



*We will lead the nation in improving student achievement.*

**DIVISIONS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES and SUPPORTS**

**APRIL 2009 DL UPDATE**

**Autism Academy: Save the Dates**

In response to system requests, the GaDOE is sponsoring the Autism Academy to provide an in-depth overview of autism spectrum disorders and an understanding of needs for students with autism to include the full ASD spectrum. Intended for educators who are in the classroom, attendees will learn various strategies, educational practices and methodologies for students with autism, including classroom set up and district program design. **Autism training sessions for special education directors will be held at a later date.**

Attendance is limited to two classroom professionals (preferably a teacher/SLP team), so selection should be based on staff dedicated to building capacity within your local system. Registration information will be forthcoming. For additional information you may contact Dr. Alice Murphy [mmurphy@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:mmurphy@doe.k12.ga.us) or 404-657-9957.

Please save these dates: June 15 - 18, 2009 in Athens or June 23 - 26, 2009 in Perry

**FY 10 Focused Monitoring Parent and Peer Recruitment**

The Division for Special Education Services would like to request your assistance in recruiting parents and peers to participate as members of the FY 10 Focused Monitoring Teams. Specific information is attached to this update and may be reproduced. Please be aware of the following information and mention it to potential applicants:

- The updated applications will be available on the GaDOE website by April 8, 2009
- Team Member Training will be conducted in August, location TBA
- Room accommodations and meals will be provided at no expense to participants during training
- Only mileage will be submitted for reimbursement for training.
- See the applications for specific information on reimbursement for expenses during monitoring.

## **Parent Survey Reminder**

Thanks to each of you who are participating in the Parent Survey this year. Just a reminder that all surveys are due back to UGA by May 31, 2009. Preliminary results indicate that many schools have worked hard to get them distributed to parents and returned. As you know not only is this important work but it was an indicator used in district determinations this year. Please let us know if you have any questions by contacting Patti Solomon, psolomon@doe.k12.ga.us.

## **Dispute Resolution Tip: Parental Request for Evaluation**

One of the most common formal complaints received at the Division for Special Education Services and Supports results from the local school system's delay or refusal to provide upon parental request a comprehensive evaluation to determine a student's eligibility for special education services. As systems are working to implement the Georgia Pyramid of Intervention, some parental requests are being delayed until data is collected. Under all circumstances it is important for systems to implement Tier II and Tier III interventions for struggling students. These interventions and data collection should continue during the 60 day period allowed for the comprehensive evaluation. The data collected in the Response to Intervention (RTI) process is designed to play a critical role in making a final determination regarding a student's eligibility for an area of disability.

Under IDEA a system must conduct an initial evaluation when it suspects that a student has a disability and needs special education and related services. Therefore, it is advisable for systems to investigate thoroughly the possible existence of a disability before refusing to evaluate, particularly when the request comes from the parent of a student who is not progressing well in school. If a local system determines that it will refuse a parental request for evaluation, the IDEA requires several actions on the part of the system. The notification provisions of IDEA 34 CFR § 300.503 require that if a system refuses to initiate an evaluation, it must furnish parents prior written notice that describes the refused action, states why the system has decided not to evaluate the student; advises parents of available procedural safeguards; provides sources for parents to contact to obtain assistance in understanding the law; describes other options considered, if any, and explains relevant factors in its decision.

## **Low Vision Evaluation**

The Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports have received numerous questions about the need for completing low vision evaluations prior to determining eligibility for visual impairments. The Georgia Rules for Special Education, adopted by the State Board of Education on June 14, 2007, specify the types of evaluations that must be conducted before eligibility for visual impairments can be established. Based on these rules, a low vision evaluation is required prior to determining initial eligibility for visual impairments. Attached is a document containing frequently asked questions that can assist local school system staff in addressing the completion of these evaluations in certain circumstances. *Please share it with all vision educators and others who may be working with students in need of low vision or, in some circumstances, functional vision evaluations.*

## **Vision Educators**

The May Lit-R-C weekend dates have changed to May 15-16, 2009 at the Smokey Powell Center at the Georgia Academy for the Blind. The April weekend has been canceled.

The next VI Consortia Meeting is scheduled for May 1<sup>st</sup>. Please note the time has changed to 9:00 a.m. to noon since some Education Technology Centers (ETCs) are closing early due to budget cuts. Kathy Seagers will be broadcasting live from Armstrong Atlantic ETC to the following centers:

Dalton State ETC	Pioneer RESA ETC	UGA Gwinnett ETC	Macon State ETC
National Science Center ETC	Valdosta State ETC	West Ga. RESA ETC	

All handouts will be placed on the GIMC website by April 30, 2009 and each participant going to the VI consortia is asked to go to [www.gimc.org](http://www.gimc.org) to print the handouts and bring them to the consortia meeting. Anyone needing Braille copies of the handouts, please contact Kathy Segers at [kseger@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:kseger@doe.k12.ga.us) no later than April 23, 2009 to allow time to transcribe and emboss the handouts.

Also, there will be a Vision Strand at The GPAT Summer Institute that will focus on Supporting Math for Students who are VI.

## **Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership**

The GaDOE is proud to fund the Parent Mentor Partnership again in the 2009-2010 school year. Nearly 80 parent mentors in 69 school districts are working to increase communication and include families in school improvement efforts across Georgia. Information on becoming part of next year's rookie class is available through your District Liaison. Commitment letters signed by local system Superintendents and the Special Education Director are due back to the GaDOE by April 15, 2009.

New systems, as well as returning systems, most complete the commitment memorandum.

Along with trainings, resource fairs, support groups and many other activities that parent mentors leader, they target the following indicators:

- #2.** Increase the percentage of students with disabilities who earn a regular high school diploma.
- #5.** Increase the percentage of young children referred by parents, or other agencies prior to age three who are determined eligible and have an IEP implemented by the third birthday.
- #10.** Increase the performance of students with disabilities on statewide assessments when given appropriate accommodations.
- #13.** Increase the percentage of parents of children receiving special education services who report that schools encouraged parent involvement to improve results for students with disabilities.

We would like to say congratulations to our outstanding Rookie Class for 2008-2009:

Appling	Kim Stancil	Fayette	Allison Stevenson
Atlanta Public	Sharon Matthews	Fulton	Jennifer Carroll
Barrow	Cyndi White	Houston	Alline Kent
Bibb	Terri Goodridge	Newton	Jennifer Jones
Candler	Carol Smith	Richmond	Jessica Ebron
Crawford	Cheryl Whitaker	Sumter	Yolanda Sanford
Dade	MaryLou Lynch	Wayne	April Lee
Decatur City	Cheryl Grant	White	June Grillo
Early	Cathy Green		

The GaDOE also appreciates the excellent work led by the Parent Mentor Council this year under the leadership of Tracy Rogers, Parent Mentor Seminole County and Ann Ladd, Parent Mentor Gwinnett County. We also want to thank the council advisors, Dr. Mike Blake, Assistant Superintendent, Clarke County School System, Dr. Mikki Garcia, Special Education Director, Chatham County Schools and Ms. Beverly Woods, Special Education Director, Marion County Schools.

A final salute to this year's winners of the Phil Pickens Leadership Award: Dr. Blake and Scott Crain, Hall County School System Parent Mentor and former Council chair.

### **Reminder: Parent Mentor Applications due April 15th!**

All Special Education Directors received information via email from our office last week with information and applications to apply for Parent Mentors. That information is attached again for your convenience. Please contact Patti Solomon, [psolomon@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:psolomon@doe.k12.ga.us) if you have questions!

### **Occupational and Physical Therapy Educational Relevance Tool - Elluminate Live! Stakeholders' Meeting:**

We would like to thank everyone who sent in comments and made recommendations for this initiative. There have been an overwhelming number of Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Physical Therapists (PTs) from around the state concerned about implementing a way to uniformly determine educationally relevant occupational therapy and physical therapy for students with disabilities. As a result, we believe that there is still a need to continue collecting and disseminating information about this topic. It is our desire involve interested stakeholders in contributing to the foundational work for creating this tool.

Therefore, there will be a statewide Elluminate Live! session on Monday, May 4, 2009 from 3:30 -5:00 p.m. for all stakeholders including Special Education Directors, school-based and contracted OTs and PTs, and private practice professionals. This correspondence serves as an invitation to all those who have an interest in the OT/PT Educational Relevance Tool to be "at the table".

To access Elluminate Live! session click on <http://elluminate.gavirtualschool.org/doe> and click on the Title: *Issues in OT and PT*. If you miss the session it will be recorded. Passwords are no longer required.

We expect to have a large amount of participation, so we would like to conduct the session in such a way as to answer all questions from the field. Although we will answer questions that will arise during the session, we are requesting that you send questions in advance. Please forward your questions to Elise Lynch at 404-657-0309 or via email at [elynch@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:elynch@doe.k12.ga.us).

Please pass this information on to all providers who would like to participate in this event. We look forward to working with *everyone*.

### **The Benefits of Sound-field Classroom Amplification**

Young children spend 45-60% of their school day involved in listening activities. Their primary channel for learning is hearing. The better children can hear, the more they can learn. Research has identified the following benefits of sound-field classroom amplification:

- The Effects of High Ambient Noise Levels are Overcome
- 30% of Children Will Hear Their Teacher Significantly Better
- Attention and On-Task Times Improve
- Class Interaction and Participation Increases
- Classroom Stress is Lowered
- Behavior Problems are Reduced
- Teacher Absenteeism is Reduced
- Academic Test Scores Improve
- ESL Children Score Higher
- Children With Learning Disabilities, Attention Issues, as well as Hearing Loss can benefit

### **Illuminate LIVE! Special Education Professional Learning Series Reminder**

To support local school systems in providing training to teachers and administrators on various topics regarding special education, the Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports continue to conduct an ongoing series of on-line learning sessions through Illuminate Live. The sessions are recorded after each live session and are intended to provide current information on the issues that affect students with disabilities and their families. Many systems have developed PLU courses around these live and recorded sessions. The Illuminate sessions are also being used by systems in order to train new faculty and staff on various topics. The training is divided into sections (e.g., Transition, Co-teaching, Positive Behavior Supports, Compliance, IEPs, Access to GAA, Academic Performance, Family Engagement, Assistive Technology, etc.), therefore training and/or PLU courses can be designed around many different topics according to faculty and staff needs. Please remember to share this information with all of your schools. This month the following sessions will be live, you may join thirty minutes before the sessions begin:

April 14, 2009	3:30-4:30	Differentiated Instructional Strategies for Struggling Writers
April 20, 2009	3:30-5:00	Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) Eligibility Update

Please note the April 14 session for Differentiated Instructional Strategies for Struggling Writers has recently been added. Participants will be exposed to specific teaching & learning strategies that will promote differentiated instruction in English/Language Arts classrooms to meet the individual needs of all students. These writing strategies can be utilized in all Standard Based classrooms.

In order to access these sessions please go to <http://illuminate.gavirtualschool.org/doe/index.html>. Passwords are no longer required.

### **District Size Data**

Attached to the electronic version of this DL update is an Excel spreadsheet listing the size groupings for Georgia school districts. Each district is listed in both the FY 08 and the FY09 size group, with a color highlight to indicate districts that changed size groups in FY 09. Please contact Bonnie Dye at [bdye@doe.k12.ga.us](mailto:bdye@doe.k12.ga.us) or 404-463-1713 if you have questions.

### **The Traumatic Injury Update: Why is there a separate diagnostic category for children with TBI?** *brought to you by the Children & Youth Subcommittee of the Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission*

Have you ever wondered why the Rules of the Georgia Board of Education list traumatic brain injury (TBI) as a disability category for special education services? While there may be a variety of reasons for this, we will focus on four of them:

First, there are a lot of children with TBI. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control, TBI is the leading cause of death and disability for children and adolescents in the United States. In Georgia, 18,174 children and youth age 3 - 21 were either treated in an emergency department or admitted to the hospital for a TBI in 2006.

Second, although many, many children sustain TBI's, in terms of educational purposes very few of them are officially identified with TBI and receive specialized services. Remember how many children and youth sustained a TBI in Georgia in 2006? During the same year the Department of Education reported only 474 children between 3 and 21 had been identified by the school systems as having TBI.

Why is that? There are many reasons, including:

- TBI is often a "hidden" or "invisible" injury, meaning that there are often no visible, physical signs of the injury. This makes it easy for parents to assume the injury was not serious and thus not report it to the schools.

- TBIs are often treated and released by the emergency departments, and parents are told that their son or daughter sustained "just a concussion" or a "bump on the head." This also makes it easy for parents to dismiss the injury and assume there will not be any long-term effects.

-TBI can lead to cognitive impairments, which carry a social stigma. Even when parents are aware of the severity of the injury they may be reluctant to report it to the schools because they are in denial about the impact of the injury, or to avoid embarrassment, isolation, or other social consequences for their child and themselves.

-Children whose families might be very interested in special education services may have some difficulty in establishing their child's eligibility. If the injury was long ago the family may no longer have access to the medical documentation that verifies the injury. And while the injury can be confirmed by a neuropsychological evaluation, most schools do not have a neuropsychologist on staff that has expertise in brain-behavior relationships and can conduct such an evaluation; neither can families afford to pay for such an evaluation.

-It is often difficult to identify the impact of TBI in children. As we've discussed in previous updates, children and adolescents who sustain a brain injury at a young age may demonstrate behavioral symptoms long after the time of the injury. By that time, the child and parent may have forgotten the link to the long-ago head injury. Most likely these children are enrolled in school by the time the behaviors begin to appear, and without knowledge of the injury, teachers may assume the child has developed a learning or behavior disorder of some other type.

Having a specific diagnostic category for TBI is critical to identifying children with histories of head injuries in order to better understand their learning or behavior disorders and providing appropriate - and more effective - services.

Third, children with TBI need specialized and appropriate services in order to be successful in the classroom. While the learning and behavior problems that result from TBI may be similar to those of other cognitive disabilities, including developmental disabilities, the methods of addressing the impairments differ significantly. In fact, providing inappropriate services, or services that are designed to address other issues, can actually exacerbate the student's problems. For example, many children with TBI who display behavioral symptoms as their first sign of the injury may be made eligible for *Emotional & Behavioral Disordered* instead of *Traumatic Brain Injury*. This mistaken diagnosis can lead to inappropriate placement (such as in an alternative school setting or out-of-state program) or services that can exacerbate the student's behavioral problems.

Services that are appropriate for children with TBI include: individualized lesson plans, structure, and attention; classroom modifications that address the child's cognitive issues; safety plans to prevent re-injury in the first year of recovery; limitations in team sports activities; and referrals for school related therapy from Speech, OT, and PT. Teachers may need to receive specialized training on the needs of students with TBI in order to understand how to work with them in the classroom.

Fourth, the TBI category is critical because children with TBI often experience other physical impairments, such as loss of vision or hearing, as a result of the brain injury. These impairments can significantly impact their ability to function in the classroom and may also lead to behavioral problems if they go undiagnosed.

If you have a student with TBI, or if you suspect that one of your students has a history of head injury, it is critical for you to increase your knowledge and training on TBI. There are also many resources available that can assist you in your support of students with TBI.

The TBI diagnostic category is only for children whose injuries were caused by a traumatic event (fall, motor vehicle accident, sports injury, etc.). Children with acquired brain injury (ABI) - brain injuries that are caused by an organic or other type of event - may be eligible for special education services under other categories such as *Other Health Impaired (OHI)*. It is interesting to note the distinction in disability category because, regardless whether the brain injury was caused by a traumatic event or not, the needs of children with either type of brain injury are the same.

To help you learn more about the needs of children with brain injury the Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission has produced the following resources:

*Georgia's Neurobehavioral Crisis: Lack of Coordinated Care, Inappropriate Institutionalizations*, October, 2007  
([www.bsitf.state.ga.us](http://www.bsitf.state.ga.us))

*Brain and Spinal Injuries in Georgia: A Needs Assessment and State Action Plan*, July, 2008  
([www.bsitf.state.ga.us](http://www.bsitf.state.ga.us))

*For Your Child's Needs: A Guide to Recovery After Traumatic Injury*, July, 2008

*Brain Injury: A Guide for Educators*, edited by Marilyn Lash, Brain Injury Association of New Jersey, Inc. 2001.  
(see also [www.bianj.org](http://www.bianj.org))

*Brain Injury: a Guide for Families About Schools*, edited by Marilyn Lash, Brain Injury Association of New Jersey, Inc. 2001. (see also [www.bianj.org](http://www.bianj.org))

### **Special Education Teacher Recruitment and Retention:**

The Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports along with the Georgia Professional Standards Commission are collaborating with the National Personnel Center to assist districts whose data indicates needs for certified teachers. A task force composed of selected special education directors, GLRS directors, HR directors, and other agency personnel met in March and another meeting of HR directors and districts with significant needs will be convened on April 23rd. Listed below are some data shared with the group:

#### ***Why should we take action toward improvements for teacher recruitment and retention?***

- Teacher Quality is the single most influential school-based factor toward improving student achievement.
- Students with 3 effective teachers in a row significantly outperform their counterparts, posting scores 50% points higher.
- 30% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years of teaching
- In some places this number is as high as 50% with close to 16% of first year teachers leaving without making it through the first year.
- The high turnover rate of less experienced teachers is often attributed to the struggles new teachers face with the reality of their own classroom.
- In 2008 there were 17,083 special education teachers. The projected demand in 2013 is 20,200.
- The 5 year attrition rate for new special education teachers in Georgia is 47%
- Of the top 20 Non Renewable Certificates issued in Georgia Special Education is 3<sup>rd</sup>

***What are the costs associated with teacher attrition?***

- The expenses associated with recruiting, hiring, and training cost a school system \$8,000 or more for each teacher who leaves during the first few years of teaching.

***Why is retention so important?***

*Improving educator quality and assisting struggling schools requires a comprehensive solution and induction is a critical component.--The New Teacher Center. To learn more about The New Teacher Center visit:*

<http://www.newteachercenter.org/index.php>

***Resources to Improve Mentoring and Induction Practices:***

- Rigorous mentor selection based on qualities of an effective mentor.
- Ongoing professional development and support for mentors
- Reserve and plan time for mentor-teacher interactions
- Guidance given to novice teacher on how to move teaching practices forward
- Professional teaching standards and data driven conversations
- Ongoing beginning teacher professional development
- Clear roles and responsibilities for administrators
- Collaboration with all stakeholders
- Possible compensation options for teacher leaders as mentors

**Dates to Remember:**

**April**

- 22-24 Georgia Association of School Psychologists Conference (GASP), Sea Palms, St. Simon Island. See [www.gaspnet.org](http://www.gaspnet.org) for details.
- 24-25 Georgia Vision Educators Lit-R-C Weekend, Georgia Academy for the Blind, Macon
- 25 Georgia Hands and Voices Meeting: Columbus, Ga
- 30 Directors' Discussion Forum with Kim Hartsell and Nancy O'Hara, Bibb County

**May**

- 1 VI Consortium Meeting, 9:00 a.m. - Noon
- 15-16, Georgia Vision Educators Lit-R-C Weekend at the Smokey Powell Center at the Georgia Academy for the Blind, Macon
- 29-30-31 Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), Atlanta Area School for the Deaf, Clarkston

**June**

- 20-21 EIPA, Valdosta State University, Valdosta