



GAPT Newsletter

OCTOBER / 2008

Since the Jekyll conference in June, it's certainly been an interesting three months. And the future certainly holds the promise of being challenging for us all. This newsletter will recap the 2008 conference, discuss some of the activities since the conference and what lies ahead..

Summarizing the 2008/Summer Conference

By all of the feedback we received (both anecdotally and by survey), the 2008 GAPT conference was a great success -- though occasionally confusing. The confusion stemmed from our attempt to make the agenda read in a more comprehensive fashion. This was done in response to concerns raised in previous years. We just went too far and made it more confusing instead of more helpful. As with all good organizations - we learn, adapt and improve.

As far as the conference operations, the response to on-line registration was extremely positive, so we expect to continue that for the future. There continues to be concerns with the quality of available lodging (local hotels), the shuttle bus service, and the food services provided during the conference. On the plus side, we received much more favorable response about the banquet this year. The GAPT board members would like to believe that it was the outstanding entertainment that was provided to *launch* the banquet (*the Gilligan repertoire*), but we suspect it was the different menu and the more relaxed dress code.

The success of this year's conference is tied directly to the presenters and the workshops. We received an overwhelming number of endorsements for the motivational speakers. Every one of them received accolades. It seemed that the collective greatest frustration you dealt with was when we scheduled one motivational speaker at the same time as another. That will be prevented in future schedules.

Evaluations we received reflected that all the workshops scored very highly, as well as both of the professional development courses. Once again, the concern here was similar to that raised with the motivational speakers. We scheduled two programs that were very much desired at the same time. However, the response to this concern is different. On these concurrent workshops, if we as a board have done our jobs correctly, there will likely be some tough choices. We want to make each workshop worthwhile and valuable. The idea is that at each period of the day, there will be a workshop you will want to attend. Depending on your background, other conferences you have attended or personal interests, you will find multiple workshops worth attending. If you set out to gain as much for your system as possible at each conference, bring a second person along, and game plan which workshops each will attend so you can assure all of the information is returned to your school system.

In general, this was a very successful conference. And as we value your survey responses and build upon the lessons we've learned, we will further be able to provide you with an improved over-all conference experience.

SESPTC (No - *not* septic!)

A couple of weeks after our conference, the boys at the DOE were called upon to host the *Southeastern States Pupil Transportation Conference (SESPTC)*. Along with GAPT and folks primarily from Cobb and Henry counties, they went into crisis labor mode (SESPTC didn't know what they wanted, just that they wanted something good and they wanted it now). The great thing about this conference was the training opportunities our attendees received (Pat Emfinger was spotted everywhere), and the great camaraderie established by our folks working the conference. You should have seen the conga line Jim Waggoner established Saturday before the conference when hand stuffing hundreds of packets.

School Opening

We all received the figurative "punch in the stomach" as we were opening the school-year when all the news about budget cuts came out. As this newsletter goes to final, we still don't know the detail about all of the impacts of this cut, but we are feeling the pressure. Sadly, all of the indicators suggest this is just the beginning of several years of difficult budget times. And looking back, we all thought the governor's austerity cuts of the last several years *were* the bad times. So the suggestion is - as you look for the efficiencies that will be demanded of you, look for those that can have a longer term effect (e.g., consolidating routes, changing services, reducing stops, shorter school weeks). We like to think of it as the opportunity to do the things all of us have thought should be done, but we couldn't get the political will behind us to do them. Under the guise of budget constraints, we might get the support to do what is financially right.

Then we got hit by the newest fuel crisis. Many of us speculated the upcoming crisis when the DOE guys started inquiring as to how much fuel we had in the ground. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that they knew something - which they did but couldn't tell us. Then as the commercial world caught wind of the possible service interruptions, the prices jumped right through the roof. We had a run at the stations, and voila - fuel shortages. The Governor says it was panic induced. Who knows? But there are a lot of lines at gas stations.

So this year has started as a humdinger. But we know better than to say, "*Now we've seen it all*", because experience has taught us that as soon as you think that, not only does the other shoe fall, but the whole darned closet falls with it.

Coming up

On **October 14th**, the required *Driver Instructor Training* will be provided in Forsyth, Georgia. This is a component of the state law governing requirements for driver instructor training. It is not mandatory for everyone to attend this workshop, but it is a component of what is required to meet the driver instruction training mandates. Contact your area consultant for more details.

October 26th to October 30th is the **NAPT Conference**. It is held this year in Myrtle Beach which will make it more reachable for those of us in Georgia. We know money is tight because of the budget issues, and frankly, if your funds allow you one conference during this school-year, we prefer it be to the GAPT summer conference.

The calendar for the remainder of this school-year is murky based on budget cuts. We'll let you know more as it firms up throughout the year. Nevertheless, one thing we know for certain. The **GAPT conference will be held the week of June 26th at Callaway Gardens**. This is the place to be for professional development, updates from the DOE, transportation networking and the establishment of collegial relations with fellow professionals and their families.

So plan ahead by scheduling the week of June 26th on your calendars!

TRS COLAS UNDER ATTACK!!

On September 24th at the Teacher Retirement System Board of Trustees meeting by Jim Hayes. At the meeting Tommy Hills, representing the Governor's office, suggested a change in TRS board policy concerning Cost Of Living Annual Increases (COLA) for current and future retirees.

The present policy, which was adopted in 1969, states that the TRS "shall give" its members a 1.5% COLA in July and January of every year. The Governor's office wants to change that policy to "may give" a 1.5% COLA in July and January. Under the proposed plan, a decision on whether to grant a COLA (and presumably how much) would be made each May. The rationale, according to Mr. Hills, is that all the other retirement boards vote on the COLA's annually and the governor's office thinks TRS should as well.

After much discussion a vote was taken by the seven members who were present. Three supported the measure and three opposed it. Acting chairman Russell Hinton broke the tie by voting in favor. The proposed change must be "on the table" for 30 days before action can be taken. The TRS does not meet in October and the next meeting will be November 19th when they will vote on the proposed change.

We have done research as to how many would be affected by such a move, how much a COLA costs and how much the TRS fund earned last year from its investments.

- * Total TRS Retirees as of 9/1/08 - 79,376
- * Total Active TRS member accounts as of 9/1/08 - 254,918
- * Total Assets as of 8/31/08 - \$49,993,786,164
- * Total Cost of COLA on 1/1/08 - \$2,813,822.41

This amount is the amount the monthly benefit payroll increased due to the Jan. COLA

- * Total Cost of COLA on 7/1/07 - \$2,661,180.50

This amount is the amount the monthly benefit payroll increased due to the July COLA

WE ENCOURAGE MEMBERS WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THIS ACTION TO CONTACT TRS AND MAKE THEIR VIEWS KNOWN

A list of the TRS Board of Trustees is below. Communication to the board may be sent in care of the TRS Executive Director:

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