

GCA has been committed to working collaboratively with the Department of Education since our launch in 2007. When, in early 2012 Department of Education staff came to us with concerns regarding the growth of our Special Education population, GCA met with DOE staff, provided all requested information in a timely manner, and cooperated fully in a completely transparent manner. When the DOE identified a list of issues to be addressed in May, GCA moved swiftly to address every issue identified in a comprehensive manner (including the addition of over 25 new special education teachers and support staff), and met every deadline that was identified by the DOE without delay.

GCA has met every deadline and addressed every issue identified by the DOE to date, as Lynda White, the consultant that Debbie Gay, the DOE Special Education Director, personally selected for us to work with has confirmed. Lynda is a former Superintendent in Butts County and Special Education Director in Cobb County, and she has been working very closely with GCA staff on improving Special Education at GCA since May and has a very different perspective on the work that we've done than what you've heard from the DOE. I am providing a letter sent from her to the Odyssey/GCA Board chair in September (after the substantial work of addressing the DOE's concerns had been completed), and I would call your attention to a couple of specific comments in the letter:

- "I consider (GCA) to be in substantial compliance and anticipate acknowledgement of this by the DOE"
- "(I)n my opinion, GCA is currently as compliant with regards to Federal and State Special Education regulations as any other public school district in Georgia that is currently serving 1200 students with disabilities.

From an academic perspective, comparing the results from GCA's students with disabilities to the state average on the tests you referenced you'll find that GCA students outscored the state average on 4 out of 6 of the tests (above in Math 1, Biology, and 3rd & 8th grade Reading; below in 3rd and 8th grade Math), in addition to beating the state average in 8th grade science and 9th grade Literature & Composition. We agree that improving the academic performance of students with disabilities remains an important priority for all schools in Georgia. As to 2010-11 AYP results, GCA met 29 out of 30 AYP indicators (including all 5 indicators for Students with Disabilities), failing only to meet the remaining one indicator by 0.1%, or 8 students out of nearly 4,000 tested. Misleading results like these are one reason that Georgia chose to move away from the AYP system last year.

As far as parent complaints, the DOE has received complaints from less than 10 parents of GCA students with Special Needs out of over 1,200 Special Education parents over the last 18 months – a very small percentage. We have still yet to be informed of any identified issues from a comprehensive monitoring visit by DOE staff last month, nor have we had any opportunity to respond to any of the concerns raised. The process that we have been subjected to by the DOE is one that appears unique to a State Charter School like GCA. In addition, we have made a number of formal and informal requests for assistance from the DOE for GCA Special education students and staff over the last 18 months – all of which are provided to students in traditional districts. Specifically, the DOE:

- Neglected to provide the school \$1.4M in state funds it was owed during FY12
- Neglected to provide access for GCA administrators to the State Special Education data system during FY12
- Neglected to provide access to the State Medicaid reimbursement process during FY12
- Continues to neglect to provide GCA students or Staff access to the Georgia Learning Resources System (GLRS)

- Continues to neglect to provide access for GCA students to Georgia Network for Education and Therapeutic Supports (GNETS)
- Continues to neglect to provide access for GCA students to regional related services co-ops available to other (non-charter school) districts around the state

We have strived to work collaboratively with DOE staff throughout the process they have identified – unfortunately negative comments were made publicly before providing the school or our Board with a report or opportunity to respond to any findings. We plan to continue to work as we always have to continue to improve the academic experience for our students with Special Needs and all GCA students.

Matt Arkin  
Head of School  
Georgia Cyber Academy



Letter to Steve  
Holland Septem...