educators do differently to address these issues so that students are better positioned for success?

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Schools and Communities Working Together

“Social-emotional learning and training around student well-being is something that has really been in the forefront in recent years,” said Dr. Sam King, GSBA’s board development training and curriculum manager. “If we can effectively deliver services that reduce problem behaviors, help academic achievement gains, and ultimately equip students with the skills they need for success in college and in their careers, then we are addressing the needs of the whole child.”

The issues contributing to student well-being are complex. According to King, recent research shows that in a classroom of 25 students, at least five will be faced with mental or emotional issues ranging from neglect, substance abuse, anxiety, depression or one of many other types of childhood traumas. This is in addition to the challenges today’s students face with technology and social media.

Part of the challenge of the school system, King said, is creating a culture where governing bodies can lead with an equity lens.

“We have to provide services that meet the individual needs of children. Equal is not always equitable. What one child needs is not necessarily what another child needs,” said King. “Our role is to ask the essential questions and provide training to board members customized for their needs for where they are with their school districts.”

In Georgia, social-emotional learning (SEL) has become a priority for school boards. Members of all of Georgia’s 180 school boards are required to complete a number of training hours each year, and the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) has held two recent educational summits on student social-emotional health.

The recent summits, which were open to the public, brought together board members, community members, educators, law enforcement, business leaders, and parents from all over the state to discuss the social-emotional obstacles faced by students and what schools, families and communities can do to help students overcome these issues.

Topics ranged from school safety to the opioid crisis, vaping, mental health and trauma, and the principles of social emotional learning.

continued
The goal, said King, is for superintendents and policy makers to incorporate this training and a focus on equity and SEL into their strategic plans at the elementary, middle and high school levels. School boards can help to frame the conversation and engage the community, but these issues are not just for the school system alone to solve.

“This has been a need all along, but in the past three years, with school shootings in the forefront, for example, people are starting to pay more attention to it and ask if what we are doing is working,” King said. “It’s great to say that we have an expectation of rigorous coursework, but if these other needs are not being met, you can’t expect a child to be ready to learn in school. Also, the school district cannot bear all of the responsibility. It’s a community effort.”

How Three Georgia Districts are Addressing SEL

School districts across the state are incorporating mental health and social emotional learning initiatives into their curriculums. Learn how three innovative school districts are making SEL a priority at the district and individual school level:

Coweta County Schools

“With the recent CDC report on youth suicide, it is very obvious that something is happening with kids and we can’t point the finger at any one thing. It’s a combination of things: social media, easy access to the internet, kids being raised in single parent homes without much supervision,” said Ruth Scott, mental health support coordinator for the Coweta County School District. “Schools are realizing that if they want kids to succeed academically, they also have to be succeeding emotionally and socially. At the end of the day, we want to produce good citizens.”

One step Coweta County has made towards this end is to hire Scott, who joined the county in December 2018. Her position is a new one in the district and Scott said she is only aware of a handful of other similar positions in the state.

“Hiring me was one of many steps the school district has taken to build this team we have created,” Scott said. “We started by strategically planning specific steps to target the whole child and then pieced together a team to address the other issues that are not necessarily just academic.”

The first step was to create a needs assessment. Scott interviewed teachers, counselors and students to get a sense of what they thought students’ mental needs were. She then reached out to the community for help, collaborating with the University of West Georgia to bring together mental health providers, hospitals and community agencies to see how they could all help Coweta’s 23,000 students across 31 schools.

“We sat with these agencies and in September, our school board signed off on collaborating with a mental health agency in our area – Grace Harbour – that provides us with eight therapists,” said Scott. “We have assigned one to each zone so that there’s a therapist at every school at least one day a week.”

The Grace Harbour Behavioral Health licensed therapists bring therapy to the schools, making it more accessible to students. As outside therapists, they are not paid by the school district, but their services can be billed...
through Medicaid, which removes the financial barrier for low-income students. Because they offer their services onsite, the need for transportation to an outside office is also eliminated.

“The goal is for the therapists to become integrated into the school culture,” said Scott. “If there is a crisis, the therapists can do an evaluation, decide whether a student needs to be hospitalized, and also support administrators and school counselors.”

Scott and her team also worked with the community to create a provider list of all mental health providers in the county and what insurance plans they accept, making it easier for parents to connect with therapists and specialists. There are even Hispanic providers listed for those families who speak English as a second language.

In January, every school in the district will also institute an SEL curriculum during homeroom. Teachers will hold sessions two to three times each week on various topics such as coping skills and how to maintain a positive attitude, aimed to help students become more equipped to succeed at school. Most of the SEL curriculum packages are web-based and include a short video followed by a teacher-facilitated discussion.

“It takes a village – it takes bringing in the community, opening the doors of the school and saying we can’t do this ourselves. We need your help,” said Scott. “It isn’t just the school’s responsibility, but we can provide easy access for families to get the services they need. The reason people become educators in the first place is to serve the needs of our children. Who better to do it than us?”

Clayton County Schools

“We have to reach students before we can actually teach students,” said Dr. Gloria Duncan, director of professional learning for Clayton County Public Schools. “As educators, we have to be aware of the situations they are going through that cause them to act and react the way they do.”

Part of this awareness is helping adults – including teachers and administrators – better understand how to collaborate and build relationships to help students make better decisions, Duncan said.

“This is a process, and we can’t assume that all students get this training at home. Some have parents working two to three jobs with children who are pretty much on their own after school,” said Duncan. “In order to improve the potential of our students to live in a global society and be successful in a job, we have to teach them how to be responsible, how to communicate, and how to have empathy for others. We have to improve education and prepare them for life.”

As part of its 2019-20 pilot program, Clayton County Schools asked for schools to volunteer to pilot its new SEL environment. In total, ten schools at the elementary and middle school level signed on. Eventually, the plan is to roll out the initiative district-wide to Clayton County’s 65 schools over the next three years.

“We didn’t want teachers and leaders to feel like this was one more thing we were piling on top of them,” said Duncan. “It wasn’t pushed on anyone, but as they hear about what these other schools are doing, more schools want to do this and volunteer.”

The program focuses on three main areas: emotional intelligence, cultural growth, and restorative practices, justice and mindfulness.

All principals, assistant principals and district-level leadership teams receive training on social-emotional

continued
learning. At SEL pilot schools, teachers and staff are also trained. At some of the pilot schools, leadership teams are trained who then train school staff. Other schools prefer to have their whole staff trained on a Saturday.

“We are asking the schools participating to form a leadership team because we realize anything we expect must be monitored. Each team goes through four-hour, four day training after school and then ongoing training throughout the year to make sure they know how to monitor it and make it part of their collaborative planning.”

Additionally, training has been set up for parent liaisons to teach parents about SEL so that they can learn some of the same skills to use at home with their children. Some of the pilot schools have even set up “mindfulness rooms” to help children reflect before making a bad decision or take a minute to talk about what is on their minds.

“There are things we can do to diffuse situations to help students calm down and reflect before they react,” said Duncan. “These are things good teachers have been doing for years. Good teachers have good relationships with their students and with each other. Effective leaders have good relationships with those who they supervise. We have to learn how to work together and not in isolation.”

**Cherokee County Schools**

“I think what we are seeing is a swing back from the time high stakes accountability was driving the discourse in education. That, and external factors at home that have driven our kids to a place where they are suffering from things such as isolationism, anxiety and a lack of sleep,” said Dr. Debra Murdock, executive director of social and emotional learning for Cherokee County Schools. “We are seeing as a district the toll it is taking on our kids. They are not performing as well academically because they are not able to.”

Cherokee County School District enlisted the help of international education consultant Dr. Lissa Pijanowski to facilitate an ad hoc committee comprised of a cross-section of the district including teachers, administrators, counselors and district personnel. The committee, whose report was published earlier this year, was charged with identifying the needs of the county’s students beyond academics and making recommendations for social emotional learning.

The result was a multi-layered approach to SEL that focuses on five core areas: equity and cultural competence, positive behavioral framework, mental health and suicide prevention, trauma-informed practices and staff well-being and self-care.

One of the overarching committee recommendations was to identify a district lead for SEL to work across departments at the district and with all schools to create a plan, coordinate implementation and monitor progress.

“When Lissa came out with the report, the number one recommendation was that we needed a district lead to plan, implement and monitor all of these SEL initiatives. We knew if we didn’t have a lead, it might get lost in all of the other initiatives, and we really felt this was important,” said Murdock.

The district’s SEL implementation will be phased, with the first phase focusing on staff awareness, community partnerships and developing a positive behavioral framework for K-12 and SEL lesson development for middle and high school students. Phase One also includes the creation of School Care Teams to identify and monitor at-risk students.

Innovation Zone Care Teams are also being created, designed to prioritize needs, coordinate services, provide professional development and organize crisis response. Teams include school principals, nurses, psychologists, counselors and social workers.

“We have six high schools and are looking at these innovation zones and trying to get them to be more like a family,” said Murdock. “All of the critical care team members in a zone are able to serve in a crisis and also when a student or family is in need. We are trying to intervene early so that we don’t have self-harm and other actions escalate so that we’re then trying to react.”

In general, Murdock said, the idea is to create a model that is more proactive versus reactive so that issues can be identified and addressed early.

“Many schools are already doing these things, but we wanted to make sure the needs are being met for all students,” said Pijanowski. “We are shining a light on continued”
the whole child and making it okay to take time out of academics to take care of the children – and to take care of the adults who take care of the children.”

**Social-Emotional Challenges Nothing New?**

According to Voices for Georgia’s Children, Georgia’s only comprehensive child policy and advocacy organization, 60% of children who need behavioral health services do not receive them. Some 76 of Georgia’s 159 counties do not have a licensed psychologist and 52 counties do not have a licensed social worker.

Approximately 75% of Georgia’s children who receive services, receive them in schools.

Combine this with the fact that two in 10 children have one or more emotional, behavioral or developmental conditions, and there is no denying the need for SEL.

“These challenges have existed for some time. Kids have been talking about it, but for a long time it was hard for adults to talk about it and face it,” said Dr. Erica Sitkoff, executive director of Voices for Georgia’s Children. “Then, kids started telling us with their behavior. We’re seeing youth harm themselves at greater lengths, taking their lives in greater numbers and it is increasingly showing up in the classroom to the point where adults have to stop and pay attention.”

Over time, said Sitkoff, it has also become clearer what kids need – and it isn’t something that schools can handle on their own. Addressing the social-emotional needs of students is a community effort that requires everyone to come together.

“It isn’t solely on schools, but they are a huge part of the solution,” said Sitkoff. “Integrating SEL into the fabric of school culture and partnering with people in the community with expertise can go a long way. We can meet the needs of kids where they are every day, which is in school.”
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Proud to support the Georgia School Boards Association.
GSBA Rural Task Force FY19 Report & Recommendations

Justin Pauly,
GSBA Director of Communications

In August of 2018, GSBA launched the Rural Task Force. The GSBA Rural Task Force is a group of local board members and superintendents from all over Georgia brought together to discuss the challenges facing rural public education. Due to the geographical distance and logistics of the state, the task force was divided into a north committee and a south committee. These groups have met in person to identify and narrow the specific focus on issues facing rural school districts. The topics were funding, early learning, healthcare and teacher recruitment and retention.

The report and recommendations were presented in June 2019 to the GSBA membership during the Summer Conference in Savannah. Since then, GSBA has had the opportunity to discuss these recommendations with state policy makers. Angela Palm, GSBA Director for Policy and Legislative Services, presented the Rural Task Force recommendations to the Legislative Rural Development Council, at the request of the Co-Chairman, Representative Rick Jasperse. Angela had 30 minutes to present and summarize the report to Georgia House of Representatives that make up this council. In addition to the Rural Development Council, Angela presented the recommendations to the Governor’s Office at a separate meeting at the capitol.

Rural development is a timely and important topic of discussion for Georgia. Public education is the foundation for economic and workforce development. Addressing the challenges of rural public schools requires partnerships between local boards of education, county commissions, city councils, state government and business and industry.

The GSBA Rural Education Task Force is working this year to dig deeper on existing topics to continue to address the challenges of rural public education for a more prosperous future for our students. □

Visit gsba.com to get a copy of the GSBA Rural Task Force recommendations.
I’m an Advocate for Public Education, Now What?

Angela Palm, GSBA Director of Policy and Legislative Services

When GSBA asks for suggestions on training topics, advocacy is always on the list. In one of those oddities of life, however, attendance is low when an advocacy workshop is offered. Perhaps it is the agenda, the timing or lack of training credits, but it requires trying different ways to get the desired information to you.

We did a breakout session at the GSBA/GSSA Conference in December 2018, a podcast in August, and now this article to try to give you information that will help you. By the way, training credits are not offered for advocacy training because advocacy is not part of the Standards for Effective Governance of Georgia School Systems, upon which all credited school board training is to be based. Following are some of the most frequently asked questions we get.

**How do I talk to legislators?**
The short answer is “the same way you want to be talked to.” They are part-time legislators, mostly not educators but often related to one. They can not be experts in every area in which they legislate, so they depend on their local officials and constituents as well as lobbyists, to help them understand issues. They need local information on the impact of proposed legislation.

Keep in mind that the goal is to build a relationship, not just have a single conversation. Try to build a bridge, not burn it. If that’s not possible, at least try to keep the door open. Generally, approaching a person with respect and facts go a long way.

**My legislator never agrees with me. Now what?**
First, flip the question. Do you have any constituents who regularly disagree with you and/or the Board? How do you want to be treated by that person? What is an effective way for them to talk with you? Notice the “with” part of that sentence. The goal is to have a conversation not a one-sided monologue.

Second, attitude is everything. There are some topics on which people are just going to disagree. Say what you need to say to provide the needed information and local impact of the proposal, listen to their point of view; if there are points of agreement, focus on those.

Board members, superintendents and GSBA Staff at the NSBA Advocacy Institute meeting with Senator Johnny Isakson and Senator David Perdue.

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If there are none, acknowledge that you do not agree on the topic, but continue working with them in a respectful, calm manner. Neither of you is going to change the other’s mind on the issue, but try to keep the door open to working together on issues where you can find agreement.

**My legislator will not talk to me or is rude every time. What do I do?**

Unfortunately, we cannot make people behave politely, but we can choose our own behavior. Stay professional and respectful whether they are or not. You have been elected to represent the students and taxpayers in your district in educational matters, and you need to do so. Remain calm, focused on the issue, and provide the information needed. Have printed material ready to leave with them. Make sure it is short, clear and correct.

Sometimes we deal with the same issue repeatedly so both of you already know the position of the other. That doesn’t mean it doesn’t need to be said. Sometimes it helps to find others to say the same thing like a parent or other community member. Don’t take the response personally, it usually isn’t no matter how it feels. Legislators oppose or support something based on personal experience or for philosophical, and/or political reasons. If you can figure out which one it is, that will sometimes help ease the tone of the conversation. Again, control what you can control and move on.

**How do I talk them out of voting for something?**

Be willing to listen to their arguments and have your facts together on why you oppose it. For example, if a voucher bill is moving in the legislature, make sure they know what choices you provide in your district. If the reply is “it’s not about you, it’s about those other bad school systems” then explain how it will impact your system whether it is intended to or not.

Does the proposal include any accountability or transparency measures? Is he/she thinking only in terms of parental choice? That must be balanced with the responsibility to taxpayers for the use of public dollars. It’s not just about the money, it’s also about good public policy. Know all the things your school district has to do in terms of reporting information. Leave them a list of the ways the district is held to standards of transparency and accountability.

Sometimes the opposition is about who is doing it more than what is being addressed. It may be an issue that needs to be dealt with but not one that should be addressed in state law. It may be something that falls under the State Board of Education or is better addressed through rule than law. If it is something that may need to be changed soon or frequently, state law is probably not a good choice. It may be something that is simply best left to the local board of education, such as a school start date.

**How do I talk them into voting for something?**

How much will it cost to do what you want? If there is a cost, where do you propose they get the funds? Does it require legislation or could it be done through an agency regulation? Why should he/she vote for it? Again, have your facts clear and concise. Be factual but paint a picture with data or tell a story that illustrates the impact. This applies to both this question and the one above.

For example, if you want the legislator to carry a bill or support one that would lower the cap on the amount a district can be charged for the collection of taxes, how much are you paying? State law allows a charge up to 2.5% of the digest. Are you paying the maximum or a lower negotiated amount? Has the board tried to negotiate a lower amount?
How much of a mill – or how many mills – does it take to cover the amount you are paying? What could you do with that amount of money?

How much do districts around you pay? Look at other school districts that are also in the legislator's district. Are any of them willing to join with you to work on this? If so, create a plan for working together before meeting with the legislator. Understand what the opposition to your request will be and how strong it will be and discuss that with him/her. Let them know that you understand this will not be quick or easy, but you believe it's the right thing to do for the reasons you have stated.

Some efforts require years to get changed so there has to be consistent, committed effort. The legislator may not disagree with you but may choose not to help for political reasons. In that case, what you want would have to become the better choice politically for them to do for the reasons you have stated.

My legislator said he’d vote against a bill then voted for it. What should I do?
They are as accountable as you are for your votes. Ask them why they did it. Ask them why they didn’t let you know. Hopefully you and your board are not acting in a vacuum but are informing the community all along and have built support for your position. Let them know what happened. Keep it respectful and factual.

Elected officials are only as accountable as their constituents hold them. Looking at the big picture instead of only this bill, but are informing the community all along and have built support for your position. Let them know what happened. Keep it respectful and factual.

Elected officials are only as accountable as their constituents hold them. Looking at the big picture instead of only this bill, there may be a good reason he/she acted as they did. Try to think about it from their point of view for a moment. If it was a solid decision from the big picture view, it’s probably best to let it go. If it was a “line in the sand” kind of issue, then remember it for questions in a candidate’s forum or other ways. Just don’t jump from holding someone accountable to beating a dead horse, that just wears people out to the point of tuning out or sympathizing with the legislator. All this may sound simplistic or “easy for me to say” because I’m not dealing with your legislator(s). I can promise you I have been in your shoes whatever the advocacy situation is. If at the end of the day you have done what you needed to do the best you know how and have done it with integrity, you’ve done your job and have helped me with mine. And I thank you.
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Everyone Counts in Georgia!

Erica Fener Sitkoff, Executive Director of Voices for Georgia’s Children

Gaye Smith, Executive Director of the Georgia Family Connection Partnership
The U.S. Constitution mandates that the government complete a head count of all people living in the United States, every ten years. It is called the census, and Census 2020 is right around the corner. The results will have a huge impact on our state, and your school district for the next decade. As a leader in your community, your knowledge and outreach for the Census will be paramount to obtaining an accurate count.

Census counts are used to determine both representation and appropriations at the federal level. In Census 2000, Georgia gained two congressional seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. In Census 2010, Georgia gained another congressional seat, thanks to the census count showing our state’s continuing population growth. The count is also used to determine how billions of dollars are allocated for vital programs impacting roads, hospitals, emergency responses, and schools.

Every year, Georgia receives federal funding totaling about $15-$20 billion. That amount is distributed across the state to more than 50 programs and services that serve your students, including the National School Lunch Program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Medicaid. It is essential that school board members and school district leaders understand that we only have one chance every ten years to get the count right.

From Census 2010, in 2015, $1.6 billion directly funded education-related services, including the National School Lunch Program for your school nutrition program, Title I for students living in poverty, and IDEA for special education services for students with disabilities. Ensuring an accurate count of every person in the state has far reaching implications for our state and your students.

National School Lunch Program

In 2015, $529 million federal dollars were allocated to the National School Lunch Program in Georgia. This is the program that funds free and reduced lunches for 1.2 million students in our state.

Title I Grants to LEAs (Local Enhancement Agency)

Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides financial assistance to local school districts and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to ensure all children meet state academic standards. In 2015, Georgia received $517 million in Title I Grants to LEAs.

IDEA (Special Education)

The IDEA is a grants statute that provides federal funding for the education of children with disabilities. In 2015, $300 million federal dollars went to IDEA (special education for students with disabilities) here in Georgia.

Hard-to-Count Areas

Just like it is important for every student to be in class on a FTE count day to ensure proper state funding for your district, it is equally important that every person in Georgia be counted on April 1st to ensure proper federal funding.
Unfortunately, 22% of Georgians live in a hard-to-count area.

The U.S. Census Bureau defines a hard-to-count area as a census tract that had a mail-return response rate of below 73% in Census 2010. In Georgia, these areas include 2.2 million Georgians.

So what happens if every person isn’t counted? An undercount of the population in Georgia means our state will not be properly represented in the federal government, and we will not receive an appropriate allocation of federal dollars. In 2016, every 1% undercount in Georgia cost the state $68.6 million.

We also know that based on certain characteristics, certain groups of people are harder to count. Who are those?

- Young children (0-5 years old)
- Individuals of color
- Those living in poverty
- Those with limited English
- Immigrants
- Those living in rural areas
- Those living in areas with high rental rates
- College students

**How Can You Help**

Census 2020 is the easiest census to date. You can complete Census 2020 online, by phone or by mail. Beginning in mid-March, all homes will receive information on how to complete their form.

We encourage you to get involved with local complete count committees or form a complete count committee in your county. Develop a leadership outreach plan to determine how you will communicate to your families the importance of filling out their census form or plan activities to provide them the opportunity and access they need to fill out the form electronically. Be sure to keep in mind that the groups that live in hard-to-count areas or are harder to count groups may need additional, targeted efforts.

Census 2020 will have a major impact on how all Georgians get quality access to education, food, housing, healthcare and other services they depend on every day. The bottom line is the Census 2020 will impact the way we all live our lives for the next 10 years.

*Note: Voices for Georgia’s Children and the Georgia Family Connection Partnership have developed a website with a great deal of information and resources. Visit everyonecountga.org and look under Resources for fact sheets, printed material, social media toolkits, and other information to share with your stakeholders.*
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The Internet, technology, software on-demand and multiple personal devices have become such a ubiquitous part of our environment and culture that it is impossible to imagine life without them. Although many educators and schools face criticism for not effectively using the technological assets available to them, it is as difficult in most classrooms to imagine a day without technology as it is for the typical teenager. While many of us in the older generations feel that the technological wave has moved at tsunami strength and speed, many of the policy and legal consequences are just beginning to be addressed or even recognized.

Internationally, we are warned that nations and even nation-states use technology to threaten our power grid, ballot box and children. Nationally, a discussion has begun about the legal and moral right of a very few megacompanies with multi-billionaire owners to control access to such a crucial part of our society. In our private homes, we worry about the information being gathered and used by all the devices that we continue to add to our homes but yet cannot give up.

In public education, it is almost impossible to believe that less than 20 years ago, the Georgia General Assembly actually had a statute banning the presence of cell phones (and pagers) on school campuses. Parents and their children today view it as a constitutional right to be able to access each other and the rest of the world in a split second through cell phones carried in pockets and bookbags. Many school districts are discovering that the dependence on technology comes with legal risks, security concerns, and real consequences.

First, school districts, like any user of technology, must be prepared for the subtle and direct attacks on the data and infrastructure on which the district depends for its financial, instructional, and safety operations. In most communities, the school district provides the largest source of personally identifiable information about any group of individuals, including students, parents, staff members, and even visitors to the school building. The same identity theft that threatens large financial institutions and retailers (and even the IRS) can threaten a school district. Having in place a protocol based on the law and a clear understanding of what is and is not required, depending upon the nature of the hack that may occur and the data that may be stolen, is essential. As just one example, school districts may be prohibited from using school tax funds to provide credit report services and other such benefits to victims of a technology breach. At the same time, the purchase of cyber insurance may be a legitimate educational/business expense which then may be available to reimburse victims as insurance typically does. Of course, like all insurance, one policy is not the same as the other and school districts need to carefully review what they are purchasing and understand what coverage it provides.

More and more frequently, districts are being more directly attacked through ransomware viruses designed to hold hostage the operation of the school district and the data on which it relies. Sometimes, those attacks can threaten terrorist acts against a school or school property. Other times, they simply seek money in exchange for a promise of releasing the data. In any event, a school safety plan that is pages and pages of material prepared for a direct single shooter or other attack and not addressing a cyber attack is likely ignoring the more probable, and just as dangerous, scenario.

If safety is a major factor on every school board agenda, privacy rights are, and will continue to be, a growing concern. Almost 50 years ago, Congress passed the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and while it certainly references and includes computer records and technology data, no one drafting the Act could conceive of the amount of information that could be stored or the potential ease with which it could be accessed by the world. FERPA places substantial demands on school districts to protect student records, to notify parents of procedures in place and of others within and outside the school district that have necessary access to that data, and to directly control vendors and educators who may utilize educational data of the school’s students so that they do not violate privacy rights of the children or their parents. The Federal Trade Commission is looking carefully at the rules that implement the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). It requires vendors to obtain...
parental permission for students under the age of 13 to access software online, but provides an exception where the school is inferred to have given consent for the use of educational software that it provides to students. At the national level, many educational groups are urging the FTC to incorporate FERPA’s requirements into the school district’s obligations under COPPA, but this will place an even greater burden on school districts to understand and faithfully implement the provisions of FERPA, especially those requiring parents to be put on notice of what access their children are being provided to software and the internet through the school itself.

On the other end of the privacy spectrum is the issue of public access and transparency. As school districts communicate with parents and the public online through websites and social media, they create open forums where access is harder and harder to control. Careful thought should be given to the extent to which schools and districts solicit comment on social media and how that content can be monitored and controlled without violating first amendment rights. In this ever developing legal arena, the rules governing students, staff and the public at large are often surprisingly different. With the increasing understanding that nothing on the internet is private and that people are responsible for what they post and that something posted potentially stays forever, school districts are finding it necessary to address staff posts on their “private” sites. The rules are beginning to develop to allow controlling what adults that work for the district disseminate, but it is harder with students and virtually impossible with the public at large.

Finally, records retention laws require that many records be retained for a defined period of time, sometimes permanently. With software and hardware changing constantly, the old rules where paper copies were stored on microfiche to save room are no longer helpful.

Transitioning from one program to another requires careful consideration of records retention requirements, and cloud storage of electronic records raises its own contract and security issues.

Just as the world’s mega social media players are facing serious questions and potential regulation years after the genie has been let out of the bottle, most school districts have installed and implemented millions of dollars worth of technology on which the business of the school district runs and the students of the school district depend on an education. Ensuring that the policies, protocols and infrastructure are in place to protect not only that technology, but the information on which it depends and which it creates, is a major responsibility.
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