

A Step-By-Step Guide

Strategies, Tools and Resources
Leading Effective Stakeholder Teams
in The Work to Increase Student
Graduation Rates and Career Readiness

Georgia Department of Education C.A.F.E. Model For Authentic Stakeholder Engagement

Based on the Research and Practices
of the IDEA Partnership



Georgia's Systems of Continuous Improvement

A State Personnel Development Grant Initiative
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following guide details strategies, tools, and research gathered over the last decade as part of the Georgia Department of Education's (GaDOE) ongoing work to build and enhance the "Georgia C.A.F.E. Model for Authentic Stakeholder Engagement."

The GaDOE appreciates the hundreds of local C.A.F.E. stakeholders from the following participating school districts:

[Baker, Bibb, Decatur, Elbert, Evans, Haralson, Grady, Meriwether, Mitchell, Terrell, Thomaston-Upson and Wayne County School Districts.](#)

Guidance for the C.A.F.E. work comes from the methodology and guidance of the IDEA Partnership, a national collaborative of educators and administrators, national health and education organizations and nonprofits, and family members. GaDOE greatly appreciates IDEA Partnership's technical assistance led by Joanne Cashman, Ed.D, Patrice Cunniff Linehan Ed.D. and Mariola Rosser Ed.D.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education and the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, (OSEP) funds the IDEA Partnership.

C.A.F.E, standing for "Circles of Adults Focusing on Education," began as a family, school and community blended stakeholder process in the highly recognized GraduateFIRST initiative under the State Personnel Development Plan. (SPDG) The Division for Special Education Services and Supports (DSESS) led GraduateFIRST, which successfully drove a data intervention framework in 400 Georgia schools to increase graduation rates and career readiness, particularly for students with disabilities and other academic risk factors.

OSEP awarded Georgia two SPDG grant cycles, starting in 2007, to improve its systems for personnel preparation and professional development for early intervention, dropout prevention and transition services. GaDOE also recognizes the following organizations' contributions to the C.A.F.E. process: National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities; Council of Administrators of Special Education; Pioneer Regional Educational Service Agency; Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership; and Georgia Learning Resource System

This guide was produced under the leadership of Richard Woods, State School Superintendent, Debbie Gay, Deputy Superintendent of Federal Programs, and Zephine Smith-Dixon, Ed.D. DSESS Director.

Patti Solomon, Statewide SPDG C.A.F.E. Facilitator and former DSESS Family Engagement Specialist, developed and wrote this guide. She also led the C.A.F.E. fieldwork with the assistance of Anne Ladd, DSESS Family Engagement Specialist, C.A.F.E. Coaches Tracy Barber and April Lee, and former C.A.F.E. Coach Debbie Currere.

This Guide Can Be Used In Conjunction with the
IDEA Partnership’s
“Leading by Convening, (LbC)
A Blueprint for Authentic Engagement.”

A copy of the blueprint, which guides teams on how to identify shared values and interests through learning partnerships, can be downloaded at www.ideapartnership.org

Many of the tools utilized by C.A.F.E. stakeholder teams were developed by the IDEA Partnership and are available on the Partnership’s website under the LbC Blueprint link.

Index to Frequently Used Acronyms in this GUIDE:

OSEP	(US) Office of Special Education Programs
LbC	Leading By Convening, Blueprint for Authentic Engagement
IDEA	(US) Individual with Disabilities Education Act
ESSA	(US) Every Student Succeeds Act
NCSI	(US) National Center for Systemic Improvement
GaDOE	Georgia Department of Education
GaPMP	Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership
SSIP	(GA) State Systematic Improvement Plan
CoP	Communities of Practice
DSESS	(GA) Division for Special Education Support and Services
SPDG	(GA) State Personnel Development Grant
CAFE	(GA) Circle of Adults Focusing on Education

All materials used in this guide are endorsed by the IDEA Partnership.

WestEd’s National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) has adopted ‘Leading by Convening’ as its preferred and recommended approach to stakeholder engagement.
www.ncsi.org

Disclaimer: The contents of this guide were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The contents, however, do not necessarily represent the policy or endorsement of the U.S. Department of Education.

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A Snapshot of Georgia's C.A.F.E.

The Georgia C.A.F.E. Model for Authentic Stakeholder Engagement is a powerful testament of what can happen when people step out of their traditional rows and move into circles.

Standing for “Circles of Adults Focusing on Education,” C.A.F.E.s bring together persons of *authority* with persons of *influence* to truly listen to one another with the intention of creating a shared understanding around complex education issues.

With the guidance of the IDEA Partnership, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) began in 2007 to develop a stakeholder model to support students, particularly those with disabilities and/or at risk challenges, with blended initiatives both in and out of the classroom.

C.A.F.E. stakeholder teams, made up of school, family and community members, at once began delivering an array of effective actions including:

- Driving renewed excitement with districtwide campaigns around learning, particularly about reading and math.
- Providing mentoring and tutoring for youth by adult volunteers.
- Identifying and moving new, nontraditional resources into the schools such as encouraging churches to adopt local schools as partners.
- Creating new community partnerships and connections.

C.A.F.E. participants range from superintendents to members of the clergy, to local shop owners, to grandmothers. Demographic reviews of students and families served by C.A.F.E.s show a large percentage living below the Federal Poverty Level, and consequently, often needing critical support beyond what can typically be provided on a day-to-day basis inside school buildings.

The Georgia Way!

"I believe the Georgia C.A.F.E. Model for Authentic Stakeholder Engagement is an excellent example of our state effectively taking national policies and practices and making them work effectively at the local level.

Because of the IDEA Partnership and a decade of experiences from these C.A.F.E. stakeholder teams, we are seeing a new type of engagement evolve in education that truly is making a difference in the lives of thousands of Georgia students.

I commend the superintendents, special education directors and school principals who invite families, community members and educators to sit together at the table as a team and work on joint action items to support student outcomes."

Debbie Gay, GaDOE
Deputy Superintendent of Federal Programs
(retired November, 2017)

The Partnership Way!

"The Georgia C.A.F.E. has brought to life all we believe about the power of working together. The local examples of school staff and families facing challenges together are the best examples we have of families as allies in changing outcomes.

We are proud to feature the GA. C.A.F.E. in modules that will help the entire nation understand what it looks like to truly share leadership."

Joanne Cashman, IDEA Partnership,
National Director

Section One: Building Blocks to Authentic Engagement

History, Partners, Policies and Practices to Date

The Georgia Department of Education, Division for Special Education Services and Supports (DSESS) created the [C.A.F.E.](#) stakeholder process in 2007 within the context of GraduateFIRST, a statewide initiative aimed at increasing graduate rates and accelerating college and career readiness. GraduateFIRST was a cornerstone of the [State Personnel Development Grant \(SPDG\)](#) funded by the [U.S. Office of Special Education Programs \(OSEP\)](#).

From the beginning, the goal of the C.A.F.E., which spelled out stands for “*Circles of Adults Focusing on Education*,” was to engage educators, superintendents, principals, families and community members in an innovative, multifaceted effort to increase engagement around critical graduation issues.

The C.A.F.E. started as a school-based effort to meet student challenges in collaboration



with participating GraduateFIRST schools. While the GraduateFirst school-based teams primarily worked on academic challenges, the C.A.F.E teams looked at building student opportunities outside the realm of the academic classroom.

Both teams developed plans to support *all* students but particularly identified actions for youth with disabilities or others with at-risk challenges.

The [IDEA Partnership](#), a national leader, funded by OSEP and National Association of State Directors of Special Education, guided the GaDOE in pulling together diverse groups to facilitate productive conversations around education issues.

The IDEA Partnership built its work on the principles behind “Communities of Practice” (CoP) created in 1991 by Etienne Wenger, Ph.D. an educational theorist, along with Jean Lave, Ph.D., a cognitive anthropologist. The CoP principles offered school districts an effective method to bring together a multitude of stakeholders to address complex, often emotional issues in a collaborative setting.



“The topic or issue unites you, the plan for connecting, communicating and doing real work together sustains you!”

Joanne Cashman, Director
IDEA Partnership

“*Leading by Convening*” is a premise to describe the framework of stakeholder interactions based on Wenger’s CoP principles. Because this premise precisely describes 15 years of the IDEA Partnership’s collective work, it is the heart of the blueprint title: “Leading by Convening. (LbC) A Blueprint for Authentic Engagement.”

Published in 2014, the blueprint is a complete step-by-step guide, with a set of tools and user-friendly charts, based on the work of special and general educators, representing every state, many national health and education organizations, and families. The blueprint also features Georgia’s C.A.F.E. Model for Authentic Stakeholder Engagement.

Meanwhile, the Georgia C.A.F.E. grew further in scope in 2014 by not just focusing on one school building at a time but by launching districtwide stakeholder teams to look at systemic education issues across all grades.

This rededicated stakeholder process worked to solve the straightforward technical challenges of increasing graduation rates as well as the more challenging adaptive ones, such as addressing complex behavior changes, history and practices. In other words, these new C.A.F.E.s looked school wide at the big, complex achievement story impacting the “whole child” both in and out of the classroom.

After data drills and analysis of root causes, along with facilitated conversations, these districtwide teams took authentic engagement a step further in 2016 by developing C.A.F.E Action Grids, aimed to operate within the district's strategic plan. With higher graduation rates and better post-secondary outcomes as the long-term goal, the current Georgia C.A.F.E.s continue to initiate purposeful action steps to increase grade level reading and math, particularly among students with disabilities and/or with other at risk factors that create obstacles to graduation.

Moreover, the GaDOE began incorporating the C.A.F.E. process into its work to meet the objectives of the [State Systemic Improvement Plan. \(SSIP\)](#) OSEP directed states to develop a comprehensive, multi-year initiative to improve results for students with disabilities and connect general supervision to the work of meeting the requirements of the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#).

The federal accountability plan came about in response to OSEP's [Results Driven Accountability \(RDA\)](#) policy, which shifted the primary school accountability balance for special education from compliance to results.

In Georgia, the GaDOE took the SSIP requirement and translated it into a user-friendly, successful campaign called, "[Student Success: Imagine the Possibilities.](#)" The Georgia plan celebrates what is working yet continually adds new ways to make progress in increasing the graduation rate of students with disabilities.

To connect the C.A.F.E. into the state's SSIP graduation work, GaDOE asked seven school districts -- not only to continue to carry out their C.A.F.E. stakeholder improvement agendas -- but also act as the local stakeholder team to oversee their district's work to meet SSIP requirements. As part of the ongoing C.A.F.E. process, the state provided a facilitator and a regional coach to support these stakeholder teams in their SSIP graduation work as well as in districtwide improvement objectives.

Because GaDOE encouraged all school districts be set up with a local SSIP stakeholder team, it offered trainings across the state on the LbC blueprint. The National Center for Systemic Improvement, (NCSI) funded by OSEP and instrumental in helping states implement RDA, also adopted the principles of “Leading by Convening” as its recommended approach to stakeholder engagement.

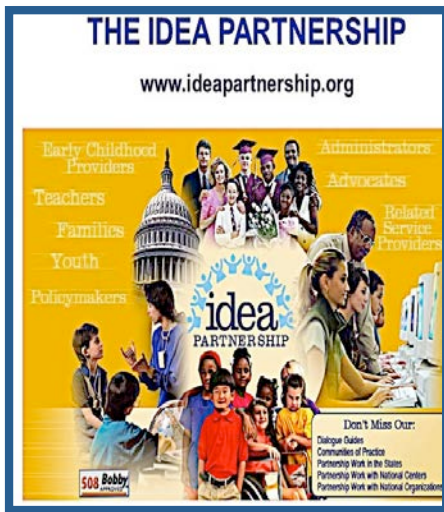
Georgia’s SSIP process is fully integrated into [Georgia’s Systems of Continuous Improvement Framework](#). The framework aligns all education tools, resources, and support and places family engagement as a priority in the improvement work to increase student success.



The C.A.F.E. process also fits well into the work of the [2015 Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#), which aims to ensure every child is ready for college, career and life success in each state’s accountability and support system. The national education act, which replaces the Elementary and Secondary Education Act better known as “No Child Left Behind,” emphasizes the critical role of family and community engagement.

Today, the GaDOE continues to lead the C.A.F.E. model’s development work under the SPDG umbrella, always aiming to work in partnership with the improvement work locally, statewide and nationally. This past year a “C.A.F.E. Action Grid” was introduced to blend the stakeholders’ work with the overall district objectives, as well as statewide and national education policies.

The following sections provide details on how to use the C.A.F.E. Model for Authentic Stakeholder Engagement to focus on engaging families and communities in national, state and local school improvement efforts.



The C.A.F.E. model not only relies on the experience of the local school districts that partnered with the GaDOE, but also the research, practices, and tools of the IDEA Partnership. The LbC blueprint is essential in this work as well as the IDEA Partnership's guides on creating dialogue and CoPs. All are available for download at: www.ideapartnerships.org



The Partnership and Georgia Way!

“I have been fortunate to lead workshops all over the U.S. and even in Canada on the sustainability of stakeholder involvement through Leading by Convening.

As a lifelong Georgian, I am most proud of the way I can use the GA. C.A.F.E experience of how a group of dedicated stakeholders took the concepts and strategies of Leading by Convening and personalized it to meet the needs of a local group. Taking the C.A.F.E. and using it to not just bring people together on an issue but to actually develop solutions with sustainability!”

Luann L. Purcell, Ed.D
National Executive Director,
Council of Administrators of Special Education

Section Two

Coalescing Around the Issues

Getting Started with a True Stakeholder Team

Finding Authentic Engagement

It takes a paradigm shift in thinking to move from working within a traditional team framework to coalescing around issues in a circle of shared influence.

True authentic engagement sparks and propels a diverse group of learners to transform their purpose into sustainable actions. This occurs when each member of the team is valued for his/her contributions and is invited into the decision-making process early on in the planning process.

These stakeholders, who are influencers in many avenues of daily life, are not asked for their “buy in” to a predetermined decision but to listen, learn, and comment. A new knowledge base soon inspires collective decisions around critical issues. And, finally, a definable action emerges to support the “whole child,” in and out of school.



Leadership Design: Management Vs. Engagement

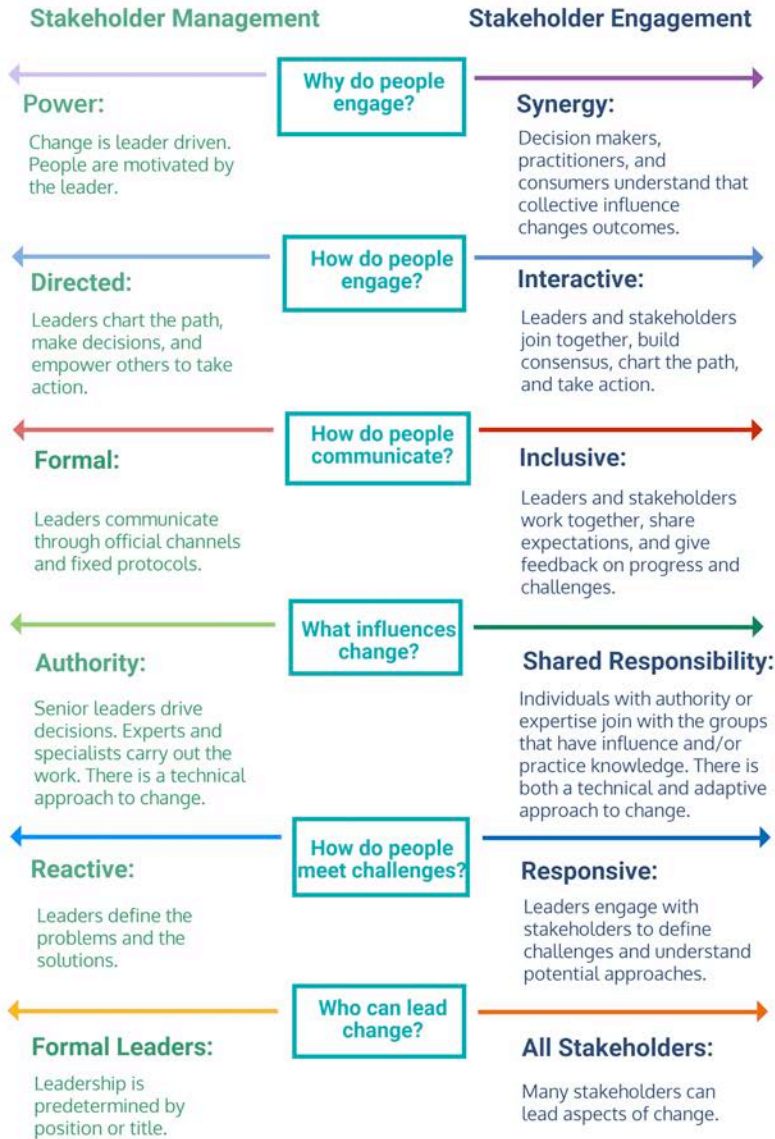
School districts often use a traditional “Top-Down Authority” approach in decision-making starting with the school board passing policies and the superintendent enforcing them. Although the traditional way of decision making is necessary in some cases, especially when time is critical, the C.A.F.E. Model for Authentic Stakeholder Engagement demonstrates the staying power of committed individuals when both the *authority* and the *influencers* sit down together to bridge the gap between policy and practice by authentically engaging in solution building from the beginning.

Are You Managing or Engaging Your Stakeholders?

Relationships are undervalued as a strategic investment.

Leading by Convening, 2014

A Management/Engagement Continuum



This infographic was developed by state and local agency staff and stakeholders working together as a follow up to the keynote session at CASE/NASDSE 2016 Conference. It is a grounding document for a set of activities around stakeholder management/engagement promoted by NCSL.



Members of the IDEA Partnership Developed This Infographic to Explain the Transition of Moving From an Authority Model to One of Influence. **Infographic Created in 2017**

The outcome of a C.A.F.E is first dependent on the willingness of a local school district’s “authority” to collaborate with a not-so-typical stakeholder team. A lot of new faces show up on these teams. And, while participants on traditional school councils and advisories come to listen to authority and then advise on pending decisions, these folks come to not only hear from authority but to listen to one another.

By valuing every voice, C.A.F.E. stakeholders coalesce around the issues to network back and forth. Eventually, a level of trust emerges that takes the team into a phase of collaboration that begins with an agreed upon vision. The banker, the mom, the superintendent, the social worker, and the math teacher, and the rest of the team, decide on short and long-term goals acting together to reach possible solutions.



The C.A.F.E.’s work does not replace the school district’s strategic plan, or its many achievement initiatives, but instead complements and enhances the efforts with new ideas, resources, and partners. Moreover, many C.A.F.E. districts experience a renewed trust in the school district from the community at large as well as willingness by many to lend a hand.

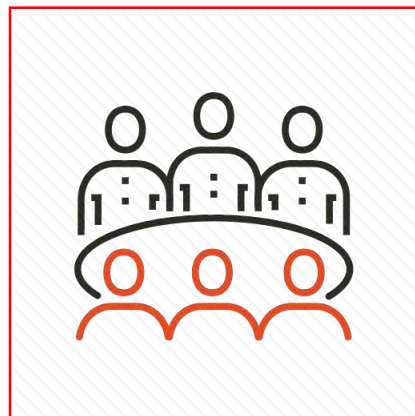
This type of improvement work is tough. It usually takes longer to reach solutions. But, because it is both collective planning and decision-making, the results are ultimately more sustainable.

Yet, the reality is that it is not always easy for a superintendent, or anyone else in charge for that matter, to discuss sensitive education issues with those typically not familiar or engaged in school district planning on a daily basis.

Introducing school data in this initial step may prove difficult for some administrators. One Georgia principal explained he felt as if he were “airing the school’s dirty laundry to people he really didn’t know.” Yet once this principal and the C.A.F.E. team members became engaged in the process, he soon realized the participants at the table did not want to point fingers in blame but instead they wanted to raise their hands to volunteer help.

A one-page sheet to explain major data points generally works best. When introducing data on graduation, discipline, and other key issues to the team, questions and varied opinions can arise; however, it is critical to stay on task and leave the questions/discussion for later in the process.

An outside facilitator is often crucial in these beginning conversations to keep participants on track by encouraging constructive questions and conversation that steer away from negative, non-productive dialogue. A facilitator also ensures every voice is heard.



Participating superintendents agree C.A.F.E. team members, representing every segment of the local community, including families, teachers, administrators, businesses, community-based organization, clergy and others, are all important participants in this new paradigm of authentic engagement. Each partner brings a new perspective, more connections, and various resources. In addition, a blended stakeholder group also opens up new avenues to improve communication and more effectively reach students and their families.

Finally, C.A.F.E.s are successful in connecting the community’s family-related services and organizations to the over all school improvement effort. Many supporters call the “umbrella” connecting together the many spokes working for children and youth.



The Partnership and Georgia Way!

“Every student succeeds when all students matter to everyone. Stakeholder engagement is not an option but a necessity. Each day, local schools and districts address tough challenges that impact positive outcomes for students. Who cares about these issues? We all do, but there must be a structured, intentional process by which we allow all voices to give educational leaders and communities the courage, strength, and resilience needed to meet the needs of our students. The C.A.F.E. process does just that!”

Zelphine Dixon Smith, State Director
GA Division for Special Education Services and Supports



The Partnership and Georgia Way!

“The C.A.F.E is bridging the gap. Folks from diverse backgrounds are coming together to seek opportunities to make our community schools awesome. The power is in developing a vision, mission and action plan, and then watching the individuals become a team as they lead the charge for improvement.

Truly, it is the difference between GOOD and GREAT. C.A.F.E. makes a powerful impact that bridges the gap between community and school.”

Robert Adams, Superintendent
Mitchel County School District

Stakeholder Interactions

While the IDEA Partnership's LbC blueprint explains the strength of blending both the power of authority and resources of influencers, C.A.F.E.s shows how it works in real time. In these teams, a safe environment evolves that allows participants to coalesce around common issues by truly listening to the voice of each member.

Leading by Convening:

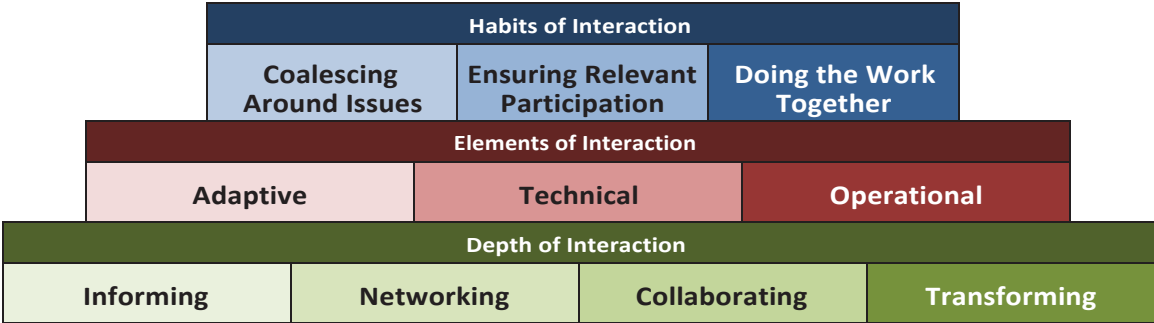
- Meets people where they are on the issue.
- Brings people together to build support for addressing the issue.
- Convenes the stakeholders to discover why this is important and how it will improve practice.
- Translates complex challenges into ways that individuals can contribute.
- Helps people lead in place regardless of role, position or title.
- Creates new knowledge together.
- Solves complex issues that need the various perspectives/aspects that contributes to problems/solutions.
- Builds a personal commitment to working in this way because inclusive work is better and more sustainable work.
- Cultivates the habit of collaboration.
- Instill collaboration into the identity of the group and the individual.

Adopted from the LbC, A Blueprint on Authentic Engagement

In the blueprint, the IDEA Partnership describes how teams move deeper into interactions on four different levels: Informing; Networking; Collaborating; and Transforming. While it is not always a priority – or necessary – to engage at deep levels with every stakeholder group, leaders can use the information in targeted ways to deepen engagement with key groups or build broad capacity by working with groups that share similar goals. The description of each level helps leaders recognize what observable behaviors or activities look like and to measure progress.

It also explains the underlying ingredients that enable groups to move from basic level interactions – such as informing and networking - to the collaborative level, which requires more attention to *technical* and *adaptive* challenges. As previously mentioned, technical challenges are solved with current knowledge and management practices while adaptive challenges require a new mindset and behavior.

Both the technical and adaptive sides of a challenge are described in the work of Ronald Heifetz, M.D. and Marty Linsky, Esq., Center for Public Leadership at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.



To summarize, the IDEA Partnership LbC chart “Habits of Interaction” is an overview on how teams go from coalescing around issues to ensuring relevant participation and doing the work together. In the process, the depth of interaction enhances as the team shares information and begins to network. Next, the team collaborates looking at both adaptive and technical challenges to develop an operational plan. Finally, the team is transformed into action unfolding a plan that is viable and sustainable.

FYI: The following sections in this Guide are divided according to the LbC interaction levels to show how the process unfolds and deepens when using the C.A.F.E. Model for Authentic Stakeholder Engagement.

LbC Tools:

To further understand how stakeholders coalesce around issues through different interaction levels, look at the LbC Blueprint: “Coalescing Around Issues” chart on PAGE 19. [Go to: www.ideapartnership.org](http://www.ideapartnership.org)

Section Three: Informing

Sharing or disseminating information with others who care about the issue.

Convening a Blended Team to Ensure Relevant Engagement

In Georgia, the process to identify C.A.F.E. participants begins with the formation of a core team often made up of a superintendent, special education director, parent mentor* and, possibly several others relevant to the work. The core team is tasked with bringing together the people who are most impacted by the identified challenges.

The first step in the process is for the core team to fully understand how a C.A.F.E. supports students, families and teachers in the work to improve outcomes. It is helpful to review the IDEA Partnership's materials: LbC Blueprint; Dialogue Facilitator Guide; and Community of Practice Manual. All are available to download at: www.ideapartnership.org.

Additionally, each C.A.F.E. team prepares detailed progress reports to post on their district websites. To read a full set of C.A.F.E wrap-ups, go to the "C.A.F.E." link located on the Special Education page on Decatur County School District's website: www.boe.dcboe.com

Appendix D: Provides a C.A.F.E. wrap-up template.

Overall, C.A.F.E. superintendents and principals agree the stakeholders sitting at the C.A.F.E. tables are providing their school districts with new information and insight, in addition to attracting more community partners and resources.

* A GA Parent Mentor is a parent of a child with a disability who works for a local school district to promote family engagement. The data-driven Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership, started in 2002 by the GaDOE, now boasts 110 highly trained parent mentors across the state.



The Partnership and Georgia Way!

“The C.A.F.E has provided an opportunity for our community to gather and discuss student issues and solutions to our issues. This unique group of individuals probably would not have gathered had it not been for the formation of the C.A.F.E.

They truly care about our children.”

Superintendent Kermit Gilliard, Ed.D.
Grady County School

Experience shows that for a stakeholder team to be successful in reaching authentic engagement the superintendent must be 100 percent behind the process. Early on, it is recommended the superintendent (authority) commit to the following:

- Attend all C.A.F.E. meetings: The superintendent’s presence emphasizes the importance of the process to all staff, families, students and community members.
- Run interference: If there are bureaucratic hurdles or local practices that block the progress of C.A.F.E. initiatives, he/she should strive to eliminate those barriers in collaboration with those most affected by the change.
- Keep the C.A.F.E. viable: Just as the superintendent strives to eliminate hurdles in the larger context, hurdles must be handled inside the group by providing reality checks on the practical aspects of implementation as well as unexpected consequences.
- Screening for what is legal, what is related to target funding, and what actually addresses identified needs and values.
- Stay on track to make a difference as a team: The C.A.F.E. needs to look at solvable issues and not spend time discussing issues they cannot control such as a federal law.
- Speak positively about the C.A.F.E.: Outside of C.A.F.E. meetings, the administration should show regard for the C.A.F.E., its members and its work.
- Assure the actions that are agreed on by the C.A.F.E. team, and that are within the purview of the superintendent, are accomplished.
- Encourage transparency and post meeting wrap-ups on the district website.

Once the commitment is made, the core team develops a list of potential team members by looking at the entire school, family and community landscape. Again, it is critical to seek to identify potential members who are most impacted by the challenges ahead. Also, it is important to ensure the potential list reflects the culture and ethnicity of the community.

Bringing new players to the school district planning table often increases community awareness, understanding and acceptance. Often these participants offer differing perspectives, expertise, resources and experience, which ultimately adds to the progress.

Because C.A.F.E. membership should reflect local needs and talents, the composition of each C.A.F.E. team will be unique to that C.A.F.E. In general, a C.A.F.E. should include school administrators, postsecondary faculty, community members (e.g., business, government, store owners, and nonprofits), representatives from the faith community, classroom teachers, police officers and parents or family members.



Classroom teachers also are valuable participants to the process. In addition, C.A.F.E.s often include other key school staff, such as the Title I Director, the Media Specialist and a Georgia Pre-K teacher.

In addition, organizers should recognize those community members who do not carry a professional title but still are considered leaders by many. In one C.A.F.E. community, for example, the local mechanic knew more about the area than the average citizen.

Residents often stopped by the local garage for coffee providing the owner with a wide range of insight. He offered information to his C.A.F.E. team on many sides of an issue.

In another community, neighbors looked for advice and leadership from a local grandmother, who was raising her grandson. The grandmother, who shared that she did not let her grandson outside after school because of the frequency of drive by shootings, said many young parents in the neighborhood came to her for guidance concerning their children.

The way to find and invite influential people from all walks of life is through personal contact. The core committee should be knowledgeable and invested in different parts of the community and also willing to call on colleagues and friends to help fill the gaps. Additionally, it is beneficial to ask every contact for suggestions on who else needs to be at the table.

In order to recruit C.A.F.E. members, the core team provides potential stakeholders with valid reasons for committing to the C.A.F.E. process for example:

- Businesses: Increased graduation rates result in a larger pool of skilled employees. Strong schools also help increase home sales and attract new business to the area.
- Members of the faith community: A C.A.F.E. expands outreach to new families.
- Family members: Participating as equal and valued participants in the discussion increases opportunities to understand the bigger picture and to make an impact.
- Postsecondary administrators: A C.A.F.E. provides a significant way to impact potential postsecondary students and influence their success.
- School administration: A C.A.F.E. builds circles of support for students in need.
- Teachers/staff: A C.A.F.E. provides a voice for school personnel and allows them to impact school culture and collaborate on issues that are too big to handle alone.

In addition, some valuable information comes from family members of students, who already dropped out of high school, or are on the verge of leaving. These family members can provide inside knowledge, which could help other students.

As for student participation, that is the decision of the team. To date, Georgia C.A.F.E. teams do not include current student members. C.A.F.E. teams report a hesitancy to include current students because of the confidentiality and sensitivity around some of the issues; it is an individual team's choice.

It is quite common for students to serve on C.A.F.E. working committees and to play a major role in developing the local C.A.F.E. team logo, campaign materials and social media avenues.

Some C.A.F.E. teams conduct focus groups and/or distribute surveys to gain needed student input on school issues. Additionally, most teams send a survey to teachers early on in the process to ask about their needs and ideas for improvement. It is critical to keep teachers informed and included in the C.A.F.E.'s work.

To gain insight from students and teachers, C.A.F.E.s also review district data on "School Climate," which is a statewide measurement that assesses safety, relationships, teaching, learning and external environments. C.A.F.E.s purposely work to impact the quality and character of school life.

For example, each C.A.F.E. runs a school wide campaign to encourage student success that includes academic contests, math and reading fairs and student leadership trainings. It is important to point to note that every active Georgia C.A.F.E. team saw an increase in its School Climate Rating.

Team Nuts and Bolts:

While the number of participants on a C.A.F.E. team may vary, those teams that experience the most success generally includes about 18 to 25 members. As the work of C.A.F.E. progresses, the number of members can be increased, and the team may decide to add members whose specific expertise is needed for committee work.

Regardless, it is critical the majority of C.A.F.E. team members commit to serving for a minimum of one year. Most C.A.F.E.s meet about five times a year with additional committee work via in person meetings, emails or conference calls. The first C.A.F.E. session generally is three hours in length with the following meetings typically running no more than two hours. When C.A.F.E.s continue after one school year, it is acceptable for members to move in and out of the circle depending on the group's needs,

When the core team is selecting members, they also should consider the following:

- Always include the superintendent in discussions regarding team selection.
- The district parent mentor, and/or someone else on the district staff, such as a Title I staff member, should regularly connect with the community and family members as well as ensure C.A.F.E. committees are running well between full stakeholder sessions.
- Successful C.A.F.E.s extend their influence beyond their members by asking team members to make communication connections through their social media and community, such as their place of worship.

It is also important to recruit C.A.F.E. members who will commit to:

- Making time for the C.A.F.E. meetings and volunteer work.
- Honoring confidentiality, respect, leadership, and teamwork in the C.A.F.E..
- Supporting the vision for the District.
- Promoting family and community engagement in the school process.
- Coming to the table with the intention of collaborating.
- Building trust among members in order for the C.A.F.E. team to work

- Understanding the data and the reason behind the numbers. No snap judgments. Members must develop a 360 view of the school to come up with sustainable actions that will add to the school improvement plan; so no snap judgements.
- Acknowledging a C.A.F.E. serves all children but particularly seeks supports for students with disabilities or other at risk challenges to succeed.

Focusing on School & Social Data/ Research / Grounding Assumptions

The C.A.F.E. process begins by tapping into the district’s data reports that identify some of the major underlying issues preventing students from graduating and succeeding in a secondary option. The core team examines relevant research that might explain the trends in the district.



From this work, it identifies some possible “grounding assumptions.” In the case of Georgia’s recent C.A.F.E.s, the core team looked at research showing the link between students living in poverty and low reading and math scores.

The core team also looks at the data provided by “Kids Count,” a network of state-level organization that provides a community by community

picture of the well being of children and families. The Georgia Family Connection Partnership runs the state’s link to data, which is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. To view state-by-state, as well as county data, go to the web site: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>.

One of the grounding assumptions of GA. C.A.F.E.’s continues to be the strong link between the impact of poverty and achievement levels. Invited participants receive evidenced-based research to support this assumption that is to be read prior to the first session.

Understanding Stresses of Poverty

The story behind declining graduation rates goes much deeper than what can be evident from a data dig. More than 60 percent of Georgia students receiving special education services also receive Title I supports such as free or reduced lunch. Poverty can lead to social and economic pressures on families that can impact a student's performance on a daily basis. Many students impacted by Georgia's C.A.F.E.s live in areas of persistent poverty.

It is difficult for school districts to handle the multiple issues that impact students living in impoverished environments without the support of the community.



In the past several years, the GaDOE targeted seven school districts with fewer than 5,000 students. A large percentage of the children and youth living in these districts live in poverty.

These C.A.F.E.s are located in the most southern part of the state where farming is critical, businesses are few and most schools are 100 percent federally funded for student breakfast and lunch. The districts are large in square miles so many students ride school buses for more than an hour each day.

One of the first challenges for a C.A.F.E. is to break down preconceived stereotypes about families living in poverty and look for ways to increase awareness and acceptance. C.A.F.E.s agree families living in generational or situational poverty often are targets of negative, unfair stereotypes.

To increase understanding, C.A.F.E.s organized activities such as: an awareness training for front office school staffs; a poverty simulation experience; and bus trips organized to show teachers the federal housing developments where their students live.

➤ The Partnership and Georgia Way!

"For several years educators in our system have discussed concerns for the impact of poverty on the students in our schools. Teams would often come together and talk about the changes we see in families and ask, what are we going to do? The C.A.F.E.'s structured process allowed our system to engage community stakeholders to develop a plan to address problems surrounding poverty with deliberate, purposeful action.



Though the ultimate goal is to improve graduation rates, the process propelled our system to move from discussing the impact of poverty to creating a web of supports for families and children living in poverty.

We are hopeful that our actions will meet that ultimate goal of a high school diploma for all our students and thus improve the lives of those within the community."

Catherine Gossett, Special Education Director,
Decatur County School District

Keeping Families Critical to the Process

While intuition and/or common sense may tell us the interest in - and respect for -education held by adults, who are significant in the lives of students is important, both research and experience prove this to be true. The impact of family engagement on school success is supported by more than 40 years of national research.

In his research report, "Parent Involvement and Student Achievement: A Meta---Analysis," (December 2005), William H. Jeynes reviewed 77 studies comprising more than 300,000 students and concluded that parent engagement is associated with higher student achievement outcomes. Moreover, this correlation holds not only for the overall student population, but for minority students as well.



This meta-analysis is just one of many studies on which the C.A.F.E. is based, further corroborating the results of family and community engagement on student achievement. Additional research studies are available at the Harvard Family Research Project , Harvard University.

Some of the critical information needed to work on student improvement can come from families of identified students needing more support. C.A.F.E.s encourage all families to get involved yet particularly looks for family members of students identified for intervention.

These family members offer needed insight from personal experience. One C.A.F.E. acted on a mother's story about her daughter's academic struggles and lack of positive connection to anything at school. This mother indicated a need for more after school activities, in addition to sports and chorus, to engage students like her daughter and provide them with a reason to go to school. The C.A.F.E. team found volunteers to run additional after school activities; and, within a few months, the principal reported the school was full of students until 6 p.m. each weekday. In addition, the district now makes sure every freshman is signed up for at least one extra curricular activity.

Schools always need parent leaders who are willing to be part of educational councils, assume leadership positions, or take on other responsibilities. As students rise through the grades, however, this kind of parent engagement tends to decrease. In addition, many parents of children who are identified as being "at risk," who experience academic challenges, or who struggle with attendance or behavior do not always feel welcome at their children's school

These are the very parents C.A.F.E. teams need to engage if they are to comprehend fully the multiple factors impacting these struggling learners.

The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has identified the following benefits of family engagement in education:

- Students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents' education levels.
- Students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and complete homework more consistently.
- Students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior.
- Students have higher graduation rates and enrollment rates in postsecondary education.

While the C.A.F.E. is successful in engaging some of these family members, it is also important to point out some parents recruited for a C.A.F.E. may not feel comfortable attending a school meeting where administrators and community leaders are present. Therefore, it is important for the C.A.F.E. leader to explain and/or clarify any generally agreed on or cultural expectations for the C.A.F.E. meetings such as appropriate dress, arriving on time, etc. Some parents involved in C.A.F.E.s are not able to afford any extra expenses that might be required to attend meetings so organizers should consider offering assistance.

In addition, this may be the first opportunity some family members will have to sit across from a superintendent or principal and share their ideas. C.A.F.E. organizers should explain to the parents in advance that these meetings are not for the purpose of talking about or solving the problems of their individual children, but to work together to create solutions for all students.

During the meetings, C.A.F.E. members typically refer to one another by their first names. This informal approach establishes a comfort level. Some school administrators or community leaders may prefer to continue more formal salutations outside of C.A.F.E. meetings. This needs to be determined and communicated to everyone.

GaDOE found in the C.A.F.E. work, particularly among some families living in poverty, that it can be helpful to include a person from the community who these families trust to provide some of the needed insight to their needs. It could be the director of the local Boys and Girls Club, a minister or a neighborhood leader. The C.A.F.E. process promotes both family and community engagement because sometimes engaging specific community members can be the voice of families who do not choose to be engaged in a C.A.F.E. but have a lot to say.

Appendix A and B to learn more about family engagement research.

Meeting Prep/ Critical Role of Facilitator/ Ice Breakers

Valuing all team members equally is one key to a successful C.A.F.E., so it is not wise for the superintendent or principal to lead C.A.F.E. meetings. Georgia C.A.F.E. teams successfully use facilitators from outside the school district. These trained facilitators can keep the tone of meetings neutral and move the discussion on topic.

In addition, the facilitator plays an essential role in helping the team examine and/or question grounding assumptions, reflect on the C.A.F.E. process, and take action. As a result of the diverse make up of a C.A.F.E., a variety of perspectives may be brought to the table at C.A.F.E. meetings. The facilitator understands and conveys to team members the importance of listening to one another thoughtfully, supporting each other, and acting together to find solutions and initiate change.

In addition, the facilitator works with the team to set ground rules for C.A.F.E. meetings; and, if necessary, the facilitator redirects members, who do not comply with these agreed upon rules, using humor or a light touch whenever possible to avoid embarrassing any member of the team.



A facilitator then assists the C.A.F.E. stakeholder team in developing a shared meaning and vision on issues identified through the vetted research, the school's data and goals, and team members' responses to the facilitator's questions. In addition, the facilitator leads the team in delivering a public relations victory early on in the process to help shape community attitudes.

Change is difficult, and it is easy for a C.A.F.E. team or individual team members to become discouraged. When this occurs, it is important for the facilitator to direct the team back to its reason for being. Reexamining or reflecting on the data may accomplish this task. Taking time to tell or retell the individual stories that brought participants to the group or specific stories about students that can benefit from the work of the C.A.F.E. can often reenergize a team.

Georgia C.A.F.E. leaders always end meetings with each members reflecting on the session whether it be positive or constructive criticism. Almost always taking the time to hear from each stakeholder energizes the individual team members and reinforces the relationship to one another.

The relationship building starts with day one when the facilitator encourages the team to get to know one another. Although some C.A.F.E. participants may cringe at the mention of icebreakers, the Georgia C.A.F.E teams found that this type of opening activity done properly exposes team members to different sides of people they may feel they already know. It also promotes more meaningful interaction among team members and initiates the process of assessing the influences and talents of the members.



To be most effective, icebreakers should be led by trained facilitators. Two icebreakers to consider are “The Elevator Speech” and “The Influencers.”

“The Elevator Speech” is when each team member prepares a message short enough to be delivered in the time it takes to travel from one floor to the next on an elevator. Each speech should include: the participant’s name; the participant’s job; role; and important characteristic(s) that make him/her who s/he is; and the participant’s primary reason or motivation for agreeing to join the C.A.F.E. team. Each team member then delivers his/her elevator speech. “

The “influencer” icebreaker is about collecting individual information and putting it together during the first session to show the base reach of the group. Before the first session begins, the core team asks participants to answer questions listed on charts hung around the room about their history in the community, talents, interests, and connections.

The facilitator tallies the information during a break; and presents the results to the team at the end of the session. This final tally becomes a group artifact that can be referred to when planning communication strategies, looking for specific skills to meet the needs of the team.

In many cases, just asking team members how many other community members they could reach with their social media circle, is enough to encourage the team of their strength.

Below are some additional facilitation strategies:

- Communicating Respect: Use individual names, make eye contact, and give credit to participants’ ideas. Recording participants’ viewpoints on chart paper for all to see demonstrates the value of the various viewpoints, provides a means for visual reflection, and helps summarize the discussion.
- Listening Actively: Arrange the meetings so group members face each other as well as the facilitator. With this arrangement, both the facilitator and the C.A.F.E. members can provide cues such as eye contact, positive facial expressions, and body language to show that they are listening to one another.
- Clarifying Points: Define or explain technical terms or jargon that may not be familiar to all members, rephrase statements that may be confusing, and/or ask members to elaborate when statements are vague or incomplete.

- Summarizing and Paraphrasing: Periodically restate or invite team members to restate major dialogue points so participants can reflect on the discussion. Ask probing questions when necessary. Value each answer. Celebrate successes!

Tips for Setting Up a C.A.F.E. Session:

- C.A.F.E chairs are to be arranged in a circle or in a u-shape.
- Make name cards on heavy stock paper folded three times to be set in front of each member. Put full names on the name cards and first names on nametags. The name cards help the facilitator as well as members when discussions begin.
- At the initial meeting, it is desirable to provide a meal because the session typically is three hours in length. The meals also provides a time for members to get know each another in a more relaxed environment.
- Future meetings are typically two hours and depending on time of day, districts often provide water, coffee and a light snack.
- Most C.A.F.E.s are held after school hours either immediately after school or at 6 p.m..
- After the initial session, the facilitator typically leaves time for committees to meet.

LbC Tools Suggested for Section 3:

To further understand how stakeholders coalesce to bring teams together go to the LbC Blueprint tools: www.ideapartnership.org

- How People Are PAGE 52
- Four Simple Questions PAGE 56
- Seeds of Trust PAGE 61
- Meet the Stakeholders PAGE 67

SECTION FOUR

Networking

Networking: Asking what others think about an issue and listening to what they say

As the next step after the district and community data review, the facilitator will begin to encourage networking through the IDEA Partnership’s “Dialogue” process, offering a set of reaction and application questions. The facilitator asks the questions based on the research, data and the grounding assumptions.

Before starting the Dialogue process, ground rules should be established. In this phase of the C.A.F.E., there is “no cross talk.” In other words, the facilitator calls on each member one by one, to build the conversation. Members are asked to not speak out of turn or raise their hand for attention. The facilitator can go in any order to choose which participant will speak. Also, the facilitator can go deeper by asking follow-up questions.

The “no cross talk” technique not only gives the facilitator a chance to move the conversation in a constructive direction but also encourages participants to listen instead of thinking about how they would like to answer. To take away any pressure on members, the facilitator lets participants know each one can pass on any question at any time when called upon. The C.A.F.E. coach or the parent mentor takes notes on poster paper so the team can see the answers during the Q&A.

Reaction questions are designed to determine where each member stands on issues; and, as such, disagreements or even hostilities may surface. The facilitator moderates to ensure all team members listen respectfully, and follow the “no cross talk” expectation. After the reaction questions, the facilitator asks the application questions to allow members to offer ideas on how they might resolve some of the issues that surfaced during the earlier part of the dialogue.

The questions are based on school data, the impact of poverty on student performance, and family and community engagement in the schools. The questions take into account the local issues around poverty, in particularly, “toxic stress” on students.

Through the responses to these questions, the most recent C.A.F.E. teams eventually linked both the need to target math and/or reading across the district and realized the urgency to build community pride and cohesiveness in order to motivate students. C.A.F.E.s are also looking into Parent Universities to offer ongoing family training.

Meanwhile, the IDEA Partnership offers prepared Dialogue guiding questions on a variety of education topics on its website. The Facilitators Dialogue Guide, also available for download at: <http://www.ideapartnership.org> offers great insight into the process.

The following is a Dialogue the GaDOE and Georgia educators and families developed with the IDEA Partnership in the work to increase graduation rates and post-secondary options. A facilitator can use some or all of the Dialogue guiding questions as well as additional ones. The order of questions depends on the responses and where the facilitator wants to take the group.

Reaction Questions:

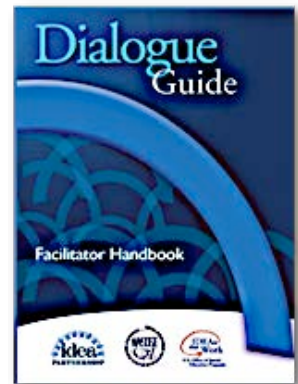
1. What attracted you to this C.A.F.E. dialogue?
2. What does family engagement mean to you?
3. From the family perspective, what are some of the common views of engagement?
4. From the school perspective, what are some of the common views of engagement?
5. From the student/youth perspective, what are some common views of engagement?
6. Does it mean different things in different cultures?
7. How will we agree to use the word “engagement” from this point forward?
8. Researchers have shown that all parents can have an influence on their child(ren)’s academic success regardless of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and educational background for students of all ages. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
9. Can you share your experience related to family engagement?

10. In your experience, are there groups who may not want to engage with schools?
Please describe an example that illustrates this point.
11. In your experience, are there any stakeholders who may not need to be engaged with schools?
12. Please describe an example that speaks to this point.
13. In your view, who is responsible for promoting engagement?
14. In your experience, what groups report being successfully engaged in family-school collaboration?
15. What can we learn from this?
16. What does it mean to communicate high expectations?
17. Consider the following excerpt from our source document. “While some parents are informed about some things some of the time by some teachers in some schools, some families still feel ‘lucky’ to be informed about or asked to participated in activities with their children.” What is your reaction to this statement?

Application Questions:

1. What are some of the most successful strategies for engaging families in support of their child (ren)’s academic success?
2. What might this look like for older students?
3. What does a family engagement approach look like across each grade span?
4. What does family engagement look like in high school?
5. What does family engagement look like in middle school?
6. What does family engagement look like in preschool and elementary school?
7. Do you have other thoughts on this?
8. The research says that all parents, regardless of income, education level, race/ethnicity, or cultural background, can have a positive impact on student achievement by engaging with their child(ren)’s school. What types of activities might build the capacity for staff to work with allfamilies?

- 9) What types of activities might create a school culture that considers the needs and assets of all families?
- 10) What types of activities would build the family capacity to work with educators?
If these activities do not exist, who should develop them?
- 11) What kinds of interactions allow the development of a core set of values with respect and dignity for all families?
- 12) What are some observable behaviors that make families more/less likely to be invited into schools? What is the role of the community in promoting deeper family engagement?
- 13) Several stakeholders have reported a “no news is good news” approach to engagement between family and school. Some feel this comes about because schools/families have taken/assumed separate roles. Others feel that some families are uncomfortable or don’t feel competent in educational aspects of their children’s life.
- 14) Are there other explanations? What are some ways to approach each of these perspectives on common behaviors observed in family-school interactions?
- 15) How could student attendance be encouraged?
- 16) How could more productive discipline strategies be developed?
- 17) How might expectations be jointly communicated?
- 18) What are some specific examples of how families can support learning at home?



[Example of answers recorded in a recent C.A.F.E. Dialogue session.](#)

Reaction Comments:

Absenteeism is a serious problem/ Many of our students lack food, clothing and shelter/
Where is the students’ initiative?/ Employers are looking for more students who are work ready/
There is a similar picture in the region when it comes to students’ lack of motivation to plan for a post-secondary option/ Some families have given up on the schools.

There is a lack of teacher prep in some areas of the Common Core Curriculum/ The frequent changes coming from the state in math are difficult for both the teacher and the student/ There isn't enough outside support or learning opportunities/ The community isn't engaged in the effort to motivate students to do well in school/ More caring adults are needed who believe in our students/ Students are excited to leave school but often do so without a plan.

Application Comments:

Encourage families to ask questions/ Deal with the kids who are home alone, hungry and without adult guidance/ Connect programs in the community and share the information /Setup tutoring for students after school – particularly in math/ Find ways to remediate so teachers can teach at grade level and accelerate those who can handle it/Find mentors to teach our students life skills and connect them to resources/ Give students a spiritual perspective on life/ Celebrate teachers with heart to support students who are struggling/Increase extra curricular activities to give students a reason to come to school/Inspire students “to dream?”

Vision and Goal Setting within a District Planning Frame

The facilitator records all responses before any discussion takes place, and then leads an examination of the data in relation to the responses of the group. The challenge of determining a common vision and goals often involves moving the team from dreams and wishes for students to a focus. Once the C.A.F.E. has established its vision, the team works together to focus the work. As the team starts to find a course of action, an overall vision is agreed upon and the goals are discussed. It is important for the team to appreciate and honor the work that already occurred and build upon the district's current work.

C.A.F.E.s envision all students will graduate with an obtainable secondary outcome. Each C.A.F.E., however, decides on different goals to reach the vision from increasing literacy skills, to improving math and science abilities to developing students' soft skills and citizenship. Most C.A.F.E teams create working committees around four or five goals.

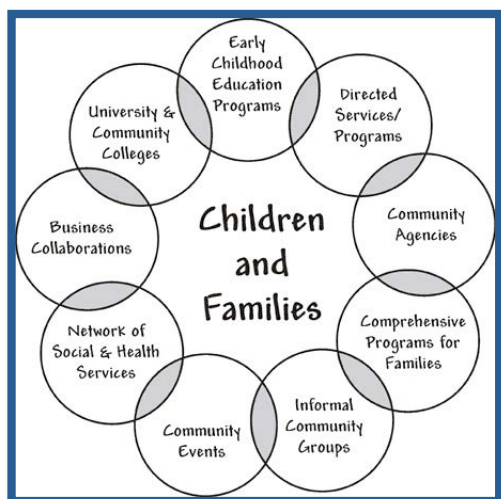
The committees write the particular goal as well as the action items. Assigning a group to each goal keeps the work moving. C.A.F.E. teams work collectively to develop a vision and objectives. This diverse group of thinkers considers multidirectional solutions to issues while looking at the big picture and at how all the different parts of that picture fit together. Most importantly, the C.A.F.E. looks at social, economic, and other outside influences that can adversely impact a student's well being and ultimate academic success. Through the responses to these questions, the C.A.F.E. team eventually linked both the need to target math and/or reading across the district to the urgency to build community pride and cohesiveness in order to build students' motivation.

One common message comes across frequently. Stakeholders want to inspire students to dream about their futures. Living in persistent poverty, and in some cases with few role models, the Georgia teams are determined to encourage students to think beyond today.

Go to Appendix C for a C.A.F.E. meeting wrap up.

MAPPING/Who is *not* at the Table?

In addition, to empowering C.A.F.E. team members to act, the team should take steps to involve and empower other families, educators and community entities in addressing the C.A.F.E. goals.



One way to accomplish this is by identifying and mapping resources. MAPPING allows team members to take stock of what's available in the community as well as what is in the schools. Also, the group looks for "natural supports," including the power of associations and relationships that flow with in a community.

The C.A.F.E. next embeds the MAPPING information into its work as well as communicates this vital information where pertinent throughout the school district and community.

With educators and administrators being asked to do more with less, sometimes communication suffers given hectic schedules and demands. Districts find the C.A.F.E. sessions a good place to regroup and communicate.

An example of a potential mapping chart:

What resources (human & material) do we need to accomplish our goals?	Who in the community can provide these human resources: knowledge & skills?	Where in the community can we obtain the material resources we need to accomplish our goals?
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The MAPPING process also helps stakeholders to realize potential partners who are missing from the C.A.F.E. table.



The Partnership and Georgia Way!

“These ambitious teams combine knowledge from the inside track of real-life family experiences with educator know-how and top it all off with community members’ experience and resources. All are considered learners on the team and all are considered influencers. The C.A.F.E. model is working to build effective teams that are energizing the SW Georgia community!”

Kathie Rigsby, Director
Southwest GA Learning Resource System

LbC Tools To Enhance Section Four:

- 5. What’s in it for Me? PAGE: 70
- 6. Engaging Everyone PAGE 73
- 7. Learn the Language. Make the Connection PAGE 76

SECTION FIVE

Collaborating

Engaging one another to do something of value and working tougher around the issue



Creating a Sense of Urgency

C.A.F.E. members, as well as the public watching the C.A.F.E.'s efforts, need to see success almost immediately. Once the team has established its goals, the facilitator should lead the members in screening these goals to determine at least one accomplishment, benchmark, or progress check that can be achieved within the first few

months. Getting the word out to the community about the C.A.F.E. via the slogan and/or logo also should be achieved in a relatively short time.

Other short-term wins can be realized by asking committees to present progress at the C.A.F.E. meeting. Also, celebrating the small victories and good news reports in the district are important initial wins.

Progress toward a longer-term goal can be recognized as a short-term win. For example, if attendance is an issue, positive changes in absences and tardy arrivals can be recognized at each C.A.F.E. meeting. Kicking off a district wide campaign on the team's short-term objective such as reading will drive energy and enthusiasm.

Early on in the process, C.A.F.E.s typically organize a special event to kick off the work. Two districts ran successful, well-attended "C.A.F.E. Conversations with the Superintendent." The teams presented their initial ideas and received public input. Working together to accomplish a public event really developed the team's relationships and enthusiasm.

Of course, a sense of urgency also is created the first day the C.A.F.E. team meets by giving the team a look at the data on graduation rates, absenteeism, and/or other areas impacting student success. Georgia's experience showed that every team needed the "WOW" factor to get the schools and community engaged in a long-term change effort.

Technical and Adaptive Challenges and Solutions

As the team interacts, it examines technical and adaptive responses to solving challenges. The technical ones are those that can be solved with the right expertise such as bringing in an expert or trying a new curriculum. As mentioned in Section Two, an adaptive challenge does not equate a clear solution. Adaptive change is about values and beliefs. Therefore, it is a more complicated solution that takes much longer to reach. The people connected to the problem are the best in solving the challenge.



The IDEA Partnership suggests using the technical infrastructure and combining it with the adaptive or human side of change. They call this step the Operational Challenge to finding a solution.

Essentially, the team thinks about what the new behavior would look like in practice. Then, leaders can identify specific operational decisions they need to pay attention to as the key 'look fors' to advance the work of school improvement.

The work of the C.A.F.E. team is predicated on an adaptive approach. C.A.F.E. teams work collectively to examine the data to put adaptive solutions in place. The C.A.F.E. develops actions to curb negative attitudes and develop positive school, home, and community collaborations.

C.A.F.E.s also allow a diverse group of thinkers to consider multidirectional solutions to issues and how all the different parts of that picture fit together. Much of this work goes beyond technical solutions and into the realm of adaptive problem solving.

Many students identified as needing support, often share some underlying commonalities that are difficult, if not impossible, to address during the school day. These challenges can be positively impacted through a wrap-around approach that involves school, home, and community. Take for example, a group of students are identified with multiple at risk factors that could impact their graduation. The identified students may receive technical support from their teachers such as remedial tutoring. C.A.F.E. trained adult mentors would check in weekly with each of the students on an individual basis. Meanwhile, a community mental health organization offers training on specific issues identified by both the teachers and the adult mentors.

The Campaign, Branding And Transparency

Georgia's experience revealed that the campaign around the C.A.F.E.'s major focus creates energy in the community. [To learn about setting up literacy campaigns go to Appendix D.](#) First, the C.A.F.E. determines the content of the message. What is at stake? What is the relevant issue? Is it attendance? Grade level reading? Performance in mathematics?

While all the C.A.F.E.s are working long term to increase graduation rates and secondary outcomes, most concentrate on short-term goals to help students in the immediate future such as with literacy and math activities.



The campaigns mainly center on promoting the short-term goal but do not lose sight of the long-term goal in the big picture. A C.A.F.E. may choose to brand its message in

much the same way a company brands its products. Branding may include creating a catchy phrase or slogan. For example, one C.A.F.E. used the motto "Read. Lead. Succeed." It promoted getting all students to read on grade level so each one can later become a leader and succeed.

A C.A.F.E. may also elect to design a logo so that any communication from the C.A.F.E. will have instant recognition in the community whenever/wherever the logo appears.

Once the content of the message is determined, the method of communication also must be established. For the content to reach its desired audience in a meaningful way, the method of communication must be focused and memorable. What vehicles will be used to get the message out? Do families and community members use technology to access email or different forms of social media such as Facebook or Twitter? What is already in place?

Each C.A.F.E. must decide the best means to reach the greatest number of families and community members and then formulate an action plan to make this happen. Several teams relied on churches to get messages to families from the pulpit and from church marquees.

Successful C.A.F.E.s extend their influence beyond their members and their meetings to reach other families and community members, and they do this by making connections through effective communication. Tapping into C.A.F.E. Stakeholder's social media contacts through email, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter is an effective way to quickly get out a message to a large group of people.

The C.A.F.E. members determine who should receive its message and how this can be accomplished.

In addition, the facilitator should remind the team that public relations and visibility are on-going tasks for each team member.

[Suggested LbC Tools Activities To Enhance Section Five:](#)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------|
| 8. A Quick Chronology Of Engagement | PAGE 89 |
| 9. Give Value First | PAGE 90 |
| 10. Your Brand | PAGE 91 |

Section Six

Transforming

Developing New Leaders And Resources

As C.A.F.E. members move from meeting to action, it is crucial that every member be an active participant. The group can inspire and ensure individual responsibility by motivating one another. By delegating activities and action steps, responsibilities, resources, and timelines at the end of every meeting, C.A.F.E. facilitators can make sure each member has a role to play, understands his/her individual responsibilities, and knows what steps to take to meet these responsibilities. Activities/Action Steps – What activity will support the initiative? What steps need to be taken to complete this activity? Facilitators should take care to ensure that activities are innovative and that they address various motivations.

- Responsibilities – Who will do the work? Since many people will be involved in carrying out the work, it is important to assign and list specific tasks and activities to one or more team members up front. This helps create ownership and sets the expectations for participation that will ensure the work gets done.
- Resources – What is currently available? What/who else is needed to carry out the activity?
- Timeline – What will be done by when and how will progress be communicated?

Each C.A.F.E. member should leave every meeting with a personal plan of action that specifies what he/she will accomplish as a fully participating member of a committee. This makes commitment visible and real. In addition, the facilitator should remind the team that public relations and visibility are ongoing tasks for each team member.

Committee Key Conversations and Ongoing Work

C.A.F.E.s often leave members with some key questions they should discuss before the next meeting. The initial conversations typically include: finalizing the vision; developing a campaign; researching resources and partners; and gathering feedback from teachers and other key groups.

By the end of the second session, C.A.F.E. members are ready to get to work and committees are formed to begin working around specific areas such as adult mentors for youth; literacy activities; volunteers in the schools; and reading or math campaigns. It is recommended that committee chairs come from outside the school administration. The more the team engages families and the community, the more the workload is expanded.

Creating Ongoing Action with the C.A.F.E. Action Grid

Once a C.A.F.E. develops goals based on data, district plans, and discussions, the C.A.F.E.'s next step is to develop an action grid. The action grid typically centers on four major goals. Specific data points on the District's Report Card will measure success. The C.A.F.E. Action Grid works in conjunction with the District's Strategic Plan.

The C.A.F.E. team divides into designated committees to update action plans as well as to develop new action steps for each written goal. The action grid drives the C.A.F.E.

Goals	Action Steps	Timeline	Partners	What will be Accomplished

Collaborative Actions For Real Change – Georgia Stories

Manchester High School, Meriwether, GA.

A Georgia high school principal pushed aside his comfort zone for unneeded publicity to invite community and family stakeholders into his building to see firsthand the data on declining test scores, high absenteeism, and low graduation rates. He also learned about the unwanted existence of a revolving door for exiting educators. Then, he took the next crucial step and asked them to help!



Through a major push from the state-initiated C.A.F.E. stakeholder model, Manchester High School, nestled in a rural farmland community of 22,000, increased its graduation rate for general education students from 60 percent to 94.6 percent in less than four years. In addition, the graduation rate for students with disabilities increased from 28 percent to 63 percent.

Many factors played into the significant improvement in graduation rates in Georgia's SPDG schools, but Manchester High School - where 100 percent of the students receive Title I free lunch – gives most of the credit to its unique team of C.A.F.E. leaders.

Former Principal Dennis "Chip" Medders was quick to identify his C.A.F.E. team and its Dialogue process, as the conduit to the change. He explained that tossing old school communication culture aside to invite the community in to see the school's blemishes led to a team of new players, ideas and resources.

Medders, now a high school principal in nearby Troup County, said he handled his new high school assignment totally differently because of his experience with C.A.F.E. He said, "Engaging everyone in the process of school improvement is critical."

Manchester's C.A.F.E. team immediately saw success because of respected proven school improvement tools such as a thorough data drill on the issues --- but most dramatically it did something unique when it purposely became *transparent* in every aspect of its work.

This did not mean Manchester and the other C.A.F.E. schools, hid information from the public but instead these teams started going beyond traditional school



communication methods by scaffolding information in various mediums, frequencies and delivery of content to adapt to changing and diverse school audiences.

In Manchester, for example, the 30 plus area churches became part of the school

improvement process, from working with families in their congregations on the responsibility to get students to class, to offering volunteers to mentor students in the school.

Many critical factors that were prominent in successful teams included: a superintendent and/or principal leader who believed in the process and stuck with it; an outside trained facilitator to support the team process; a seasoned Georgia Parent Mentor who was trusted by her/his community; and school partners who did the day to day work to keep the process moving.

Baker County School District, Newton, GA

Transporting children and youth from K-12 to one school building daily within a 350-square mile radius, with a majority of the students facing extreme poverty living environments is a critical challenge. Then add in lack of local businesses and industry to support the tax base and to many observers, this could be a predictor of a student success story *gone wrong*.

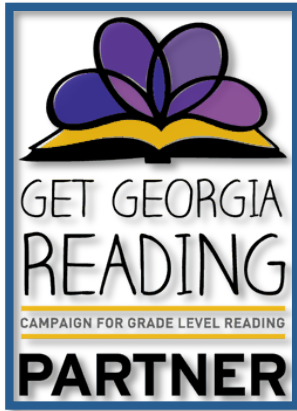
Yet, in the Baker County School District, an achievement story in literacy is turned into an inspirational tale with 12 bears as its footnotes. This Southwest Georgia district, which sported a “Baker Bear” mascot as the “Data Bear” for each of the 12 grade levels, is rewriting the book on reading proficiency levels through the leadership of its Superintendent and a diverse group of stakeholders.



Six local parents, two grandparents, two teachers, three school administrators, and six community volunteers - including the county sheriff, several pastors and two family agencies representatives - met under the evidenced-based stakeholder process, C.A.F.E.

Then Special Education Director and Assistant Principal Buddy Edwards conducted a data drill. Mr. Edwards found much of the past data from standardized and end of course testing pointed to an underlying literacy issue among some students.

The economic level of many of the 370 plus students (about 50 of those on IEPs), was an important consideration for the staff. All students - 100 percent of the school population - qualified for federal assistance under Title I, which can be an indicator for future dropouts, according to the National Dropout Prevention Center and Network.



A 2014 report confirmed this finding by the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a national collaborative effort to ensure more children in low-income families succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, a career, and active citizenship. The campaign focuses on the importance of grade-level reading by the end of third grade as a predictor of school success and high school graduation.

<http://gradelevelreading.net/our-work>:

Students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave high school without a diploma than proficient readers, according to its recent study: “Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation.”

Further, it stated that students who live in poverty are three times more likely to drop out or fail to graduate on time than their more affluent peers.

According to the longitude study, conducted by Donald J. Hernandez, a professor of sociology at Hunter College and the Graduate Center at the City University of New York, there is link between third grade scores and high school graduation. The study breaks down the likelihood of graduation by different reading skill levels and poverty experiences. The Annie E. Casey Foundation commissioned the study, which also funds the Kids Count study on the nation’s poverty levels for children.

The Baker C.A.F.E. team began its work to establish a shared vision by first looking at the academic data for its students as well as national research on indicators for student success. Members agreed on a vision that would lead every student to graduate and continue to a secondary option. Quickly, evidence pointed to an action plan around an underlying literacy issue.

“We all knew our district had experienced an exodus among administrators and teachers in the last decade, as well as a decline in community confidence,” said former Superintendent Torrance Choates, Ed.D, who first came on board as principal in 2011. “In addition, we were losing students to a nearby charter school and a private school in a neighboring school district.”

Although, standardized test scores began improving under Choates’ leadership, he determined that to deal with the complexity of issues surrounding student success – from discipline to staff morale to a lack of resources - he needed more players in this achievement story.

Along with the campaign banners and other pro-reading signs around the school, no one could miss the grade level improvements being showcased for each grade on 12 colorful bears. Stakeholders also provided students with reading assistance at some neighborhood churches because many students lived too far away to get transportation to the school’s media center. The district also allowed those churches willing to help with reading activities to check out large numbers of books from the media center.

Former Special Education Director, Buddy Edwards said, “Compared to the gains made in previous years at Baker, we now are knocking it out of the park.”

Appendices

Appendix A: PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships

- STANDARD 1: WELCOMING ALL FAMILIES INTO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY
Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.
- STANDARD 2: COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY
Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way meaningful communication about student learning.
- STANDARD 3: SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS
Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and health development both at home and at school and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.
- STANDARD 4: SPEAKING UP FOR EVERY CHILD
Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.
- STANDARD 5: SHARING POWER
Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.
- STANDARD 6: COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY
Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

National Parent Teacher Association. (2001).
National Standards For Parent/Family Involvement Programs. Chicago, ILL: Author.

Appendix B: Research on Family Engagement

Family Engagement Overview:

Today's call for families to become more involved in their children's education both at home and at school is not new. For decades, federal programs such as Head Start, Follow Through, Chapter One/Title One, and special education have mandated that parents/families be closely involved. Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) has shown positive effects on student achievement at the middle school level. Unfortunately, in many cases there is no partnership between home and school.

Family Engagement is needed:

Some schools and teachers have not made significant progress in reaching out to families. While some parents are informed about some things some of the time by some teachers in some schools, some families still feel "lucky" to be informed about or asked to participate in activities with their children. In addition, some schools and communities do not fully understand the barriers parents and families encounter and the importance of reaching out to them in order to build the kind of relationships that engage parents as true, active partners early in their children's education. Clark (1993) found that the way children spend their time at home is the strongest predictor of school success. Home learning time activities such as homework, reading, and using the dictionary are common among high achievers.

Schools and school districts, which are successfully involving families, began by responding to the qualities, characteristics, and needs of the parents in order to overcome the barriers that interfere with communication.

These barriers include parents' levels of literacy; language preferred for reading, listening, speaking, and writing; daily commitments and responsibilities that may affect the time, energy, and attention available to devote to school; and parents' levels of comfort in becoming involved in their children's education.

Steps to Effective Family Engagement Programs Henderson and Mapp (2002)

1. Recognize that all parents, regardless of income, education level, or cultural background are involved in their children's education and want their children to do well in school.
2. Link family and community engagement efforts to student learning.
3. Create initiatives that will support families to guide their children's learning from preschool through high school.
4. Develop the capacity of school staff to work with families, focus efforts to engage families on developing trusting relationships, embrace a philosophy of partnership, and be willing to share power with families.
5. Make sure that parents and school staff understand that the responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise (Mapp, 2004).



The Partnership and the Georgia Way!



The C.A.F.E provides a platform where parents, educators and community leaders drop their titles at the door and instead come in with an open mind to create sustainable change that increases education outcomes for all students”

Latosha Peters
Special Education Director and School Principal
Terrell County School District

Appendix C: A C.A.F.E. Template: Session Wrap-ups

C.A.F.E. Meeting Wrap up # and School District Name.
Date of Meeting

Next Full C.A.F.E Session Date
Time and Place

| Summary of Meeting: _____

List Members Present at Session and who he/she represents such as middle school principal, family member, community leader etc. *(Please note it is important members have an updated contact list.)*

List Those Unable to Attend and Member's Association: -

| Overview of C.A.F.E. work to date:

Update on Data points:

Superintendent's Comments: *(optional)*

Individual Committee Reports to the Full C.A.F.E:
(Type of Committees will depend on the C.A.F.E.'s Decisions and Direction)

Example: Outreach Committee:

- Summary of Action:
- Next Steps:
- Committee Chair(s) and Members:

Discussion on Goals and Next Steps:

Standard:

At the end of each C.A.F.E. Wrap-up add information summarizing the C.A.F.E. process and its ongoing connections to local, state and federal policies or action items. Also, look and report on the "value" in each step of the process that is playing a role in getting to the finish line.

Appendix D: Tips For Starting A School Wide Literacy Campaign

- Make a plan with strong, consistent message.
- Choose motto or slogan.
- Create a logo that represents your brand.
- Decide on your touch-points for your brand campaign such as the school web site, schools newspapers, local radio and TV, church bulletins etc. The more ways students, families and the community are exposed to different touch points, the more likely they will buy into the message.
- Consider how you will use social media. Do you want to start a Facebook Page? FB is helpful when looking for away to call your audience to action.
- Plan for frequency and longevity in your message. Think about your different audiences and how you will reach out to each one differently.
- Work to tie in the work of the C.A.F.E. and its partners under one brand so information is two way and accessible to all.
- Identify income and/or resources to create banners and other materials in all the schools and in local businesses and/or church that choose to partner with the school district.
- Build your plan on existing activities and resources.



Web Addresses:

GA Department of Education: www.gadoe.org

GA Division for Special Education Supports and Services:

[www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/SpecialEducation Services](http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/SpecialEducation%20Services)

GA State Personnel Development Grant: www.gaspdg.org

Ga Parent Mentor Partnership: www.parentmentors.org

GA Family Connections Partnership Kids Count, Annie E. Casey Foundation:

www.datacenter.kidscount.org

Campaign for Grade Level Reading: www.getgeorgiareading.org

US Office of Special Education Programs: www2.ed.gov

OSEP's National Center for Systemic Improvement: www.ncsi.org

Addresses to Guide Books Available on the IDEA Partnership Website:

www.ideapartnership.org

IDEA Partnership Books:

- The IDEA Partnership: [Leading By Convening. A Blueprint for Authentic Engagement](#), published by NASDSE, 2015
- IDEA Partnership's [Dialogue Guide, Facilitator Handbook](#), published by NASDSE, 2005
- [Communities of Practice: A New Approach to Solving Education Problems](#), published by NASDSE, 2007

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