

# OPINION

JIM KELLY

## Launch Georgia K-12 education on the 'Seven Cs'

As Gov. Nathan Deal's Education Reform Commission approaches the release of its first round of draft proposals, now is a good time to focus on some overarching principles for improving K-12 education in Georgia. Otherwise, detailed prescriptions for more equitable education funding, student performance, and teacher recruitment, retention and compensation will fail for a lack of attention to seven essential elements of effective education: creed, competence, curriculum, character, community, compassion and choice.

Among the standard definitions of the word "creed" is "a set of beliefs or aims that guide someone's actions." Without clearly stated beliefs or aims that infuse the entire educational process, a school community increases the risk of failure. A school creed does not have to be religious in nature; however, it must be meaningful enough to focus the attention of parents, students, teachers, and administrators on a mission that transcends and contextualizes the everyday learning process.

Competence needs to be the benchmark of every school community. Unless teachers and administrators are competent, students will not be competent. Schools must adopt objective methods to measure teacher competence, improve teacher performance, and terminate incompetent teachers. As for students, acquiring knowledge has never been easier; however, becoming competent in the use or application of knowledge is imperative to future success. Meanwhile, community-based programs must be developed that increase parent childrearing, academic, life skills, and employment competence.

The school curriculum should reflect the mission, goals and objectives of the school community. Grassroots activists should continue to shine a spotlight on the disproportionate and undemocratic influence of education associations, foundations, the U.S. Department of Education, and big business on the development and implementation of national education standards, such as the Common Core State Standards.

Georgia law mandates that character education be taught in all public schools; however, the implementation of the law has been almost non-existent. This failure constitutes education malpractice. In light of the availability of outstanding and proven character education programs, such as Character Counts! and the Medal of Honor Character Development Program, there is no excuse for the continued neglect of such an important obligation.

As a society, we need to stop protecting ineffective and costly school systems and



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start building individual school communities. Beyond academic learning, each school community should consider whether there are basic non-academic needs that are not being met and how to meet those needs. To the extent model public-private partnerships, including faith-based ones, have been developed to meet the psychological counseling, health-care, job training, tutoring, and substance abuse prevention and counseling needs of families, they need to be replicated in school communities throughout Georgia.

Georgians must exercise compassion

toward those families who are facing difficult circumstances in securing an adequate education for their children. President George W. Bush once said, "Government cannot love a child, but it can support those who do, parents and family members and neighbors and caring adults who have heard the call." State officials should do more to educate Georgians about faith-based and community initiatives that help families secure the social services necessary to create a stable learning environment for their children.

Finally, too many parents are being forced to send their children to public schools that are failing to provide an adequate education, failing to keep their children safe, or failing to provide their children with the moral education desired by their parents. Parents need more choices, including the expansion of Georgia's popular K-12 tuition tax credit scholarship program and the adoption of an education savings account similar to the one Nevada recently adopted.

It is encouraging that, to some extent, education policymakers have considered each of the "seven Cs," albeit usually in isolation. Nevertheless, whether it is these seven principles or some other formulation, Georgians should seek agreement on a set of principles that can inform and, hopefully, transform, the proposals ultimately recommended by Gov. Deal's Education Reform Commission and adopted by the Georgia General Assembly.

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