

From the Desk of *Our First Lady*

Georgia's Children's Cabinet Starts the New School Year with a Focus on Parent Engagement

by **Careshia Moore** photo by **Picture This Studio**

In the last issue of *Southern Journal Magazine*, we shared information about the Georgia Children's Cabinet's focus on immunization during the month of July. Immunization awareness is just a mere fraction of the work that the Cabinet undertakes for the children of Georgia. For the month of September, the Cabinet has chosen to focus on parent engagement. How apropos - this focus is a great way to kick off the 2013-2014 school year in Georgia.

The Cabinet provides support and resources in order to help promote parental engagement. One such resource is the Parent Café. "Parent Café is a great model for communities to engage parents. This is a forum to bring caregivers together to open dialogue about embedding protective factors in their family as well as in community programs," explains Georgia First Lady Sandra Deal. The Children's Cabinet website (www.children.ga.gov) provides information on upcoming trainings and resources necessary to implement Parent Café in various areas of the state.

Mrs. Deal, a former educator and Co-Chair of the Cabinet, wholeheartedly believes in the positive impact of parental engagement as it relates to education. "As a teacher, I enjoyed meeting the parents and learning about their willingness to be involved with the school and their support of their child. It helps to put a face with a name when you are making phone calls or setting up appointments. I think it is important for

parents to attend and to be active in school organizations, booster clubs and to volunteer their skills when needed," she said.

The Children's Cabinet recognizes the importance of parental engagement in every area of a child's life. "Parent engagement is the key to success for our youth. We want parents and caregivers to have their own conversations about how to keep their families strong. Whether we engage them in recovery treatment, prevention activities, or education, our communities that utilize parental involvement have stronger outcomes for children," says Mrs. Deal.

Parent engagement is not just beneficial for individual families; it also affects our communities. Schools depend on the support of parents for the needs of the classroom, the community environment and the successful education of its students. Similarly, Georgia's workforce depends on students who obtain the best education possible.

Parent engagement plays an integral role in a child's future. Parents serve as role models who help children to dream of who they would like to be. The more educated and skilled children become, the more opportunity they have to impact their future. Georgia's schools produce the state's workforce; and the better prepared our students are for jobs, the greater their impact will be on the future of our state.

Mrs. Deal also reflects on her personal experience of parenting her children. "As a parent, I felt

it was important for me to be acquainted with the teachers of my children. I offered them my support. I wanted to be aware of ways I could assist at home to help my children be successful students. I welcomed their phone calls and notes. I followed up with conferences if I had questions or concerns. I believe the role of the parent is to support the child and the teacher and to help their relationship be effective."

When asked about practical ways for parents to engage, Mrs. Deal replied: "Parents, please read to your children and help them with their math facts. Your interest in their education and their success at school will help them to feel loved and appreciated for who they are. It will build their confidence and allow them to be better students at school. The time spent developing a relationship with your child will encourage conversations at home and often enable issues to be solved before they become problems at school."

In the age of technology, it is relatively easy to stay in communication with our children's teachers. "Currently, many teachers use the internet to stay in contact with parents and provide the opportunity for them to know what topics are being studied, homework assignments, projects and other ways for them to be engaged with their student," Mrs. Deal explains.

As citizens of Georgia, we should join in with the Cabinet by engaging in our children's school community. Our engagement in our children's education is our contribution to the future success of our children and the state of Georgia. **S**