

2017-2018 PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT POLICY



**GEORGIA
CYBER
ACADEMY**

1745 PHOENIX BLVD., SUITE 100 ATLANTA, GA, 30349
404.334.4790

WWW.GACYBER.ORG

WHAT IS A TITLE I SCHOOL?

The U.S. Department of Education provides federal Title I funds through the Georgia Department of Education, to local educational agencies (LEAs), and public schools with high percentages of economic need to help ensure that all children meet and/or exceed State academic content and student academic achievement standards.

GCA is a Title I district utilizing a "schoolwide program." A schoolwide program uses Title I funds to support the educational programs of the school. Students and teachers receive benefits from federal funding that help support academic achievement. Consistent with section 1112 of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), GCA will put into operation programs, activities, and procedures for parent and family involvement which will be planned and operated with meaningful consultation with parents and families. GCA works on the improvement of the Parent and Family Engagement Program through continuing education, collaborations, and trainings with the Georgia Department of Education.

WHAT IS A PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT POLICY?

The purpose of the Parent and Family Engagement Policy is to share how GCA works with parents and families to help all the students in the school meet high academic standards. It outlines rights and responsibilities, schedule of Title I and other important meetings, methods of communication, how to receive student academic expectations and learning goals, available resources, as well as how to provide feedback and become more involved in our school.

HOW IS IT REVISED?

The Parent and Family Engagement Policy is revised annually by GCA Learning Coaches and the Family Engagement Team. Revisions are made through focus groups, survey feedback, email feedback, online meetings, and phone calls. We welcome Learning Coach feedback. If you would like to provide feedback, please email Kristy Howard, Family Engagement Coordinator (krhoward@gacyber.org).

WHAT IS PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT?

The goal of Parent and Family Engagement at GCA is for all parents and families to become active partners in the education of their student; to feel supported and empowered by staff; and to be connected to other GCA families and the GCA community as a whole in order to guide their student toward academic success. GCA has adopted the 6 National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships as the model for engaging parents, families, and students. The 6 National PTA Standards are:



**WELCOMING
ALL FAMILIES**



**COMMUNICATING
EFFECTIVELY**



**SUPPORTING
STUDENT
SUCCESS**



**SPEAKING UP
FOR EVERY
CHILD**



**SHARING
POWER**



**COLLABORATING
WITH COMMUNITY**

1

WELCOMING ALL FAMILIES

Georgia Cyber Academy welcomes all new families through the following initiatives:

STRONG START:

New families participate in "Strong Start" which is facilitated by the Family Academic Support Team (FAST). This program provides a foundation of support and information which initiates the transition to the online educational model. Families are assigned a Strong Start Specialist to welcome and assist them with the onboarding process. Family Engagement hosts Learning Coach Prep Academy Virtual School 101 Orientations to get families familiar with our school and our systems.

SCHOOL-LEVEL ORIENTATIONS:

Elementary, Middle, and High School hold a series of orientation sessions to foster connections between staff and families and help orient students to our school environment. Sessions cover topics such as navigating the Online School, where to go for help, schedule planning, and more.

LIVE HELP SESSIONS:

Departments provide live help sessions throughout the year. Families can attend at any time to get academic or other support. These sessions are for new and returning families and are posted in the announcements section of the Online School and/or are listed on the [GCA Events Calendar](#).

GCA WEBSITE:

gacyber.org - This website is for current Georgia Cyber Academy families and has a wealth of information such as: staff contact, school news, school and events calendars, department information, Georgia Milestones resources, new family Strong Start resources and much more.

Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

School activities that promote effective communication:

MONTHLY FAMILY ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER:

The *Georgia Cyber on My Mind* monthly newsletter is sent via email to connect parents and families to community events, workshops, resources, technology support, Parent-Teacher-Student Organization updates, and other valuable information.

QUARTERLY DISTRICT TOWN HALL MEETINGS:

These meetings are held quarterly to inform all parents and learning coaches of volunteer opportunities, upcoming events, department news, ways to further help their student at home, Title I information, as well as other school news. During these meetings, parents and learning coaches will receive information on how to collaborate on a variety of initiatives and share in the planning and revision of family engagement programming. During these meetings, parents and learning coaches will have an opportunity to hear news from school leaders. For the 2017-2018 school year, the District Town Hall Meetings will be held on September 21, 2017, January 18, 2018, and May 17, 2018. Details and links to all District Town Hall meetings and recordings can be found on the [GCA Events Calendar](#).

PARENT MEETINGS:

These meetings are hosted by the Family Engagement Team to share district wide information, receive parent feedback, and provide strategies to help parents be a successful Learning Coach to their student. Parent University will be offered after these Parent Meetings. For the 2017-2018 school year, the Parent Meetings will be held on November 16, 2017, December 14, 2017, February 15, 2018, March 15, 2018, and April 19, 2018. Details and links to all Parent Meetings and recordings can be found on the [GCA Events Calendar](#).

SCHOOL AND HOME COMMUNICATION:

Open and frequent communication between school and home is hugely important to a child's academic success. GCA uses many forms of communications throughout the school year to provide information and to continually build relationships with you and your student. Some of the ways we communicate are through email, phone calls, voice mail messages, text messages, website updates and Online School announcements.

STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Staff professional training is provided district wide on best practices in effectively reaching out to, communicate with, and working with parents and family as equal partners in a meaningful and productive manner.

Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning by providing multiple forms of communication to inform families of academic resources, opportunities and events in school newsletters, the school website, weekly teacher emails and course announcements.

CLASS CONNECT RECORDINGS:

All live Class Connect sessions are recorded for convenience and flexibility. Class Connect session recordings are available from the Online School in both the learning coach and student accounts. Live virtual classroom recordings are approximately one hour each and give detailed content area instruction on a variety of topics.

PARENT-TEACHER-STUDENT ORGANIZATION NEWSLETTERS:

The Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO) provides regular newsletters in order to inform all GCA families of PTSO events, initiatives, programs, volunteer opportunities, and more. Families can find additional information about the PTSO and how to become a member at www.gcaptso.org.

EVENTS CALENDAR:

The [GCA Events Calendar](#) contains details about in-person events and online support sessions. In-person events are planned by our school, teachers, and parent leaders all over the state in order to provide opportunities to meet other GCA families. Online support sessions cover a variety of topics. View the [GCA Events Calendar](#) for details.

INFORMATION IN AN UNDERSTANDABLE LANGUAGE:

During the initial enrollment process, the language needs of a parent are assessed. If a language barrier is determined, the enrollment package will be provided in the known language. Through our English Learner Program, GCA provides communication to parents of children identified for participation in a language instruction educational program in an understandable and uniform format, to the extent practicable, and provides information in a language that the parents can understand.

School activities that promote student success include:

SCHOOL-PARENT COMPACTS:

GCA staff and parents/learning coaches work collaboratively to develop the Student-Parent-Teacher Compact as part of the Parent and Family Engagement Policy. This Compact outlines how parents/learning coaches, school, staff, and students share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement and the means by which the school and parents/learning coaches will build and develop a partnership to help students achieve the state's high standards. Copies of the School-Parent Compacts are located on our website: <http://www.gacyber.org/title-i.html>

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PLANS:

An Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) is a written plan which defines the academic needs and strengths of a student based on data, including input from the parent/learning coach, student, and teachers. The ILP is created collaboratively with the student's homeroom teacher and parent/learning coach.

PARENT UNIVERSITY:

Teachers and administrators lead parent workshops on a variety of topics throughout the school year to assist parents in helping their student academically. Parent University will cover topics such as state academic standards and assessments, how to monitor your student's progress, how you can collaborate with your student's teachers, technology assistance, and much more. Additional information about Parent University will be sent via email, newsletter, and listed on the GCA website. All sessions are held online. Session details and recordings are posted on the [GCA Events Calendar](#).

STATE TESTING:

The Georgia Milestones Assessment System (Georgia Milestones) is designed to inform efforts to improve student achievement by assessing student performance on the standards specific to each course or subject/grade tested. More information about the Georgia Milestones can be found on our website at: <http://www.gacyber.org/georgia-milestones.html>

GCA RESOURCE ROOM:

The online GCA Resource Room provides families with useful, interesting, inspiring and engaging supplemental educational content. Visit <https://www.pinterest.com/gcaresourceroom/> to access the [GCA Resource Room](#).

SCHOOL AND PARENT-LED EVENTS:

Social and academic outings are planned by teachers and parents all across the state. School/teacher-led event details are located on the [GCA Events Calendar](#) which can be filtered by region. Parent-Led event details are located on the [GCA PTSO Parent-Led Events Calendar](#).

Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS:

GCA hires teachers who are Highly Qualified in their content areas. We assign teachers to their subject area and/or grade level of expertise. Parents will receive notification if a non-highly qualified teacher is assigned as the child's teacher of record in an academic content area for four consecutive weeks or more. GCA Teachers receive ongoing training in order to provide the best education possible to students. These trainings are provided professionally, by our school leaders, and with the assistance of GCA parents.

PARENT RIGHT TO REQUEST TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS:

At GCA, we are very proud of our instructional faculty who are highly qualified to provide your student a quality rigorous education. As a Title I school, we must meet federal regulations related to teacher qualifications as defined under the United States Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). These regulations allow you to learn more about your child's teachers' training and credentials. At any time, you may inquire:

- Whether the teacher met state qualifications and certification requirements for the grade level and subject he/she is teaching,
- Whether the teacher received an emergency or conditional certificate through which state qualifications were waived, and
- What undergraduate or graduate degrees the teacher holds, including graduate certificates and additional degrees, and major(s) or area(s) of concentration.

You may also ask whether your child receives help from a paraprofessional. GCA does not currently employ paraprofessionals. Our staff is committed to helping your student develop the academic knowledge and critical thinking he/she needs to succeed in school and beyond. That commitment includes making sure that all of our teachers and paraprofessionals are highly skilled. If you have questions regarding your student's teacher, please contact the school or department director.

REGIONAL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT COORDINATORS:

Regional Family Engagement Coordinators (RFECs) provide regional family support to specific counties with the goal of increasing academic achievement for all students within their covered counties. RFEC support includes in-person events, local resources, monthly newsletters, and individual support. The following counties are supported by an RFEC: Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Henry, and Paulding.

REGIONAL FACEBOOK GROUPS:

GCA PTSO regional Facebook groups offer a beneficial avenue of communication for parents/learning coaches. The GCA PTSO regional Facebook groups are closed groups which are monitored by parent volunteers. Group members must be a parent or learning coach of a currently enrolled student. These groups are used as support for GCA families. For Facebook links and contact information, visit: <http://www.gacyber.org/regional-contacts.html>.

School activities that promote speaking up for every child include:

BECOME AN ADVOCATE:

Parents/learning coaches are encouraged to understand how the school operates and how to raise questions or concerns about school policies or programs. We want to empower parents/learning coaches to understand how to effectively support student success at home and know where to find opportunities to learn how to better guide students. Parents/learning coaches are encouraged to attend quarterly Town Hall meetings, annual Title I meetings, Parent meetings and other live help sessions to learn more about the school and become involved (see [Communicating Effectively](#) and [Sharing Power](#)).

REDUCED CLASS SIZE:

Title I funds are used to reduce class size. Hiring more teachers allows for a smaller student-teacher ratio, especially for at-risk students.

McKINNEY-VENTO ACT:

GCA participates in the education of homeless students by providing specific support and supplies to help with their education. A “homeless” student is any student who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This could mean that a child is sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship; is living in motels, etc. due to the lack of alternative accommodations; is living in emergency or transitional shelters; or is awaiting foster care placement. If you are currently experiencing homelessness and are in need of assistance, please contact Barbara Stevens, our Family Resource Coordinator and Homeless/Migrant Liaison at bstevens@gacyber.org.

MIGRANT EDUCATION PROGRAM:

GCA participates in the Migrant Education Program (MEP). Migrant students in GCA are also provided additional support and supplies to help with their education. GCA receives the names of migrant students from the MEP regional office. If you would like more information, please contact Barbara Stevens, our Family Resource Coordinator and Homeless/Migrant Liaison at bstevens@gacyber.org.

Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

School activities that promote sharing power include:

GCA BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Georgia Cyber Academy is governed by a Board of Directors which is composed of nine community leaders, some of whom are GCA parents. Public notice of GCA board meetings can be found on the school website. The GCA Board of Directors share in the creation and revision of district plans and policies. Board policies, meeting dates, and minutes can be found here: <http://www.gacyber.org/board-of-directors.html>.

TITLE I MEETINGS:

GCA will hold a Title I Parent Input Meeting on Thursday Aug 17, 2017 at 7:00 pm. We will review items and documents such as the District Wide/School Wide Plan, Title I Funding, Parent and Family Engagement Policy, and School Compacts. Parents' and Learning Coaches' will be given the opportunity to provide feedback. If Parents or Learning Coaches are unable to attend live, we will place the recording in our [GCA Events Calendar](#).

GCA will hold an Annual Title I meeting on Thursday, Oct 19, 2017 at 7:00 pm. In this meeting we will review all Title I plans and programming. Family Engagement will also host a meeting at the end of the school year where the effectiveness of Title I plans and programming will be evaluated. These live meetings and the recordings can be accessed via the [GCA Events Calendar](#).

Parents/learning coaches are invited to review all Title I and school plans. Invitations and documents for this review are sent via email and located on the GCA website at <http://www.gacyber.org/title-i.html>.

GCA will reserve 1% from the total amount of Title I funds to carry out parent and family involvement requirements. Furthermore, at least 90% of the 1% will be reserved to support family engagement programs and activities. Family Engagement programs and activities are to ensure that parents are provided opportunities and experiences that enable them to promote high student academic achievement and be involved in an effective partnership with the school.

You can contact our Title I Director or Family Engagement Coordinators to provide feedback on our Title I Program, Funding, and Documents at anytime during the school year.

Joy Peterson, Title I Director: jpeterson@gacyber.org

Kristy Howard, Elementary School Family Engagement Coordinator: krhoward@gacyber.org

Veronica Okpani, Middle School Family Engagement Coordinator: vokpani@gacyber.org

Maria Blencowe, High School Family Engagement Coordinator: mblencowe@gacyber.org

ANNUAL SURVEY:

A parent survey is conducted annually to assess the effectiveness of the school and its teachers. Parents and families are encouraged to share their thoughts on family-teacher communication, level of academic support, outings, resources, scheduling, opportunities for greater family engagement, and more. Results from this survey are used in the planning of future parent and family engagement programming.

Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.



School activities that promote collaborating with community include:

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:

Our Community Partnerships program focuses on the GCA community by helping build partnerships with museums, historic sites, colleges and businesses across the state. Supporting all grades K-12 with programming and opportunities for students to attend free classes, field trips, internships and community service to help with their academics and even wellness and fitness. If you would like more information about our community partners, please email Tonette Price, our Community Partnerships Manager, at tprice@gacyber.org.

REGIONAL COMMUNITIES:

GCA families are divided into twelve regions across the state. Each region has Regional Parent Leaders who communicate and provide information on activities going on in the region for the purpose of fostering community within the school. To find out more visit: <http://www.gacyber.org/regional-contacts.html>.

PARENT-TEACHER-STUDENT ORGANIZATION:

Georgia Cyber Academy Parent-Teacher-Student Organization (GCA PTSO) is a non-profit organization which is organized and operated for the charitable and educational purpose of assisting GCA in providing the best education possible to the children enrolled at the school. The GCA PTSO:

- Serves GCA throughout the state of Georgia.
- Finds and organizes volunteers for GCA.
- Raises money for school programs and services.
- Holds meetings to discuss current issues affecting our school with administrators, teachers, students and learning coaches.
- Supports school faculty and staff.
- Hosts virtual and in-person events for GCA Families.
- Manages Facebook groups for GCA parents/learning coaches.

More information about GCA PTSO tab on the website at <http://www.gacyber.org/regional-contacts.html> and on the PTSO website directly at www.gcaptso.org.

PARENT LEADERSHIP:

Parent leadership is successfully achieved when parents and educational professionals build effective partnerships and share responsibilities, expertise, and leadership in decisions being made that affect student success, families, and communities. GCA parents and learning coaches have many opportunities to participate in this program including regional volunteer opportunities, GCA PTSO committees, academic student support, state-wide testing, and more. If you would like to volunteer as a Parent Leader, please email Maria Blencowe, Family Engagement Coordinator (mblencowe@gacyber.org).

Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.