December 3, 2021 Email Blast

Office of Federal Programs - Division for Special Education

Directors,

Hope your Thanksgiving holidays were spectacular! We had a great trip to Pennsylvania to be with family for Thanksgiving. I will provide this piece of advice – the traffic in and around Washington, DC is simply unbelievable. It took 9 hours to travel the final 236 miles on Tuesday of Thanksgiving week, but it was still worth it!

Even though it is only December 3rd, this month will certainly go by very quickly. The celebrations and rituals we enjoy at this time of year are especially important to our children. Take time to enjoy despite the hectic pace.

Our e-blast this week is packed with announcements and opportunities. Please carefully read each announcement and share within your district as appropriate.

The first opportunity to receive funding to support the implementation of a multi-sensory reading methodology was sent earlier this week to Superintendents by the Division for School and District Effectiveness. The competitive grant process is designed for local educational agencies (LEAs) with identified schools. The grant can provide support for the entire district, but the identified school must also be involved. Please determine if this opportunity is right for your district. Plans moving forward include training and support for multi-
sensory reading methodology to all LEAs. More information soon!

I am very pleased to highlight Pickens County Schools and DeKalb County Schools for their recent honor in increasing student outcomes. Smoke Rise Elementary School in DeKalb County and Hill City Elementary School in Pickens County have been recognized as 2021 National ESEA Distinguished Schools. This is a national honor awarded by the National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators (NAESPA) to 2 of the highest-performing Title I schools in every state. In Georgia, the top-performing 5 percent of Title I schools based upon the most recent CCRPI score are eligible to apply.

Our staff highlight is Vickie Cleveland, Program Manager. Vickie brings a wealth of experience and expertise to her leadership role. Vickie’s positive leadership style and beautiful smile are always welcome!

Kudos to Ware County Schools for their collaboration with the Smokey Powell Center to host a low vision clinic for their area. Feel free to contact Zelma Murray at zmurray@doe.k12.ga.us if you are interested in hosting a clinic.

Be sure to visit the new webpage designed for school-based building leaders. You will also want to learn more about the Special Education School-based Leadership Academy.

As always, thank you for all you do to support students with disabilities. Your leadership is making a difference!

Keeping Students First,
Wina

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**District Highlight: Pickens County & DeKalb County**

**Hill City Elementary School, Pickens County Schools**

Hill City Elementary is keenly aware that active student and family engagement is the foundation of improved achievement. The school has a long history of implementing innovative practices to encourage engagement, including flexible classroom seating, a book vending machine, and an elementary...
agriculture program. Recently, following a careful study of student performance data and conducting a comprehensive needs assessment, the school launched new initiatives to better meet the needs of all students, including the economically disadvantaged and those with disabilities. That work included implementation of a schoolwide balanced literacy program – including a 135-minute daily reading block – building teacher capacity to deliver math standards, and improving school climate and supporting student well-being.

Smoke Rise Elementary School, DeKalb County Schools

Smoke Rise Elementary has made notable progress in student growth and achievement in ELA, math, science, and social studies over the last four years. In 2019, the school was recognized as both a Title I Distinguished School and a Beating the Odds School. Administrators, counselors, teachers, and paraprofessionals analyzed content standards and formative assessment data to ensure students were receiving standards-aligned and differentiated instruction, conducting monthly learning walks and observing classrooms. Students at Smoke Rise also have access to a wide array of enrichment opportunities, including STEM, science lab, agricultural lab, gifted/advanced content courses, guided reading, an extended-day afterschool program, extracurriculars from art club to chorus to coding, and more. The school also has fostered a culture of collaboration, with more than 40 community partners actively volunteering time and resources to support students.

GaDOE Spotlight: Vickie Cleveland

Vickie Cleveland has worked at GaDOE for 5 years and is currently the Program Manager for GNETS in the Division for Special Education Services and Supports. During her tenure at GaDOE, she has also worked as a DL in the Results Driven Accountability Unit. She has worked in the field of special education for over 30 years. Previously, she taught special education for 14 years. She has also served as a special education Department Chair, LTSE, Special Education Coordinator and Executive Director of Special Education for metro area districts.

Vickie’s team collaborates with internal and external stakeholders to provide technical assistance for state and district leaders. The team proactively seeks opportunities to improve programming for students receiving GNETS services. They provide guidance on implementation of the GNETS Strategic Plan.
activities.

Vickie is married, has two sons and a granddog. Vickie enjoys traveling, reading, and working in the music ministry through her church.

Thank You Ware County

The Smokey Powell Center Outreach Program of the Georgia Academy for the Blind sends a huge thank you to Ware County. Mandy Harper, SPED Director and Julie Rigdon, Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) were wonderful hosts for the clinic. We literally pack the clinic with one of our Low Vision Optometrist, Dr. Macy Caldwell, and put our show on the road.

We could not conduct these travel clinics without the support of generous host, such as Ware County. As always, the evaluations are at no cost to the districts and in addition to the evaluation, all prescribed devices are provided free of charge for all.

Again, thank you from all of us at the Smokey Powell Center!

Calling All Transition Personnel

The Division for Special Education Services and Supports is forming a statewide transition consortium. We would like each district to submit the name of their transition specialists, transition coordinators, or lead transition teachers to be part of the group. This information will be used to send the invitation to the meetings as well as to communicate activities and events that will need to be shared in the district. Please use the District Transition Personnel JotForm for your district. If you have any questions, please contact Elise James at ejames@doe.k12.ga.us.

The Georgia Transition Consortium

The Georgia Transition Consortium is an opportunity to collaborate with Transition colleagues around the state, seek guidance from others who serve students
People sitting in a group and giving high fives

with disabilities, and have your questions answered following GADOE webinars. After each session, local Transition Consortium can break out into groups to meet regional needs, issues, and opportunities. If you are not part of a regional consortium, you will have the opportunity to join and/or build a consortium for your area.

The Georgia Transition Consortium will meet virtually during the 2021-2022 school year from 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM. Use the [GA Transition Consortium Teams Link](#) to participate. Subsequent dates are listed below. If you have questions, please contact Kristin Pewitt at kristin.pewitt@cobbk12.org, Susan Darlington at sdarlington@forsyth.k12.ga.us or Elise James at ejames@doe.k12.ga.us.

**Remaining Consortium Dates:**
- February 2nd
- March 9th
- May 4th

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**Grant Opportunity for Multi-Sensory Reading Instruction Training for Students with Disabilities, Dyslexia, and Other Struggling Readers**

Georgia Department of Education’s Office of School Improvement, in collaboration with the Division of Special Education Services and Supports (DSESS), is excited to share a grant opportunity for multi-sensory reading instruction training for students with disabilities, dyslexia, and other struggling readers.

This grant provides financial resources to local educational agencies (LEAs) on behalf of Title I schools identified as Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI), and CSI Promise as defined by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The Division of School and District Effectiveness will award competitive, non-renewable grants to LEAs on behalf of identified schools to meet the needs outlined in their improvement plans to address closing the gap, making progress, and mastering content for students with disabilities, dyslexia, and other struggling readers.

The purpose of this grant is to provide opportunities for identified schools to compete for funds to ensure the necessary infrastructure and supports are
available for teachers to meet the needs of each student and improve outcomes for students with disabilities, dyslexia, and other struggling readers.

To review the grant information, requirements, and process, please view the Grant Opportunity for Multi-Sensory Reading Instruction Training application packet. Each document can be downloaded by clicking on it.

We strongly encourage each district to read the application package and apply for the grant to provide training and resources to teachers as they help support students with disabilities and other struggling readers. Applications must be received no later than 5:00 PM on December 17. Please reach out to Leigh Ann Cross, Program Manager, at LeighAnn.Cross@doe.k12.ga.us with any questions.

FY22 SSIP Fall PL Series: Mark Your Calendars!

The SSIP spring professional learning series will continue to focus on supporting teachers and leaders in secondary settings to increase graduation rates and student achievement and decrease dropout rates for students with disabilities. The first session of the series will be January 19, 2022 from 2:00-3:00 pm. Renee Shirley-Stevens, GaDOE Content Integration & Special Education Specialist for Science will present “Integrating Science Content for Secondary Students with Disabilities”. Please register for each session separately using the FY 22 SSIP Spring Professional Learning Series document.

2021 Georgia Deaf-Blind Child Count Update

Directors, please be advised that requests to update the Georgia Deaf-Blind Child Count will be sent to students' best contacts in December. Please see the 2021 Georgia Deaf-Blind Child Count Update document.

Contact Carol Darrah cdarrah@uga.edu with any questions. Thank you for supporting this year's count!
**APH Annual Census for the Blind**

This is important information for all persons in your district involved with registering blind students for the American Printing House for the Blind's annual quota census. "Eye reports for students who meet the definition of blindness (MDF) and doctor’s notes for students that function at the definition of blindness (FDB) have been waived for the 2022 Federal Quota Census". Therefore, "if you think someone qualifies, register them". Student count will begin the first Monday in January (1/3/22) and the records can be accessed through this [GIMC student registration and online ordering system link](#).

Students are eligible if they meet 3 criteria.
1. Registered in school on 1/3/22
2. Are blind or functioning at the definition of blind
3. Have consent to release personal identifying information.

Each student registered brings approximately $400.00 to the state to support the education of blind children across Georgia.

**URGENT! ASPIREPlus Control Group Participants Needed**

The ASPIREPlus grant is moving into its last year of implementation. The grant is to do research on outcomes of students with disabilities as a result of their participation in ASPIRE and/or the Self-Determination Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI). We need some districts to be a part of the control group. The control group consists of districts that are not participating in ASPIRE or the SDLMI. The requirement will be for you to administer the Self-Determination Inventory (SDI) to students. The SDI is an online self-determination assessment and can be used as part of your transition assessment toolkit. This assessment will not put a burden on teachers and the district.

Contact Elise James at ejames@doe.k12.ga.us to discuss your district’s participation.

**Transitioning to Adult Health Care**
The Georgia Department of Public Health in collaboration with Parent to Parent of Georgia announces a free online workshop for parents and caregivers of youth with disabilities. This virtual workshop will provide parents and caregivers with the opportunity to learn about transition planning tools and resources available to prepare for young adults to manage their health care needs. Please share this information with parents and transition personnel in the district. Register for this event using the information below:

**Date:** Wednesday, December 15, 2021  
**Time:** 6:00 PM – 7:30 PM  
**Transition to Adult Health Care Registration Link**  
**Event Flyer**

For more information call Parent to Parent of Georgia at 800-229-2038 or contact Sitara Nayak by email at sitara@p2pga.org.

### Transition Talks with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA)

The Division for Special Education Services and Supports will collaborate with GVRA to provide cross training to vocational rehabilitation counselors and school transition personnel. Sessions will be held from 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM. The remaining dates for the transition talks are listed below.

- December 14th  
- January 10th  
- March 8th  
- April 18th  
- May 17th

Register for the series using the link below. Individual session links will be provided one day before the event. If you have registered previously, you do not need to register again.

**Transition Talks Registration Link**
Occupational and Physical Therapists’ Community of Practice

The Division of Special Education Services and Supports will be conducting a Community of Practice for Occupational and Physical Therapists. Each session will provide an opportunity for occupational and physical therapists to engage in conversations regarding relevant topics and seek solutions from other districts. The dates for the Community of Practice will be December 6, 2021, February 7, 2022, and April 4, 2022. Each session run from 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM. We are collecting your feedback on topics for these sessions. Please use the Feedback for Topics JotForm to provide your feedback. You will only need to register once to participate in the four sessions. If you have questions or need more information, contact Elise James at ejames@doe.k12.ga.us or by phone at 404-326-0421.

Replacing Suspension and Expulsion with Positive Classroom Support Practices Webinar

Save The Date!!! Our next early learning webinar, “Replacing Suspension and Expulsion with Positive Classroom Support Practices” is scheduled on Wednesday, December 15, 2021 from 10 AM - 11 AM. During this webinar, participants will gain knowledge of how relational wellness competence among children, staff, and families can contribute to implementation of effective classroom strategies that support the behavior needs of Pre-K/Kindergarten students.

Replacing Suspension and Expulsion with Positive Classroom Support Practices Webinar Registration

Target audience: Elementary Schools, District personnel, Early Learning Program personnel, RESA School Climate Specialists, PBIS District Coordinators

New Webpage: Special Education and the School-Based Administrator

We are super excited to announce a new webpage, Special Education and the School-Based Administrator. It is crucial that administrators

Desktop computer
understand special education and the critical role they play in ensuring that students with disabilities and their families are receiving the services and supports provided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This webpage is intended to connect school-based administrators to the professional learning and resources needed to support all students in their schools including students with disabilities.

We will be hosting a School-Based Administrator’s Academy beginning in January 2022. Leaders may register using the Interest Survey for Special Education and the School-Based Administrator Academy. We will also be hosting a PL Series full of rich content for both Special Education Leaders and School-Based Leaders around key special education topics. Register for the PL Series for School-Based Administrators using the FY22 PL Series Special Education and the School-Based Administrator document.

Please take a moment to view the tools and resources and share with your school-based administrators. We welcome your feedback and input. For questions, please contact Ann Cross at leighann.cross@doe.k12.ga.us.

**MTSS Snapshot: Are you Implementing with Fidelity?**

Educators continuously seek new and innovative ways to best support students who may experience learning loss while meeting the needs of all students. Several districts and schools use funds to hire personnel, i.e., recovery specialists, interventionists, MTSS/RTI coaches/coordinators, etc., who are expected to initiate or continue implementation of MTSS. There is a critical need to know how to assess implementation levels as educators determine next steps in the process. **Georgia’s Tiered System of Support for Students’ website** provides multiple resources to help guide districts/schools in the implementation process. Some of the valuable resources are listed below:

- **Step by Step Implementation Guidance Document** – This document is intended to assist districts and schools with implementation of MTSS. The guidance includes the five essential components of MTSS implementation as well as the steps needed to implement the framework.
- **Fact Sheets** – These individual documents are best defined as briefs for each of the essential components of MTSS. Each document defines and explains a specific component and also aligns it with Georgia’s Systems of Continuous Improvement. Included with the Fact Sheets are excerpts from the Fidelity of
Implementation Rubrics.

- **School’s Essential Components Worksheet** - This worksheet is intended to provide a tool for collecting relevant information and recording a school’s rating on various items related to implementation of MTSS. Descriptions of ratings for each item are provided on Georgia’s Tiered System of Supports for Students Fidelity of Implementation Rubric.

- **School Fidelity of Implementation Rubric** – This rubric is intended for use by individuals who are responsible for monitoring school-level fidelity of MTSS implementation. The rubric is aligned with the essential components of a tiered system of support and the infrastructure that is necessary for successful implementation.

- **District’s Essential Components Worksheet** - This worksheet is intended to provide a tool for collecting relevant information and recording a district’s rating on various items related to implementation of MTSS. Descriptions of ratings for each item are provided on Georgia’s Tiered System of Supports for Students Fidelity of Implementation Rubric.

- **District Fidelity of Implementation Rubric** - This rubric is intended for use by individuals who are responsible for monitoring district-level fidelity of MTSS implementation. The rubric is aligned with the essential components of a tiered system of support and the infrastructure that is necessary for successful implementation.

Through the use of these nationally vetted resources adapted from American Institutes for Research (AIR), areas of needed growth and progress toward full implementation of MTSS with fidelity can be determined.

For more information, contact Karen Suddeth, Program Manager, Georgia’s Tiered System of Supports for Students at ksuddeth@doe.k12.ga.us.
December 10, 2021 Email Blast

Office of Federal Programs - Division for Special Education

Directors,

The excitement for the winter holidays is certainly building. I hope you are taking time to enjoy this season of the year. We are flying today to see our grandchildren, Annabelle and Josie, in Iowa. Snow is predicted during our visit so it should be a great trip. Hope you will find time to be with those you hold dear.

Our next Director’s Webinar is scheduled for Tuesday, December 14, 2021. Please use the webinar link to register: Director’s Webinar Registration. Our webinar agenda will include the following:

• MTSS Platform and GO-IEP
• Professional Learning and Technical Assistance for School Psychologists
• Update on Virtual Job Shadow from Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
• Reminders from the Return to School Roadmap regarding students with medical conditions
• Special Education Academy for Building Leaders
• Competitive Grant for Multi-Sensory Reading Methodology

Be sure to carefully read the two policy letters released from the Office of Special Education Programs during the month of November. Letter to
Anonymous addresses whether a local educational agency may file a due process complaint to request a due process hearing against a parent to override the parent’s refusal to consent to a change in the child’s individualized education program or placement. The letter also discusses whether a parent has met IDEA’s exhaustion requirements if a hearing officer determines that a State educational agency is not a proper party to a due process hearing. Letter to Boals addresses whether IDEA requires inclusion of language development goals in a child’s IEP if the child is an English learner and discusses best practices that districts, schools, and teachers can use to ensure they provide appropriate instruction to English learners with disabilities throughout the school day. The letter also provides several resources that address best practices for developing IEPs and providing instruction for English learners with disabilities.

This week, I am proud to highlight Randolph County Schools. You will enjoy learning more about their special education program, Spectacular People with Endless Dreams.

Our staff member spotlight is shining bright on Felicia Peavy. Felicia provides strong leadership to our Result-Driven Accountability Unit. I know you will enjoy learning more about Felicia.

In closing, I really want to focus on being proactive rather than reactive as we start a new calendar year. Let’s all commit to increase communication and support each other in this long, winding journey. I have some ideas, but I really want to hear from you. Please let me know of supports and technical assistance that would be helpful to your local education agency. You have my commitment to listen and address your needs.

As always, you are so appreciated! I stand proudly with you to support our students and their families.

Keeping Students First,
Wina

District Highlight: Randolph County

The Randolph County Special Education Department is under the leadership of Dr. Tosha A. Middlebrooks, Director. She is a lifelong educator, leader, and advocate with 20 plus years in
education. She is a champion for children, the curriculum, and the community. As the Director of Special Education, she centers her leadership around being a servant leader. She believes in her role as Director of Special Education nothing shall be impossible with faith, focus, and the familiarization of student services.

Dr. Middlebrooks and her department realize there is no “I” in the word team, but the word vision has the letter “I” twice, which indicates a team must work together to implement and improve services through its vision. The vision of the Randolph County Special Education Department is to maximize educational opportunities for every student and specialize in the possibilities each day to educate the whole child.

To strengthen the structures of the department, Dr. Middlebrooks established “The SPED Academy” in 2016. The SPED Academy focuses on the six principles of IDEA (Individualized Education Program (IEP); Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE); Least Restrictive Environment (LRE); Appropriate Evaluation; Parent and Teacher Participation; and Procedural Safeguards), supervision and monitoring, practices, policies, procedures, co-teaching, accommodations, team building, leadership, student’s rights and the responsibilities of public schools for students with disabilities. The SPED Academy provides professional learning and speaks through the lens of compliance. Throughout the “The SPED Academy,” the special education teachers have been committed to this process by working after-school, on Saturdays and during the summer. The SPED Academy supports general supervision and has been a great resource for teachers, paraprofessionals, support staff, and building administrators. Before the start of the 2021-2022 school year, through The SPED Academy, a Co-teaching training was offered and was presented by West GA GLRS Director, Mr. Sean Cooper and Mrs.
Julie Bragg, West GA GLRS Coordinator. The training focused on building capacity for both special education teachers and general education teachers to collaborate and co-teach together by utilizing the 6 Models of Co-teaching.

Parent and community engagement are key components of the program. Each year we focus on transition and post-secondary activities by conducting a GREET and GET event which provides parents and students with information regarding agencies and resources available for students with disabilities. We also value the input of our parents. Each year we sponsor a Sub and Survey Day. This day aims to obtain parental input and increase the completion of the state-required parent survey. Parents who participate are provided lunch and with an opportunity to meet and speak with teachers and the director.

With the supports of the Superintendent, West GA GLRS, GVRA, Chatt-Flint RESA, Babies Can't Wait, our District Liaison, along with our stakeholders and GaDOE Division of Special Education Services and Supports, we can meet the needs of our students.

Our district truly has Spectacular People with Endless Dreams working for the success of all students in Randolph County.

GaDOE Spotlight: Felicia Peavy

Felicia Peavy has worked at the Georgia Department of Education for 9 years and is currently a Program Manager for the Results Driven Accountability Unit (RDA). During her tenure at GaDOE, she has also worked as a District Liaison (DL) in the RDA Unit. She previously taught Special Education for 6 years. She also served as Department Chairperson, Instructional Support, Special Education Liaison, and Special Education Coordinator for metro area districts.

As a Program Manager, she currently supervises the RDA Unit and provides oversight and guidance for the following initiatives:
* Monitoring and correcting IDEA noncompliance
* Monitoring of LEAs with disproportionality determinations
* Monitoring of special entities (private residential facilities, Department of Juvenile Justice, and Department of Corrections)
* Providing targeted technical assistance to district personnel
* Annual LEA Determinations
* Providing data and collaborating on submission of the State Performance and Annual Performance Reports
* Coordinating and Developing the IDEA Cross Functional Monitoring Process in FY18
* Providing guidance to districts on the CFM process

Felicia is married and has two sons and two dogs. She loves traveling, reading, singing and spending time with family.

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Policy Letters from November 2021

Letter to Anonymous on Due Process Hearing

The Letter to Anonymous (November 17, 2021), addresses whether an local educational agency (LEA) may request a due process hearing to override the parent’s refusal to consent to a change in the child’s individualized education program (IEP) or educational placement. The letter also discusses whether a parent has met IDEA’s exhaustion requirements if a hearing officer determines that the SEA is not a proper party to a due process hearing.

Letter to Boals Regarding IEPs if the Child is an English Learner

The Letter to Boals (November 15, 2021) addresses whether IDEA requires the public agency to include language development goals in a child’s IEP if the child is an English learner. In this letter, OSEP identifies best practices that districts, schools, and teachers can use to ensure they provide appropriate instruction to English learners with disabilities. The letter also includes a list of resources for further information on development of IEPs and provision of appropriate instruction for English learners with disabilities.

Parent 2 Parent Training Webinars

Topic: Georgia Medicaid Basics and Katie Beckett
Deeming Waiver

**When:** Saturday December 11th at 4:00 PM EDT

**Georgia Medicaid Registration link**

*Pre-registration is required*

**Topic:** Where Do We Go From Here? Preparing for Transition from High School (Spanish)

Join us as Patricia Lanaspa shares the keys to successful transition, the role of the school in transition planning and things to consider when planning your child’s transition to adulthood.

**When:** Wednesday December 15th at 10:00 AM EDT

**Transition from High School Registration link**

**Topic:** Parents & Caregivers on Transitioning to Adult Healthcare

Are you ready to help your youth or young adult child move from pediatric to adult health care?

Parents, this is a virtual opportunity to learn about transition planning, tools and resources available for you to help your young adults become better prepared to manage their health care needs.

**When:** Wednesday December 15th at 6:00 PM EDT

**Transition to Adult Healthcare Registration Link**

**Topic:** Dream Bigger, Aim Higher

Learn skills and strategies beyond advocacy that help empower you from your child’s infancy to adulthood.

**When:** Thursday, December 16th from 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

**Dream Bigger, Aim Higher Registration Link**

For more information, contact Paula Porter, Parent Mentor via email at paula.porter@hallco.org or by phone 770-534-1080 Ext 10318 or call Parent to Parent of Georgia at 1-800-229-2038.

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**Important Budget Announcement:**

**Excess Cost Calculation Submission**

The Excess Cost Calculation Portal is now open for submissions. The Special Education Excess Cost Calculation, which is part of the local district determination’s Timely and Accurate Data Submission Report, is due by January 31, 2022. This submission must be entered into the Consolidated Application and has a two part sign-off for the
results and base calculations. Please plan accordingly as both parts must be submitted by the due date. Resources for the calculation can be found on our Budget Webpage. Please contact your budget liaison for further information or technical assistance.

**Disproportionality for Discipline Data**

Please go to your SE Applications Dashboard and select the Disproportionality tile. The tile itself will not have new information yet. Inside the tile, the first seven tabs have updated calculations for disproportionality in discipline as reported in SR in June 2021.

Due to COVID, most LEAs had a large reduction in the number of disciplinary referrals so the number of LEAs with significant discrepancy or disproportionality is quite small.

Information on Significant Disproportionality or Disproportionate Representation for Placement and Identification will be available soon. The printed report will also be available when all calculations are completed.

If you have any questions, please contact one of the following people:
Linda Castellanos, lcastellanos@doe.k12.ga.us, 404-719-8045
Dawn Kemp, dkemp@doe.k12.ga.us, 678-340-6738
Alicia Mercer, amercer@doe.k12.ga.us, 470-808-2194
Bridget Still, bstill@doe.k12.ga.us, 678-850-6268

**UPDATE: FY 22 State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) Spring Professional Learning Series**

This professional learning series will focus on supporting teachers and leaders in secondary settings to increase graduation rates and decrease dropout rates for students with disabilities. Please register for each session separately with the links provided in the SSIP Professional Learning Series document.

**Assessment Strategies Webinar**
Series
The Georgia Sensory Assistance Project, along with our southeast partners, is excited to offer a FREE Lunch & Learn webinar series for School Psychologists and Team Members that focuses on Best-Practice Assessment Strategies for Students with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss and Other Complex Disabilities. The professional learning series will be held over 5 Thursdays in February and March. See the Best-Practice Assessment Strategies document for the complete schedule as well as the registration link. Email Carol Darrah cdarrah@uga.edu with any questions.

MTSS Snapshot: The Twelve Gifts of MTSS
We have all witnessed the research, strategies, practices, recommendations, etc. that lead educators to implement best practices for helping students meet with success. Clearly, teachers have a tremendous impact on student learning and achievement. For this reason and during this holiday season, I offer you the “Twelve Gifts of MTSS.”

- On the first day of school, MTSS gave to me a 3-tiered pyramid of prevention.
- On the second day of school, MTSS gave to me a universal screener that was quick and a 3-tiered pyramid of prevention.
- On the third day of school, MTSS gave to me Tier I core instruction, a universal screener, and a 3-tiered pyramid of prevention.
- On the fourth day of school, MTSS gave to me a data team to work with, Tier I core instruction, a universal screener, and a 3-tiered pyramid of prevention.
- On the fifth day of school, MTSS gave to me Tier II interventions, a data team to work with, Tier I core instruction, a universal screener, and a 3-tiered pyramid of prevention.
- On the sixth day of school, MTSS gave to me progress monitoring practices, multiple resources, Tier II interventions, a data team to work with, Tier I core instruction, a universal screener, and a 3-tiered pyramid of prevention.
- On the seventh day of school, MTSS gave to me progress monitoring practices, multiple resources, Tier II interventions, a data team to work with, Tier I core instruction, a universal screener, and a 3-tiered pyramid of prevention.
pyramid of prevention.

- On the ninth day of school, MTSS gave to me data team decisions, a second universal screener, progress monitoring practices, multiple resources, Tier II interventions, a data team to work with, Tier I core instruction, a universal screener, and a 3-tiered pyramid of prevention.

- On the tenth day of school, MTSS gave to me infrastructure support, data team decisions, a second universal screener, progress monitoring practices, multiple resources, Tier II interventions, a data team to work with, Tier I core instruction, a universal screener, and a 3-tiered pyramid of prevention.

- On the eleventh day of school, MTSS gave to me Tier III intensive interventions, infrastructure support, data team decisions, a second universal screener, progress monitoring practices, multiple resources, Tier II interventions, a Data Team to work with, Tier I core instruction, a universal screener, and a 3-tiered pyramid of prevention.

- On the twelfth day of school, MTSS gave to me a third universal screener, Tier III intensive interventions, infrastructure support, data team decisions, a second universal screener, progress monitoring practices, multiple resources, Tier II interventions, a data team to work with, Tier I core instruction, a universal screener, and a 3-tiered pyramid of prevention.

For more information contact Karen Suddeth, Program Manager Georgia’s Tiered System of Supports for Students at ksuddeth@doe.k12.ga.us
December 17, 2021 Email Blast

Office of Federal Programs - Division for Special Education

Directors,

It’s the most wonderful time of the year! You can see the sparkle in the children’s eyes while everyone just seems a little happier and nicer to each other. I still feel the magic of the holidays and hope I always feel that way. Certainly, our lives change through the years with some years being very difficult while other years are pure joy, but I do believe the holiday season usually brings out the best in us. I wish we could keep this feeling in our hearts throughout the year.

As you receive this message, you are likely getting ready for the holiday break. Please take a few moments to read the announcements and share in our highlights for the week. I am excited to spotlight Toombs County Schools for their excellence in comprehensive planning to support children with disabilities. Their plan contains spectacular community support for all students.

Our staff highlight is none other than our own Santa, Scott Smith. I know you will enjoy seeing his picture dressed as Santa. Scott is a veteran special education director having served for many years at the district level. We are so grateful
that retirement did not suit him and hope we have his knowledge, expertise and leadership for many years to come.

The next eblast will be sent on January 7, 2022. There will be no eblast for the next two weeks.

Please allow me to extend a warm holiday greeting from our staff to you and yours. Please spend time with those you love, check-in on friends, and most of all, take time for yourself to enjoy this special time of the year. May you never be too grown-up to search the skies on Christmas Eve. As my mother said, there will always be a Santa Claus for those who believe. I believe! In all seriousness, I do believe in the magic of the season, but I also believe in you. Never doubt that you are making a difference each day! Thank you for all you do to support students with disabilities.

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

Keeping Students First,
Wina

Announcement

For LEAs receiving notice of timelines non-compliance (Indicator 11 and/or Indicator 12), please note an extension is being provided until January 31, 2022.

District Highlight: Toombs County Schools

Toombs County Schools take pride in providing activities for all ages of students with special needs to plan for independent living and post-secondary success. Students in Pre-K through 12th grade participate in programs designed to facilitate goal-setting, making choices, career planning, and transitioning successfully from school to post-secondary education, employment, the military, independent living, and community participation.
Programs include:

- **E** – Essential Skills
- **D** – Digital Literacy
- **G** – Goal Setting/Self-Determination
- **E** – Employability Skills

**Edge (Pre-K through 12th Grade)**
The EDGE Program is a comprehensive transition program for students with an IEP that begins in elementary school and ends at the completion of the 12th grade of high school. The purpose of the program is to give students an “edge” while planning for their future. The program will give students the necessary tools to navigate the world of work, on-the-job training, college, or military.

**Camp Bullpup and Camp Bulldog (6th through 12th grade)**
This program is a community-based activity for students in 6th through 12th grade. The program is held monthly at school or at a site in the community. The main focus of the program is to assist with transition for life after high school. Some components of the program include Self-Advocacy Training, Career Counseling, Self-Determination/Goal-Setting, Post-Secondary Options, and Life Skills. Students enjoy going on field trips, listening to guest speakers and doing hands-on activities that prepare them for the future. The Camp Bullpup and Bulldog Program focuses on instruction, available services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives. The program stresses the importance of daily living skills and independent living after high school.

**Passport (11th and 12th grade)**
PASSPORT program gives students the opportunity to learn valuable skills in order to become productive, working citizens. The students are participating in monthly sessions at the career academy, Southeastern Early College and Career Academy - SECCA, from September through May. This is a valuable transition program that enables the students to learn job skills, work readiness skills, self-advocacy, and information concerning post-secondary options. SECCA, Special Education Directors and teachers from the four counties are working together to encourage students go to college, the military, or the career of their choice and be successful.

The program began in the Fall of 2017. Toombs County High School has been
participating in the program since its inception. Some of the activities Toombs has participated in include field trips to college campuses, industry and business tours, and visits to service agencies in the community.

**GaDOE Spotlight: Scott Smith**

Scott Smith has worked at the Georgia Department of Education for 2 years and is currently the Program Manager for Family Engagement and Dispute Resolution. He started out determined to be a music therapist, but with no jobs available, found his way into special education. He was a special education teacher for 10 years in Baldwin County and Barrow County, and then a special education director in Barrow County, Moore County (NC), and Bartow County for a total of 25 years. He retired in 2017, hated it, and decided he wanted to go back to work!

In his position with GaDOE, Scott has worked with districts and parents involved in special education issues. Two areas of importance that he works with are the Special Education Helpdesk and the Parent Mentor Partnership. Prior to his retirement from Bartow County Schools, one initiative that will always be the one he remembers most was playing a part in getting Project SEARCH going in his community. Not only did Project SEARCH have a positive impact on the students in the program, it also made a significant impact on the adults in the community working with students. It is great to see so many of the Project SEARCH graduates, several years later, continuing to hold 'regular' jobs and being an important part of their communities.

Scott grew up an Air Force brat and went to schools in six states and two different countries. Now, he enjoys traveling and has been to 42 states and 37 countries (his goal is to make it to at least 100!). Right now, he and his wife are in the middle of building a house in a new "active adult" community in Hoschton. They have two rescue dogs, Max and Maggie, who keep them very entertained!

**Urgent! Supporting Multi-Sensory Reading Training and Implementation for Students with Disabilities and Other Struggling Reader Grant**
The Division for Special Education Services and Supports is offering one-time funds, up to $350,000.00 per district, or up to $50,000.00 to help federally identified schools focus efforts to increase student achievement by providing Multi-sensory Reading training and implementation to teachers who work with students with disabilities and other struggling readers. Eligible applicants must be LEAs serving Title I schools identified as CSI, TSI, or CSI Promise as defined by ESSA who have been identified for students with disabilities. LEAs with federally identified schools may also apply for a districtwide grant to enhance efforts to support identified schools within the district.

**Deadline for Submission:** Friday, December 17, 2021, at 5:00 PM EST

**Multi-Sensory Reading Instruction Training Grant Application Link**

For more information, contact Leigh Ann Cross, Program Manager, GLRS/SSIP, at leighann.cross@doe.k12.ga.us.

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**Mathematics Virtual Specialist Professional Learning – Year 2 Underway**

The GaDOE is excited to announce our second year of virtual professional learning series. This year, our Mathematics Virtual Specialists will be highlighting Georgia’s K-12 Mathematics Standards in each of their sessions. One of the main goals of these professional learning sessions is to discuss changes and improvements embedded within these new standards, learn the intent of the standards in each grade level and course, discuss the importance of mathematical reasoning that is woven into the standards, and explore the ideas of Mathematical Modeling and the Framework for Statistical Reasoning and discover how these can impact student learning of mathematics.

The Mathematics Virtual Specialist PL sessions are either pre-recorded or live and are available for every grade level, K-8 and multiple High School courses from Algebra: Concepts & Connections through Advanced Calculus and Advanced Statistics. To register for any of these courses or watch a recorded session, please click the link for the Virtual Mathematics Professional Learning Catalog.
Collaboration with School Counselors

The Division for Special Education Services and Supports in collaboration with the Division for Career, Technical and Agricultural Education’s Counseling Unit will collaborate on a transition training series focused on the roles of counselors and special education professionals in providing access to instruction, interventions, and activities that will increase positive postschool outcomes (Employment, Education and Training, and Independent Living).

If you did not attend the previous session and wish to register your team consisting of counselors, special education teachers, transition personnel, and CTI coordinators from across all grade bands (elementary, middle and high school), contact your school counselor to register through CTERN or Elise James at ejames@doe.k12.ga.us.

The remaining workshop dates are:
• January 20: 1:00pm–2:30pm
• March 10: 1:00pm–2:30pm

Support Personnel Professional Development: Related Services: Solving the Mystery

Did you miss this presentation? You can access the webinar at Related Services: Solving the Mystery.

If you have questions, please contact the Program Specialist for your area listed below:
• Evelyn Dixon, Program Specialist, Speech-Language Pathologists at edixon@doe.k12.ga.us
• Elise James, Program Specialist, Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy at ejames@doe.k12.ga.us
• Alicia Mercer, Program Specialist, School Psychologists at amercer@doe.k12.ga.us

Submit Information for District/School Administrators for the
Virtual Job Shadow Platform

The structure for accessing Virtual Job Shadow (VJS) through the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency is being restructured with support by the Division for Special Education Services and Support Transition Unit. We are requesting that all districts who have not previously submitted their contact personnel in January 2021 use the jotform link below to do so. If you are not sure that you have done this or want to make an adjustment, you may also resubmit the names of the contacts for your districts.

Districts are allowed to submit as many names as they believe they need to assist in the administration of the VJS platform and licenses. Duties for these individuals will include:

• Gathering and submitting required documentation for participation in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Parent permission and 504/IEP)
• Getting VJS to students
• Addressing issues and concerns with the state coordinators for this initiative

Districts are strongly encouraged to select at least one lead special education transition specialist or lead teacher working with the 9th grade students, although other individuals can be added to the list. Submission should be made by January 22, 2022 at District/School VJS Administrator Submission.

For assistance or additional information contact Jeff Allen at jeff.allen@gvs.ga.gov or Elise James at ejames@doe.k12.ga.us.

Making an AT Device a Service: Food for Thought

Carson Cochran

I, like many others have had a clear distinction between an AT device and a service. However, I recently read an article written by Beatriz Acosta which allowed me to see a different aspect of the relationship. Ms. Acosta addressed crafting 504 plans with the inclusion of AT, but the thoughts are also relevant for IEP teams. I will share those thoughts with you here.

One must observe the phrase in the AT service definition "or use of an assistive technology device" to comprehend the fusion of device and service. The article
goes on to explain that for a device to become a service, there needs to be a thoughtful process in place. Teams should look at the student's needs as listed in present levels, make sure the device recommendation is based on that need, and consider if the student is comfortable using the device. A device is just a device until these considerations are complete. Helpful ideas of AT device-service considerations are listed below:

**Reflect on AT services by asking simple questions like...**
1) What is this device going to do for this student?
2) Will this device help the student improve?

**Develop a strategy**
Checklists, notes, or any other helpful organizational tools could be used to develop an organizational system, which is not dependent on having a device. Devices that are necessary will become more evident if non-technological supports aren't enough.

**Create individualized systems**
Remember that not everyone is the same. Therefore, the organizational system that works for one student is not a mold for every other student's plan. Devices must be individualized.

**Have a process in place**
A system to track progress must be in place before a device is written into a plan.

**Assess the data**
The purpose of having a strategy before implementing the plan and tracking effectiveness is to collect reliable data to determine whether the AT has been effective and how it can continue to be effective going forward.

Thank you for taking a minute to read this different spin on AT devices and services and please share it out with your district's teams.

**MTSS Snapshot: It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year!**

Not only does the holiday season brighten our spirits and bring joy to our lives, but it also marks a point in the school year where educators reflect on the accomplishments and year end goals for their students. Upon returning from a holiday break, we recognize 5 months of school remain, and the end of the
school year will be here before we know it. As educators ring in the New Year of 2022, they set their sights on what must be done in the remaining months of school. So, what needs to happen in these important 5 months?

- Administer a second or **winter universal screener**
- Continue the collection of **progress monitoring** data
- Hold data team meetings to perform **Data-Based Decision Making**
- Look at trend lines of data and year end goals to make decisions and/or adjustments to **Tier II or Tier III interventions**

Yes, it is the “most wonderful time of the year” when celebrating with family and friends during the holidays. It is also a perfect time to celebrate the growth of your students’ learning as you look at the coming months of 2022 and plan for tiered supports that are your gift to ALL students.

Please let us know how we can assist and support you in your MTSS implementation and refinement of practices – it is our gift to you! Happy Holidays!

For more information contact Karen Suddeth, Program Manager Georgia’s Tiered System of Supports for Students at ksuddeth@doe.k12.ga.us