

**BGE Smart Energy Education Advisory Council Kick-off Meeting Notes**  
**June 19, 2018**



**Advisory Council Member Attendees:** Nicole Campbell (St. Stephen School), Alison Donnelly (Fountain Green Elementary School ), Edith Foster (Baltimore City Public Schools), Dr. Nancy Grasmick (Towson University), Monica Gudmundsson (Perry Hall Christian School), Jenese Jones (Faith Leaders for Excellent Schools), Shawn Kerr (Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High School), James LeMon (Howard County Public Schools), Robert Limpert (Harford County Public Schools), Kim Mason (Windsor Farm Elementary School), Mary McComas (Baltimore County Public Schools), Carol Ann McCurdy (Anne Arundel County Public Schools), Claudette McLish (Fallstaff Elementary/Middle School), Earnest Moore (Maryland PTA), Margaret Pfaff (Carroll County Public Schools), Debbie Phelps (The Education Foundation of Baltimore County Public Schools, Inc.), Dr. Darla Strouse (Maryland State Department of Education) and Tanya Terrell (South Baltimore Learning Center)

**BGE Attendees:** Valencia McClure, David Milton, Keisha Clarke-English, Justin Mulcahy, JoAnn Frazier, Stephanie Leach, Natalie Estelle, Jacquelyn Zichos and Nada Ibrahim, Robert Matthews, Delanee-Alexis Coley, Brittany Jones, Ammanuel Moore

**Additional Attendee:** Phil Yerby (Weber Shandwick)

**OPEN DISCUSSION SUMMARY**

*What is your vision for how corporations like BGE can play a role in education?*

*Observations/Questions:*

- BGE playing a role in the education space is a natural fit, and the Council welcomed our involvement
- Overall the Council was unclear on BGE's commitments in the education space, and suggested BGE brand all our education efforts in a more unified fashion.
- The Council shared limitations that educators and school administrators face regarding awareness and participation in BGE's education offerings:
  - Lack of awareness of the deadlines for all opportunities
  - There is pressure from school system administration to stay on curriculum
  - There isn't a central source/hub where BGE posts all internship, workforce development and grant funding opportunities for educators and administration to learn and apply
- The Council shared the company benefits of the Maryland Business Roundtable for Education. BGE is currently a member and has been a speaker in the past. However, the group advised that BGE should evaluate the full benefit of our membership to reach out to the education community and drive awareness of our programs.
- The Council approved of other company models such as Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman which provide: college scholarships, education modules and professionals to mentor students
- BGE programs seem to touch elementary school and high school. The Council stated there is a gap in ideas and programs to engage middle school students.

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- BGE should build stronger relationships with superintendents and other higher-up administration contacts to gauge their interest for our education programs. In addition, BGE should also take time to become familiar with organizations' structures (ex. school systems and/or schools), build relationship and market to educators.
- BGE should also use Junior Achievement to get the word about their Workforce Development Programs, and focus on trade development
- BGE has had difficulty connecting with school Superintendents and the CEO of schools. Council members stated that these people are not always the correct person to reach out to within an organization to get your cause initiated in schools and it's important to find the right contact at each office that will hear you out on the specific project you're presenting. Additionally, the best way to reach out to the top leaders is by contacting their secretary to find time on their calendar.
- Schools often can't afford all the resources they need on their own and rely on grant funding and corporate gifts to help fill the void
- When schools partner with a larger organization or company, like BGE, their noteworthy projects have higher visibility due to the brand/name recognition through their association with the company. Corporate partnerships elevate educational causes and provide visibility that otherwise wouldn't exist in some cases.
- Often teachers don't participate in contests like the ones that BGE hosts (Wires Down/Captain Mercaptan) because they don't know if they have their administration's buy-in to apply for the contest or similar grant opportunities. Council members mentioned that their administration finds these contests distracting if they are not directly tied to the curriculum.
- An example of a company that partners well with schools in Northrup Grumman (NG).
  - They have a "Be what you want to be" campaign for students that showcases the different jobs available within their company
  - They have a publication specifically for educators
  - NG brings in chief executives and key leaders to speak to educators. They also host free seminars for educators to provide them with tools for success and the skills to be successful leaders. Their discussions feature from top leaders within the field, including Freeman Hrabowski.
  - Their initiatives focus on STEM, the environment, their internship program and scholarships
  - Their education partnership is used to "teach the teacher" so they can be an ambassador for the company

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### **BREAKOUT SESSION OBSERVATIONS**

#### **BGE Smart Energy Workforce Development Program**

- Overall the Council members had a positive reaction to the BGE Smart Energy Workforce Development Program and are interested to expand this program. The feedback repeatedly stated was that they appreciate that a company provides life-changing opportunities to students.
- The program began with 14 interns and is projected to include 50 interns this summer 2018
- After starting the BGE Smart Energy Workforce Development Program it became clear that access to BGE employees already in the field and the authenticity during in-person interactions with those running the internship program was imperative.
- BGE noted that the term Career Technology Education (CTE) should be used (rather than “vocational”).
- BGE noticed that diverse applicants were passing CAST at about ¼ the rate of Caucasian men. The workforce development plan was created to help increase the number of diverse candidates and help them pass the test in order to be considered for employment in certain roles at BGE.
- The biggest area to hire those going through the program is with the recent approval of the STRIDE plan to modernize the gas pipeline around the service territory. Other areas within the company where this infusion of diverse talent could be used in the more immediate future include fleet and automotive.
- **Barriers:**
  - Currently the BGE Smart Energy Workforce Development Program works directly with teachers, principals but how do we get to the higher-ups in the School Board to make sure this program grows and is available in all the jurisdictions? Know and learn the organizational structure of the various school boards to reach above the teachers.
- **General Questions:**
  - How can we expand this program from the city to other jurisdictions in the service territory?
  - How can a program like this be funded?
  - Is there a way to increase young women participating in the program?
  - Is there a way that the program can connect graduates with other local utilities like PEPCO or the water utilities?
  - How best should program graduate include on their resumes so they can show other employers?
  - Is middle school too early to begin reaching out to program candidates?
  - This program is an excellent pipeline for those that know college is not for them. This gives participants a chance at an excellent career path that can introduce them to important life lessons (at 18 talking about 401K, maybe attending college down the path, just providing for their family)

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- **Suggested Enhancements:**

- Starting an introduction of this program to middle school students is an opportunity to help provide a plan through an energy career guide to let the student know what classes they need to take in high school that may assist them in passing the CAST test.
- This program needs to make additional connections, maybe through the local school board leaders, and reach more schools/students.
- If there is a teenage girl that has completed this program, perhaps consider this student as a spokesperson. The council would like to see more girls/women show interest and be involved in the program. BGE should consider partnering with Western High School (Baltimore City, all girls, public high school), which could be an excellent start to get teenage girl engaged and learning about BGE's Smart Energy Workforce Development Program.
- The Spring Energy Conference is 5 days of training currently held at Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High School and should be offered at other schools.
- When visiting the high schools, make sure that someone is present that looks like them. Current BGE employees who went through the program, would be perfect. If they see that he/she can do it, so can I.

### **Gas & Electric Safety Contests**

- Overall the Council members had a positive reaction to this BGE's gas and electric safety education programs. The Council expressed that the levels of funding available for elementary schools to win is ideal as well as the categories available to enter. They also appreciate the effort BGE put into these programs and education materials used to support the education community.
- For the schools and the student, the anticipation of the judging period before the announcement feels like a is a long wait. Suggestions for improvements were identified, such as:
  - Include progress bar (currently the website says the same 'we are checking the votes' for months and it can become frustrating). Possible incorporate Captain Mercaptan or BGE Wires Down Video Challenge characters to engage students and keep up their enthusiasm
  - Be more transparent about judging process. It would also be helpful to find a way to abbreviate the rules or pull out the key restrictions and guidelines that teachers need to be aware of rather than making them read through 13 pages of legal documents. Consider incorporating the top guidelines into the entry kit.
  - Add waiting period games on contest website to keep the school community engaged throughout the process
  - Send follow-up emails to teachers that submitted to keep them engaged through every step of the process, including the long way from when voting ended to when the winners are announced
- **Captain Mercaptan Enhancements**
  - Allow the use of technology to create the comic strips
  - Create a jingle for Captain Mercaptan, or at least a lyric sheet for the entry kit
  - Add an adventure storyline or theme for the comic strip as a starting point for the schools to build off the story
  - Allow the students to create their own character versus having to use the existing characters

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- List examples of how schools have used the grant funding in the entry kit and in promotions material to entice more people to enter.
- **BGE Wires Down Video Challenge Enhancements**
  - Consider allowing schools to submit a different version of the jingle to increase creativity
  - List examples of how schools have used the grant funding in the entry kit and in promotions material to entice more people to enter.
  - Make the rules shorter
- **General Enhancements/ Feedback**
  - *When asked should we consider only running one contest per year versus two?*  
The Advisory Council gave BGE feedback that one contest a year is too long of a wait and stretch for educators to manage.
  - *BGE shared that it has considered partnering with an "Safety Ambassador" to help promote these contests to the education community. We have been brainstorming a local celebrity or local television personality who could help engage our audience. Do you think this would motivate more people to participate?*  
The Advisory Council gave BGE feedback that it would not motivate others and it would take away from the core purpose of the safety education programs. They also think that adding other factors into the contests will draw away from the superheroes that students should be admiring. Instead, BGE should find a crossover promotional opportunity where parents and kids are both seeing the promotion. As more and more parents are leaving social media and kids aren't yet online – where can BGE promote the contest so adults and children both see it?
  - BGE should create vocational presentations focused on CTE careers geared to the elementary school audience
  - There is a large discrepancy in tools among different schools. The winning school tend to have higher production value compared to others.
  - Teachers prizes for all elementary school winners was a good enhancement that BGE implement in fall 2017. The teachers are using this overall to help the student body and their colleagues.
  - Some people find the Wires Down jingle to be old and would like to have a more updated song available or the opportunity to create their own song.
  - Teachers use the comic books as an art lesson and have saved the scratch n sniff cards from the participation pack to use in future years to teach about natural gas safety.
  - To enhance our education resources available to teachers, BGE should add the Culver material to SafetyCentral.BGE.com website and start to promote it more since not many are aware of SafetyCentral website
  - It's important to show how the contests relate back to the curriculum and common core so teachers and administrators know that there is a direct correlation with the classroom.
  - Legal rules are not easily understood (highlight important notes and leave fine print to the actual rule)
  - When designing marketing materials geared to teachers, we should lead with "grant opportunity" since this is the language that resonates most with educators. Using words like contest or prize makes it seem like a lottery with

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less chances to win and could be discouraging. Not all principals open their own mail so it's important to use language that will catch the eye of the assistant that is looking for grant opportunities for the school. Headlines must be direct.

- BGE should explore advertising all safety education programs on advertise on school system webpages and community pages. These central websites seem to have the most visibility to teachers since they must go here to read county updates or check their mail.
- A consideration for more contest visibility would be to create a commercial or garner TV interviews with the schools that have won. Post winner videos and highlighting winning schools in short videos on the BGE website where everyone can see it.
- **Continuity**
  - Start all fall contest release dates in August although school won't have an opportunity to work on entry until October. This will allow educator to be aware of the opportunity and figure out a way later in the school year to work it into their curriculum.
  - Continue to keep music as a component for BGE Wires Down Video Challenge since it is a creative and fun way to engage elementary school students
  - Lesson plans included in the entry kit for both contests are helpful and are being used by educators
  - Captain Mercaptan comic books are beneficial and are being used by educators
  - Participation pack banner are being used by educators and are a great visual to get other excited to support the school entries
  - Direct mail campaign to educators about our safety education programs has been effective in reaching them

### Digital Classrooms 2.0

- Overall the Council members had a positive reaction to this opportunity. Only a few Council members were aware of the opportunity prior to the meeting through news coverage. However, once the program was explained and a video was shown – all the Council members in the discussion group became interested in obtaining a robot in their school and/or organization. Carol Ann said that the goal is to eventually have 1 robot for every school.
- Carol Ann McCurdy, Director of Partnerships, Development and Marketing at Anne Arundel County Public Schools explained the Digital Classrooms 2.0 program:
  - The cost of obtaining a robot is \$4,000 – and BGE is willing to fund this
  - The robot is essentially an iPad on a Segway and weighs only 9 lbs. (easy enough for students to assist/carry around if needed)
  - The only technical requirements are a wireless connection at the school and internet access at the student's home
  - This technology provides students with a sense of connection – one-on-one with teacher and class. It helps to elevate the student's mood to an optimistic level
  - Schools can leverage existing staff to launch the program. Anne Arundel County leverages a partnership between the Home and Hospital Teaching Office (identifies student, educates family), Instructional and Technology Office (trains teachers to upload the lesson) and Partnerships Office (identifies corporate sponsors).
- Potential barriers and concerns with the program were discussed, and included:
  - Was the sick child singled-out or teased?

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- No, the student body embraces the robot – and the robot has an “escort buddy” with it throughout the day.
  - What is the maintenance cost of the robot?
    - Minimal, the \$4,000 cost includes extra parts. The only item to keep in mind is that the battery needs charging at the end of the day.
  - Concerned that that speaking time wasn't in real time.
    - Carol Ann McCurdy advised that the lapse in speaking time was only due to a wireless issue however, in general it is "real time" speaking/interactions
- **Potential growth opportunities for the program were discussed, and included:**
  - Do you have students build the robot and further the STEM initiative?
    - Carol Ann did not have any experience with this – and stated the existing program is turn-key
- **Future ways to increase awareness of the program were discussed, and included:**
  - Earnest Moore, Maryland PTA, stated this is a potential topic for Prince George’s Parent/Community Office to discuss further
  - Dr. Darla Strouse, Maryland State Department of Education, stated she could push this opportunity out through her channels. (Office of Partnerships)
  - BGE and Anne Arundel County School System should consider making a revised video that answers some of the questions that were discussed at the Council
- **Other innovate partnership ideas discussed included:**
  - BGE sponsoring Baltimore County’s Mobile Innovation Lab

### Bright Ideas Teachers’ Grant

- The Council’s awareness of BGE’s teachers’ grant opportunities was low, and a brief review of BGE’s areas of giving was reviewed
- The Council also had little to no awareness on the Bright Ideas Teachers’ Grant opportunity
- **Future ways to increase awareness of the program were discussed, and included:**
  - Leveraging PTAs
  - Leveraging school foundations to market the grants. Consider having members of the education community on the grant proposal review board. These members can then serve as advocates to get the word out.
  - Working with the Maryland State Department of Education to have a page created on their website, which lists grant opportunities
  - Leveraging Teacher Associations
  - Leveraging existing training sessions to provide grant opportunity information.
- **Barriers of the program were discussed, and included:**
  - Recognizing that every county is different with their needs and grant approval process.
    - Some counties block individual grant recipients and require teachers to work with the PTA or the school's finance department
    - Anne Arundel County can pursue individual support under \$10,000.
- **Future updates and enhancements of the program were discussed, and included:**
  - *Recipients:* Why are the grants limited to teachers? Could a team of teachers or department submit a proposal instead of an individual teacher?
  - *Amount:* The \$500 grant cap is not impactful – BGE should consider grants ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 for a greater impact. The Council believed that raising the cap and lowering the number of grant recipients was more impactful

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that a lower cap and having more grant recipients. BGE should want the projects they are funding to be impactful too – and not focus on the number of grant recipients.

- *Process*: Simplify the grant description language and process. The language on the website and collateral piece is too complex and intimidating. The Council believed that this may have discouraged teachers from submitting proposals – as it seemed like a lengthy process for a \$500 grant.
- *Timing*: The Council did not respond well to the timing of which grant applications were submitted – as it is a busy time of the year for teachers. BGE should consider opening the grant application process in June and concluded in October – allowing teachers more time to plan.
- *Follow-up*: BGE should follow-up with the grant recipients and see what impact the teachers made with their funding. BGE could package these success stories through video and use it to promote the grant proposal period.
- **Recognition for the grant-winning teachers was discussed, and included:**
  - Overall, the Council appreciated BGE's recognition efforts and agreed it was an important piece
  - They responded positively to an idea of a reception and/or classroom recognition. However, they recognized that classroom recognition for all the teachers would be logistically challenging. Even though, teachers do like to be honored at their school.
  - The Council had a positive response to the checks being distributed on Giving Tuesday