

Collaborating. Brainstorming. Focusing.Action Plans.....

The concept of the C.A.F.E. is a facilitation tool that can assist a school or system to overcome the obstacles that separate parents from typical methods of engagement in their child's education. The term C.A.F.E. means "Circles of Adults Focusing on Education" a *method* or a process of small group problem solving that can be used for positive system change. The purpose is to meet in "a circle of stakeholders" on an issue, share views and common concerns and find solutions.

The parent-educator-community driven C.A.F.E. in Georgia combines the know-how from real life parent experiences with a team of professionals and community leaders to focus on goals to impact student success. The C.A.F.E. video produced by the GaDOE under the leadership of Superintendent Kathy Cox explains the C.A.F.E. process. It also demonstrates how parents can become leaders through the telling of real-life vignettes. The parents featured in the C.A.F.E. video cross traditional borders in every way from where they live to their educational backgrounds.

Thirty years of research on parent involvement/engagement shows that when students know their parents are involved, academic achievement increases. (SEDL, 2002). The Six Types of Parental Involvement, identified by the National Network of Partnership Schools at John Hopkins University and Joyce Epstein, and adopted as standards by Georgia PTA, are featured in the C.A.F.E. video. Six parents selected from throughout Georgia represent one of each of the six engagement standards. These six standards are parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and community collaboration. These standards are the backbone to the GaDOE School Keys on Student, Family and Community Engagement.

How to Set Up a C.A.F.E.

- 1. Choose a Topic of Concern**
Choose one that is important to your community and school.
Put together data and other pertinent information that is vetted by the school and the community. In other words, start with shared knowledge that all respect as valid.
- 2. Chose about Eight Stakeholders.** Identify parents who understand the issue through first -hand knowledge. Think out of the box when inviting community members. *You are looking for problem solvers.* A school administrator should be on the team as well as teachers and other staff members. Remember, family members may need extra supports such as transportation or childcare to participate. In addition, the parent may need some early coaching to feel comfortable in participating on the team. *Invest in parent leadership!*

3. **Write a “Dialogue,” a set of reaction and application questions** for each stakeholder to begin the discussions. Members will listen before they can react. Stakeholder can have different values and/or experiences. The “Dialogue” process was created by the national IDEA Partnership.
4. **Be clear on ground rules for added communication.** Set expectations high.
5. **Create a list of roadblocks** with the stakeholders in which they cannot control in the short term and then steer stakeholders from being hung up on any one of them.
6. **Build solutions on current initiatives and supports.** Everyone gets an assignment. Never leave a C.A.F.E. session without an action plan. Look for the group to find some short term goals so it feels as if things are moving.
7. **Make sure the team begins “To Do Life Together.”** Look for opportunities for members to share personal stories, dreams and fears so each member begins to understand others’ motivations.
8. **Embed the plan in the school’s overall goals** and make sure family engagement activities are part of that plan. Family engagement should not be separate from the overall focus and, finally, all parts of the plan must be sustainable.

In Action in Georgia:

- √ C.A.F.E. is part of the second year initiative of the State Personal Development Grant on decreasing dropout. The IDEA Partnership, an arm of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDE), will partner with the state to write “Dialogues” on discipline and behavior issues. The Dialogues will be used to guide school C.A.F.E.s
- √ Parent to Parent of GA also is running C.A.F.E.s on medical issues relating to school-aged students throughout the state. Parent to Parent also is the state’s Parent Training Information Center. (PTI)

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Also, refer to the IDEA Partnership, www.IDEAPartnership.org.