Shared Vision and Rationale

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**Vision Statement**

The vision of Georgia Connections Academy (GACA) is for all students to graduate prepared for their chosen college or career experience. To achieve this this vision GACA’s mission is to exemplify a collaborative virtual school where our students meet high expectations through mastery of challenging academic material in preparation for successful college and career experiences. The goal for the 2018-2019 school year is for GACA to decrease the percentage of students at the beginning learner level on Math and Social Studies Georgia Milestones assessments. GACA will use online standards aligned quarterly benchmarks, TestPad, to determine student academic progress levels and coordinate appropriate interventions, such as USA TestPrep and MathXL.

**Rationale**

To improve student achievement on Math and Social Studies Georgia Milestones assessments GACA leadership decided to begin benchmarking students’ academic progress. They began by planning a series of benchmark assessments. The first benchmark assessment, given at the beginning of the school year will serve as a pretest benchmark to assess students’ knowledge prior to instruction. The subsequent benchmarks will assess student growth. The important criteria for selecting an appropriate benchmarking program include alignment, utility and feasibility (Herman 2005). The benchmarks must be aligned to state standards. The benchmark must have the utility of suggesting areas of improvement, and it must be feasible for accessibility and budget. GACA decided to use TestPad, which is an online testing system housed in the Student Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) provided by the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE). The TestPad assessment questions are aligned with GADOE standards of excellence and is provided to public schools at no cost. The TestPad benchmark, therefore has the utility of suggesting areas of improvement and meets feasibility requirements for accessibility, students will access it via the LMS, and budget.

A variety of strategies will be used to support students who are performing as beginning learners. Remediation for students performing as beginning learners will include virtual and in-person math help sessions (Stein 2013) for parents and students, and intervention programs such as MathXL (Stillson 2009) and USA TestPrep (Christian 2012) for students who require additional support to help them with academic progress. Teachers will also meet weekly to monitor and discuss student achievement data.

**Diversity Considerations**

As I gathered and analyzed for GACA 2017 (Appendix A), the results indicated that 44% of student population receive free or reduced lunch or are economically disadvantaged (ED) and 10% of the population are identified as students with disabilities (SWD). GACA Milestone results indicated that its students showed 25% proficient and distinguished levels in math. However only 14% of ED students were proficient or distinguished and only 6% of SWDs achieved distinguished or proficient levels in math.

Because they have historically performed lower than the general population of GACA students, the special group individuals who underperform on benchmark assessments will receive the targeted remediation and interventions as indicated by the benchmark results. The TestPad benchmark access is imbedded in our LMS which requires no additional resources for our ED or SWD students to access. The SWD who already receive additional support using software to read text will continue to use the add-ons for benchmarks. For students who have difficulty arranging transportation to the student and parent Math Help sessions, virtual help sessions will be provided using GACAs synchronous classrooms via Adobe Connect, which is also imbedded in our LMS. Students will be able to work collaboratively with each other (Kochhar-Bryant 2005) and with teachers on areas of need. Students with disabilities or economically disadvantaged students who need additional interventions via Math XL and USA TestPrep will be provided with targeted lessons which they can also access via a link in the LMS. The data gathered does not indicate disproportionate achievement scores for girls versus boys for Georgia Milestone proficient or distinguished levels (Appendix B). Per communication from an administrator, GACA is establishing a Girls Who Code club to support and encourage female interest STEM careers.

**Stakeholder Roles**

Administrators

The administrators develop the goals for the school and delegate the assigned duties leading towards student achievement. During discussions with members of the administration team, they indicated they are also taking on the responsibility of creating and updating the school virtual data wall and completing data analysis of information gathered on students to inform their next steps (Duke 2012). This data wall will house historic student performance data, special concerns, such as gifted or IEP designation, and benchmark data. In addition to analyzing general education student data, administrators will also analyze the data of students who are identified as ED or SWD and ensure that they are placed in intervention, remediation and enrichment cohorts as their data supports. Administrators will also attend the weekly learning team meetings of Math and 8th grade Social Studies teachers. These meetings will be attended in-person or virtually via Google Hangouts or Adobe Connect.

Teachers

Teachers are the first line of action to help student achieve success. According to the survey questions, at GACA, teachers appreciate having the autonomy to create their own versions of standards-based lessons in Adobe Connect. Engaging standards aligned lessons help increase student motivation (Wankel 2013) resulting in students learning more content and increasing their higher order thinking skills. Teachers will select standards-based questions in TestPad to determine student knowledge and growth levels though benchmarking (Olson 2005). Teachers will also analyze student data from benchmark assessments to determine areas that require whole class reteaching, or specific student targeted remediation. Teachers will collaborate with their learning teammates to arrange in-person help sessions for students and parents. Teachers will additionally create virtual help sessions for students and parents for parents who cannot afford or do not have transportation to in-person help sessions. The Special Education teachers will work collaboratively with the regular education teachers to analyze test results and arrange small group virtual remediation sessions specifically for students with disabilities to improve student learning (Kochhar-Bryant 2005). Based on survey results, teachers believe that students would benefit if teachers create supplemental modules in USA Testprep for all students. As a result, teachers have created remediation and enrichment modules in USA TestPrep in Math and Social Studies. Teachers are also creating targeted remediation assignments in MathXL. Teachers share feedback with administrators, parents and students regarding student achievement levels and areas of concern.

Parents

Since GACA is a virtual school, parents often serve as the learning coaches of the students, they are essential to help students organize their time, prioritize assignments, motivate students to complete school work and remind students of the importance of studying, reviewing and remediation after assessments. Student performance improves when students have family support (Santos 2018). Parents are essential to making sure that students stay engaged in the learning process while they are on devices and are not just enjoying screen time. When teachers schedule in-person help sessions, parents and grandparents are necessary for providing student transportation and by participating in activities that will help their students grow academically. Parents also serves as an advocate for their student with additional communication for academic concerns.

Students

There would be no GACA or teachers if there are no students. The students must buy-in to the shared vision of the school. They must understand that GACA’s vision is to provide them with the foundation to achieve any post-secondary goals they set for themselves. At the beginning of each academic year, GACA students set their goals for the year and inform their homeroom teachers of the goals. When students are invested in learning and forming their own achievement goals, they are more likely to stay focused (Burns 2018). They are also more likely to become receptive to accepting help with remediation and targeted interventions. Students must communicate with their teachers and parents to express their concerns and needs so that all stakeholders can support them.

In conclusion, GACA’s mission of exemplifying a collaborative virtual school where our students meet high expectations through mastery of challenging academic material in preparation for successful college and career experiences can only be brought to fruition with the support of students, parents, teachers and administrators. Each person brings an essential and integral component to achieving the annual growth goals on the Georgia Milestone’s assessments. By integrating technological resources with continued innovation and insight GACA will be able to continue its vison to graduate all of its students prepared for their chosen college or career experience.

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Appendix A

Technology Needs Survey

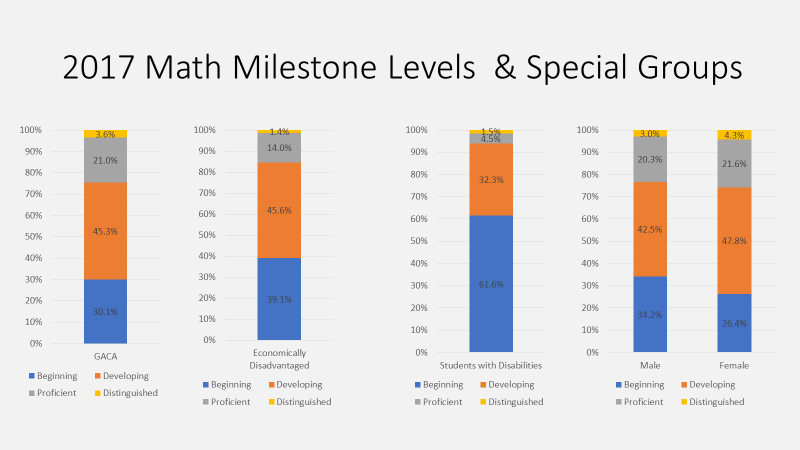
1. How comfortable are you with accessing and using resources in SLDS?

Very comfortable Somewhat comfortable Not comfortable

1. How do you use technology to provide activities that address higher order thinking skills with students?
2. Do you solely rely on the LMS to provide assignments? If not, what other online resources do you use to remediate or enrich your students?
3. What opportunities are provided at GACA for teachers to make critical decisions and implement their own solutions to problems?
4. How do you know that our LMS is providing the best use of technology for all types of students at GACA?
5. What strategies do you use to remediate or provide interventions to students who are struggling to achieve mastery in your course?
6. What type of professional development would you like to receive that will help with teaching students in your synchronous sessions?

Appendix B

Page of Math Milestones Ranges for Subgroups from Data Overview

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