

G-CASE Comments

G-CASE is an affiliate of the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders



From Our President

Dear G-CASE Friends,

As spring blossoms around us, it brings with it a season of renewal, growth, and reflection. It's a time when students are graduating, staff are contemplating their roles, and we, as educators, are reminded of the importance of our work. In the midst of these transitions, it's crucial that we recognize the

significance of our community in fostering personal and professional development. That's why I urge each of you to commit to introducing two new faces to our organization—let's spread the spirit of *G-CASE* far and wide!

G-CASE launches dreams and inspires change: At G-CASE, membership isn't just a formality—it's a passport to possibility. As a member, you gain access to a treasure trove of resources, professional development opportunities, and a network of like-minded individuals dedicated to elevating the field of special education. From innovative strategies to cutting-edge research, G-CASE empowers you to dream big, think boldly, and drive meaningful change in the lives of students with disabilities. For many of us, this organization has been instrumental in our career journeys. Alongside organizations like CEC and GAEL, it has provided invaluable support, resources, and opportunities for growth. Membership in G-CASE isn't just a formality—it's a gateway to endless possibilities. Through access to a wealth of resources, professional development opportunities, and a supportive network of peers, G-CASE empowers us to dream big and drive meaningful change in the lives of students with disabilities. I encourage you to share this with others in your network. They won't stop thanking you.

G-CASE celebrates diversity and inclusion: In the mosaic of G-CASE, diversity isn't just welcomed, it's celebrated. We embrace the unique gifts and perspectives of every individual, fostering a culture where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued. National CEC created the Diversity Leadership Academy this year, with the primary focus to support CEC members of color to build and enhance their leadership skills. Our own Dr. Cassandra Holifield, 2022-2023 G-CASE President has been asked to serve as an Academy mentor for the first cohort. With initiatives led by Dr. Holifield and ongoing efforts to strengthen diversity initiatives, we're committed to creating learning environments where differences are celebrated as sources of strength and enrichment.

G-CASE empowers educators, and elevates practice: Are you ready to take your leadership to new heights? CASE and G-CASE stands ready to support you on your journey of growth and professional development. Dr. Zabrina Cannady, recently hired as the professional development director for CASE will ensure her believed G-CASE is at the forefront of professional learning. I'm excited to see what will be realized as we embark on the coaching collaborative and work to expand our professional learning offerings from workshops and conferences to mentorship programs and leadership academies. We will provide the tools, resources, and support you need to excel in your role as a special education administrator. Together, we'll unlock the full potential of every student and create schools where every child can thrive Membership in G-CASE isn't just about belonging—it's about joining a movement. It's about ensuring that every child, regardless of ability, has access to the specialized instruction and support they need to succeed. So, let's invite our friends and colleagues to become part of this transformative journey.

Our recent spring legal conference saw a wonderful turnout, with 400 registrants leaving equipped to address human resource concerns, Section 504 issues, and IDEA concerns. Additionally, a delegation of G-CASE executive board members attended the Council for Exceptional Children conference in San Antonio, forging connections and bringing back valuable insights.

As we embrace the opportunities of spring, let's continue to paint a world where every child's potential knows no bounds. Together, we're shaping the future of special education in Georgia and beyond.

With boundless optimism and unwavering dedication,

Michele Sayles Harris, President Georgia-Council of Administrators of Special Education



From Our Executive Director



During our G-CASE Summer Retreat in June 2018, the Executive Board recognized the statewide concern that there is a shortage of educators specifically trained to administer/direct special education programs across Georgia. After much discussion, planning, and committee work over the next few years, the Board proudly rolled out its pipeline to developing, selecting,

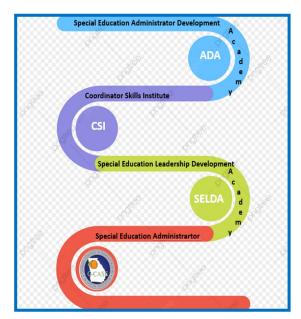
and monitoring future special education administrators!

The pipeline begins with the Special Education Administrator Development Academy (ADA), created to prepare master teachers and others to gain foundational skills related to possible eventual leadership and administration for special education programs. The next channel on our pipeline is the Coordinator Skills Institute (CSI), a one-day conference designed for coordinators to learn practical, useful, timely, advanced, and needed information for special education leadership. Topics chosen for this institute are based on survey results from directors and coordinators. The pipeline continues with the Special Education Leadership Development Academy (SELDA), in which G-CASE partners with the GaDOE as they host a year-long Academy for first and second-year directors. G-CASE provides mentors from our Advisory Board (representing each GLRS) to all first-year directors participating in SELDA and a *Legal 101* workshop for all SELDA members before the G-CASE Fall Conference.

The Pipeline is working! Georgia's present and future special education administrators are well-trained with a good understanding of budget, scheduling, human resources, specially designed instruction, program evaluation, data interpretation, communication, discipline, the Perfect IEP....Thank you all for supporting the professional learning initiatives of *G*-

CASE!

Sarah Burbach, Executive Director





G-CASE

Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education 2022-2025 Strategic Plan

VISION

A unified voice promoting excellence in leaders of programs for students with disabilities

MISSION

- ➤ Promote professional learning
- ➤ Promote engaged membership
- ➤ Promote effective leadership

PURPOSE

G-CASE advocates for improved services for students with disabilities

STRATEGY

By offering effective performance-based professional learning and promoting the engagement of members, G-CASE will impact state and national policy and legislation.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Impact legislation and policy

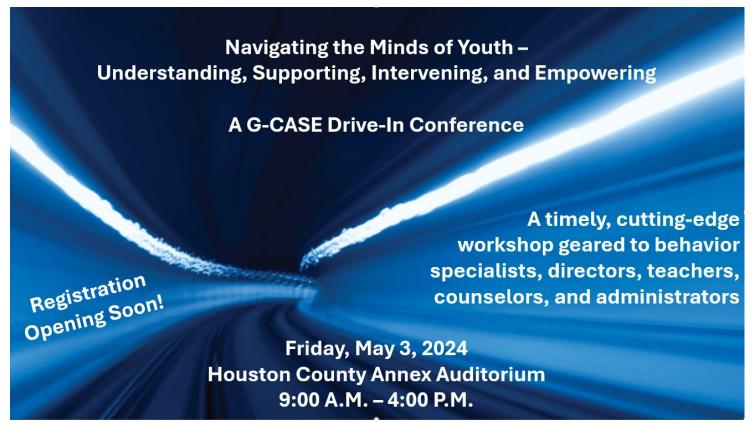
- To impact state legislation and policy by identifying and advocating for key issues/legislative priorities
- To impact national legislation and policy related to IDEA and other special education-focused regulations by identifying and advocating for key issues.

Promote engaged membership

- To increase, honor, and celebrate membership in G-CASE (state organization) by ensuring member loyalty, retention, and engagement
- To increase membership in CEC/CASE (national organization) by offering efficient registration and an awareness of the benefits of belonging to a professional organization

Provide performance-based professional learning

- To build the knowledge capacity of members in order to provide improved services for students with disabilities
- To develop and enhance the leadership skills of new members at all levels of administration by strengthening the pipeline from teacher to director
- To expand the leadership skills of all members
- To communicate timely, accurate information that will encourage improved services for students with disabilities
- To value the experience and expertise of Past-Presidents and G-CASE-awarded individuals in the design, implementation, and presentation of professional learning activities



G-CASE is proud to present a powerful one-day Drive-In Conference Navigating the Minds of Youth – Understanding, Supporting, Intervening, and Empowering, on May 3rd at the Houston County Annex Auditorium. Presenter Dr. Amanda Giordano, Associate Professor in Counseling and Human Development Services at The University of Georgia, will lead workshop. Dr Giordano recently spoke to superintendents at a RESA Board of Control meeting and was immediately invited by several of them to share the critical information with their local districts.

During the workshop, participants will have the opportunity to explore captivating topics that are essential for comprehending and aiding student behavior through these topics:

The Intriguing Realm of Addiction: Dive into the neuroscience of addiction, adolescent brain development, and prevalent behavioral addictions such as gaming, social media, and pornography.

Substance Awareness: Gain insight into the world of substance use among young individuals, covering topics like vaping, cannabis, alcohol, and nonprescription stimulant use.

Practical Approaches: Unveil two effective interventions that are critical for educators - Motivational Interviewing and SBIRT (screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment).

It is vital that educators working with students of all ages understand these behavior addictions. This workshop will also provide interventions and knowledge to assist in developing Behavior Intervention Plans, Functional Behavior Assessments, and Manifestation Determinations. It really is a MUST for all professionals dealing with social media, gaming, vaping, and other substance-abusing behaviors.

SAVE THE DATE! Registration opens soon! Please share with all appropriate staff!

2024 G-CASE Spring Legal Conference



The 2024 *G-CASE* Spring Legal Conference held at The Classic Center in Athens was a huge success! Over four hundred attendees learned from nine state and nationally-known attorneys, along with Dr. Jimmy Stokes, GAEL Policy Analyst;, and Wina Low, State Director, Division for Special Education Services and Supports at the GaDOE. GLRS Directors, SELDA, G-CASE Advisory Board, and G-CASE Executive Board took advantage of their members being at the conference by meeting before the conference kicked off. Keynote speakers reviewed current state and national legal decisions and taught how to avoid excessive litigation, work with parent advocates, understand personnel laws, and conduct manifestation determination reviews. Participants also received data and special topics from the GaDOE and a timely legislative update.



G-CASE Past-Presidents Honored at Special Dinner before Spring Conference



G-CASE honored its Past-Presidents the night before Spring Conference with a special dinner hosted by Kristine Hammond, Regional Director of Sales for Beable, at South Kitchen. Past-Presidents JoAnn Brittingham (1974-1975), Christi Teal (2011-2012), Jennifer Donnelly (2013-2014), Traci White (2014-2015), Jimmy Pitzer (2016-2017), Charlette Green (2017-2018), Greg McElwee (2018-2019), Zabrina Cannady (2019-2020), and Tris Gilland (2020-2022) joined current G-CASE President Michele Sayles Harris and G-CASE Officers for a time of remembering the past and celebrating the future.

Dr. Kristi-Lee Arrington Named

2024 Outstanding New Special Education Director

The G-CASE 2024 *Outstanding New Special Education Director* Award was announced by Dr. Tris Gilland, Past-President and Awards Chairperson, at the Spring G-CASE Con-

ference. To be eligihonor, the recipient Special Education Dithree years adminiscation programs and/ emplifies G-CASE values, and standards; CASE. CEC. exemplary leadership cial education adminand concern for stuwith disabilities; conof special education; in professional and and be recognized as

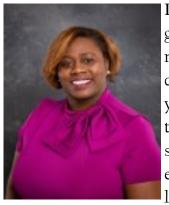


ble for this coveted must be a current rector in their first tering special eduor services who exand CASE's ethics. be a member of G-CASE; demonstrate and service as a speistrator; show care dents and families tribute to the field be actively involved community affairs; outstanding an

leader in their local district and/or by the state. Dr. Kristi-Lee Arrington, Director of Student Services for the Houston County School System, nominated by her assistant superintendent, coordinators, and program specialists, certainly exhibits these qualities! This group stated that Dr. Arrington supports her system's students by attending local special events for students with disabilities. She supports her leadership staff with tough placement meetings. She has resolved conflicts and handled difficult situations with patience and tact. Under her leadership, teachers and administrators have gained a greater understanding of processes and strategies essential to the development of programs and services for students with disabilities. She also sets high expectations for teachers who serve students with disabilities. She encourages teachers to use high leverage practices in their classroom with fidelity and advocates for the resources needed to provide the most effective education. She has been the guiding force behind the district-wide addition of Sensory Rooms with 15 rooms added at 9 locations during her first year as Director. Congratulations, Kristi-Lee!

G-CASE Elections: Vice-President

G-CASE Members had the opportunity to vote for Vice-President and Treasurer. These new officers were announced at the 2024 G-CASE Spring Legal Conference and will assume G-CASE leadership following the Summer GAEL Conference in July.



Dr. Damita James, Assistant Director and GLRS Director of Middle Georgia RESA, was chosen as the 2024-2025 G-CASE Vice-President. She will move up to President-Elect the next year, and then serve as G-CASE President in 2026-2027. Damita has called Warner Robins home for more than 20 years along with her husband and daughter. Her passion to help others was the catalyst to her educational journey at Georgia Southern University where she not only met her college sweetheart but also obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Education with an emphasis in Mental Retardation. Being a life-long learner, Damita decided to pursue a Master's degree in Instructional

Technology from Georgia College and State University, a Specialist degree in Educational Leadership and Administration from Lincoln Memorial University, and a Ph.D. in Special Education Leadership at Capella University. The opportunities she had for the last 25 years as a special educator has allowed her to teach and lead in various settings including elementary and high school, the Georgia Academy for the Blind, and as a Special Education Administrator both in Houston County and currently at Middle Georgia RESA where she serves as the Assistant Director and GLRS Director.

As an active member and leader of CEC, CASE, and G-CASE, Damita has held the following positions for the respective organizations: GaCEC President, CASE-Financial Committee Member, and G-CASE Treasurer. Throughout her educational career, Damita has served on the advisory board for Capella University, volunteered for Special Olympics, and participated as a member of Georgia Association of Educational Leaders (GAEL). She was also a member of Delta Kappa Gamma Society International (DKG) which is a national educational organization for women. As part of DKG, Damita served on the professional affairs and grant in-aid committees.

Damita is a certified trainer for IIRP Restorative Practices, Emotional Poverty 1 and 2, and Check & Connect. Damita loves to support new teachers and work with coaches through the GaDOE Teacher Provider Retention Program (TPRP) for new special education teachers in Georgia. She has presented at several state and local conferences on best practices for co-teaching, high leverage practices, specially designed instruction, and teacher wellness.

Damita is a huge advocate for the self-care of educators and believes that we must use our experiences as opportunities for growth in both our personal and professional lives. Her motto, "Just Breathe" serves as a reminder that we can get through anything, one breath at a time.

G-CASE Elections: Treasurer

G-CASE Members had the opportunity to vote for Vice-President and Treasurer. These new officers were announced at the 2024 G-CASE Spring Legal Conference and will assume G-CASE leadership following the Summer GAEL Conference in July.

Dr. Kristi-Lee Arrington, Director of Student Services for the Houston County Schools, was chosen as the 2024-2026 G-CASE Treasurer. Prior to serving in this role, she was a program specialist for 14 years. Kristi-Lee has been a member of G-CASE for 16 years and currently serves on the advisory board and the legislative committee. Kristi-Lee received her Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education from Rhode Island College, her Master's Degree from Columbus State University and her Doctor of Education degree in Leadership from Valdosta State University. Kristi-Lee believes strongly in the

mission of *G-CASE* to support and sustain the high level of special education leadership across the state of Georgia. She has a passion for serving her local and state community to advocate for individuals with disabilities, their families, and special education professionals.



G-CASE: Active National CASE Presence

G-CASE is embracing our relationship with National CASE more than ever!



The 2024 National CASE Conference will be held in Savannah November 6-8, the week before the G-CASE Conference (November 13-15). G-CASE has been working with CASE representatives all year to ensure successful conferences! We have even enticed the CASE Board of Directors in November with pralines and the CASE Executive Board with peach bites to give them a sample of



Georgia hospitality!



Our own Dr. Zabrina Cannady, recently retired as the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services for the Houston County Schools, has been selected as the Director of Professional Learning for National CASE. Zabrina's responsibilities will be to "advance the field of special education through the delivery of highly effective professional learning opportunities." Dr. Cannady's term as G-CASE President has prepared her well for this position. G-CASE is proud to have a Georgia

special educator helping to lead the nation by providing specialized professional learning!



Long-time *G-CASE* member and newly-elected *G-CASE* Vice-President **Dr. Damita James** is running for Treasurer of National CASE! Damita has served on the National CASE Financial Committee and is the current *G-CASE* Treasurer, so she is well-equipped to handle this important position. All National CASE members received the link to the official ballot on April 1st. Please vote today—Voting ends on April 12th! Thank you for supporting Damita! She will be GREAT!





Georgia Well-Represented at the CEC International Convention and Expo in San Antonio, March 12-16, 2024











G-CASE Treasurer, Dr. Damita James, served on a CASE session panel.







Dear GCASE Members,

I trust this newsletter finds you thriving and prepared for a strong conclusion to the academic year. We're thrilled to share exciting news, upcoming events, and opportunities to engage with your professional organization. Let's dive in!

GaCEC Highlights



Our recent participation at the CEC convention was a resounding success! We enjoyed learning from experts and networking with colleagues. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who made it such a fruitful event.

We thank *G*-CASE for their generous sponsorship of our *GA* FL Social, which saw an impressive turnout of over 50 attendees. Special recognition goes out to Damita James, Zelphine Smith-Dixon, Veronica Crenshaw, and Luann Purcell, among the *GA* attendees and board members who made the event memorable.





Did you know GaCEC is one of the oldest CEC units? Our archives committee chair, Mike Weinroth, has reported the digitizing of our records is almost complete. The records are housed at UNG and will be open for research soon! Email me what year The Georgia Federation of CEC first met for a chance to win a free t-shirt.

Upcoming GaCEC Events

Mark your calendars for these not-to-be-missed events:

- 4/14-4/20/2024: Exceptional Children's Week Championing tomorrow: Embracing inclusive technology for all students is the theme.
- 4/26/24: Deadline for the student contest which includes any form of art. The student winner and their teacher each receive a \$50 gift card! Submit their creative work here.
- 5/31/24: <u>GaCEC Awards Nominations Due</u>- We're currently accepting nominations for various categories, including Employer of the Year, Teacher of the Year, and Lifetime Achievement, among others. Take advantage of the opportunity to recognize outstanding contributions in special education!
- 6/22/24: GaCEC Virtual All-Member Meeting Join us from 9-11am on Zoom for a valuable opportunity to connect with fellow members, meet new leadership, share feedback, and actively participate in shaping the future of our organization. Register for the meeting here. (https://georgiasouthern.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMlce6vqzMrEtK5iDKmn80FeMvs5OjPxHn3)
- 7/29-8/1/24: The Special Education Legislative Summit Stand alongside our Children's Advocacy Network (CAN) coordinator Caitlin Criss and GCASE Legislative Representative Sean Cooper as we advocate for special education in Washington, DC. Your voice matters!

Volunteer Opportunities: We always seek enthusiastic volunteers to help us plan and execute our programs and events. If you're interested in joining our programs committee or contributing in any way, please contact Veronica Crenshaw at gacecvp@gmail.com or fill out CEC's Volunteer Square. Your involvement is crucial in ensuring high-quality professional development and socials for educators across the state.

In conclusion, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to each one of you who has graciously supported me throughout my tenure as president. It has been an enriching journey filled with invaluable guidance from mentors and unwavering support from esteemed colleagues. As my presidency draws to a close, I look forward to personally expressing my appreciation to you all in June as I pass the torch to Veronica. Thank you for your dedication and camaraderie.

Dr. Karin Fisher

GaCEC President

Email: kfisher@georgiasouthern.edu

Keep abreast of the latest updates and developments by following us on the CECommunity, <u>GaCEC Website</u>, <u>Facebook</u>, <u>Linktree</u>, <u>Instagram</u>, and \underline{X} .

Tony Molinaro Scholarship Winners Announced

Two outstanding Georgia special educators were selected from a wide field of candidates to receive the Tony Molinaro Scholarship! — Phrashunda Hudson and Erin Young. Tony Molinaro was an exceptional special education teacher and administrator who was the first recipient of the G-CASE Lillie N. Moncus Award for Special Education Administrator of the Year. He died unexpectedly at a relatively young age. In his honor, a scholarship fund was established to enable special educators, especially special education administrators, to attend the International Council for Exceptional Children Annual Convention. Each year two \$1,000 scholarships are available for special education administrators, with a preference for at least one of the awards being given to a beginning special education administrator in the first 5 years of service.



After attending the G-CASE Spring Legal Conference the week before, scholarship winner **Phrashunda Hudson**, Special Education Director from Jefferson County Schools, chose to remain in her system and attend the International CEC Conference virtually.

"Being selected as a Tony Molinaro Scholarship recipient is an honor that I cannot adequately put into words, and I am beyond grateful for the opportunity to use this scholarship to help benefit The Jefferson County Board of Education's commitment to preparing all students to be college and career ready.

In conjunction with that commitment, my virtual attendance at the CEC Conference provided me with a plethora of opportunities to enhance our current special education practices. By accessing a diverse range of presentations, I gained insights into the latest research findings, evidence-based interventions, and best practices. Additionally, I will had the chance to explore emerging technologies, strategies for inclusive classrooms, and effective ways to support students with diverse needs.

While this year's conference was held virtually and in-person, attending virtually doesn't diminish the value of the experience. In fact, attending the conference virtually offered unique advantages. I had the flexibility to engage with presentations and workshops from the comfort of my district, allowing for a more focused and immersive experience with the team I work alongside.

As I embark on this enriching journey, I extend my heartfelt appreciation not only for the opportunity, but also for my district entrusting me to gather this information on our behalf. I will be sure to bring back invaluable insights to further enrich our special education practices. It is my desire to ensure that our district continues to make a positive difference in the lives of all students, ensuring that every individual receives the support and resources they need to thrive."

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Erin Young, CABS Program Specialist (Communication Academics Behavior Social Skills Program which provides intensive support for students with characteristics of Autism) for the Glynn County Schools, used her Tony Molinaro Scholarship to attend the CEC International Convention in person. She writes that "this experience has provided actionable steps toward redelivery as well as personal growth toward professional development. This event proved to be exceptionally transformative, offering not only invaluable insights from esteemed professionals like Glenna Wright-

Galla, Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, but also the opportunity to connect with a diverse community of passionate individuals from across the globe. The sense of camaraderie was truly profound, leaving me overwhelmed at times and moved to tears. As Dr. Curtis Hill expressed on the first night, "you have to thank your people; I wouldn't be who I am if it wasn't for you." To Sarah Burbach, Michele Harris, Pam McKinnon, Laura Wallen, Shane Young, Beth, and Doc Carroll – I extend my heartfelt appreciation for your contributions to my journey. Thank you!

I am incredibly grateful to have been selected as one of the recipients of the esteemed Tony Molinaro Scholarship for 2024. This scholarship has afforded me the privilege to represent both the State of Georgia and Glynn County Schools at my first international special education conference. Throughout the conference, organized activities such as the "GA/FL Meet and Greet" hosted in part by G-CASE, provided me with the opportunity to network with like-minded professionals. I was also honored to network with others from various countries including Guam, The Bahamas, Saudi Arabia, and Oman.

Choosing from the multitude of engaging sessions proved to be a challenging yet enriching experience as each topic touched upon the specific needs of students, educators, administrators, and school districts. The sessions I had the honor of attending covered a diverse range of themes including; Revised High-leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities, Building Inclusive Practices that Matter in Your District, Making Social-Emotional Learning Attainable and Meaningful for Students with AU, Leading to Equitable Outcomes: Creating Impact and Fostering Success, AI Workforce and Considerations in Special Education, Twice Exceptional Behavior Hacks, Stop the Revolving Door Rethinking the Role of the Paraeducator, Executive Functioning, Functional Skills, and Writing Instruction.

The conference offered actionable insights and strategies to enhance support for students in special Education. Joining your local G-CASE or Council for Exceptional Children is highly recommended, as these organizations offer evidence-based professional development focused on improving student outcomes. They actively advocate for Special Education rights in Washington D.C. and keep educators informed about weekly developments.

Get involved, raise your voice, and become an active member of your Special Education Community.



Key Takeaways from Recent Due Process Decision

Beth Morris, Parker Poe

Going through a due process hearing is inevitably a learning process for the school district. Win or lose, there are valuable lessons learned. Accordingly, it is always instructive to review recent due process hearing decisions in our state to determine what lessons can be learned from those decisions to inform practices in your own district. Set out below are four due process hearing decisions rendered by the Office of State Administrative Hearings this year, along with Key Takeaways from each.

Predetermination, Case No. 23-23998

The parents of a student with autism spectrum disorder filed a due process hearing request under IDEA related to the student's IEP, placement in the least restrictive environment, parent participation, and a free appropriate public education. The parents sought reimbursement for costs associated with private placement and a psychological evaluation.

The student withdrew from the District in 2020 and enrolled in a private school. In 2022, the student's parents contacted the District requesting an IEP meeting. Upon the District's request for confirmation of the student's plan to reenroll in the District, the parents stated that they planned to keep him at the private school at public expense. At the IEP meeting, the District disagreed with the parents' proposal for continued placement at the private school and proposed that the student be enrolled in the District's regional autism unit. The parents alleged that the District's decision to place the student in the regional autism unit was predetermined. Predetermination, which is prohibited under IDEA, occurs when an educational agency preliminarily decides material aspects of a child's education program without parental input. The Administrative Law Judge agreed that predetermination had occurred and found that District personnel repeatedly and emphatically pronounced that the purpose of the meeting was to transition the child to a public-school setting. District personnel also repeatedly insisted that private placement would not be considered in any form and continuously rejected suggestions for alternative placement of offers of compromise based on the student's needs. Despite hearing concerns from the parents and an educator familiar with the students needs, the District's commitment to placing the student in the regional autism unit did not waver even slightly.

Key Takeaway: District personnel must make a concerted effort in considering all of a parents'

Key Takeaways from Recent Due Process Decision, continued

proposals and concerns during an IEP meeting - even if the proposal is private placement and that placement is not the student's LRE. It is equally important to document the discussion and the basis for the Team's decision.

"Child Find" Obligation, Case No. 23-21963

The parents of a 14-year-old student eligible for special education services under the category of Specific Learning Disability filed a due process complaint alleging that the District failed to identify the student as eligible under the additional category of Emotional Behavioral Disorder. The parents further alleged that the student had shown signs of needing an evaluation for an emotional or behavioral disorder pointing towards past acts of misconduct such as being disrespectful to staff, not following directions, insulting teachers, and threatening to kick an administrator.

The student's most recent IEP, however, stated that the student did not have behavior that impeded her learning or learning of others and that a Behavior Intervention Plan was not required. The IEP team agreed to add a "Behaviorally Related" accommodation where the student could request more frequent monitored breaks in all academic/core classes when she was feeling anxious and/or overwhelmed in the classroom setting.

The court disagreed with the parents' allegations for several reasons. First, the student's Eligibility Report stated that the student did not have any significant discipline issues. Second, the student's four behavior incidents in the four months prior to the most recent IEP are not consistent with the student's behavior during the prior two years and the two IEP's prior to the most recent listed no serious behavioral issues or concerns. Based on the totality of these circumstances, the student's inappropriate conduct appears more intermittent, as opposed to the "consistent and persistent" inappropriate conduct of a child with Emotional Behavioral Disorder. Furthermore, there was no evidence that the student's instances of inappropriate conduct interfered with her actual educational performance.

Key Takeaway: Not all acts of inappropriate behavior require a student to be found eligible for services in a category related to their behavior. The District must examine the totality of a student's needs when looking at the eligibility requirements to determine if a student meets those requirements. It is possible for a student to have specific discrete needs, but not be eligible in a particular eligibility category.

Manifestation, Case No. 23-21739

The parents of an 11th grade student eligible for special education services under the eligibility categories of Other Health Impairment, based on a diagnosis of ADHD, and Specific Learning Disability, filed a due process complaint alleging that the District violated IDEA in finding that the student's misconduct was not caused by, or did not have a direct and substantial relationship to, her disability.

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Key Takeaways from Recent Due Process Decision, continued

The underlying behavioral incident involved the student participating in a physical altercation involving several other students. After the altercation, a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) meeting was held. The MDR review team determined that nothing in the student's educational file reflected aggressive behavior. The student's most recent IEP incorporated a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) based on the finding that the student exhibited behavior impeding her academic progress. The BIP identified one target behavior: "student refuses to comply by refusing to complete independent work tasks." During the MDR meeting, the student's mother asserted that the student had been diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder but did not present any documentation reflecting this diagnosis.

The court disagreed with the parents' assertion and found that the materials reviewed at the MDR meeting supported the conclusion that the student made a deliberate choice to engage in the misconduct. The student's IEP's stated goals and corresponding interventions address her academic issues. The student's IEP nor her educational records indicate that the student had demonstrated aggressive behavior at school. To the extent that the student's behavior was an issue, the BIP reflects that she needed to attend to and complete her work.

The parents also alleged that the District's denial of the parents' request to add a member of the IEP team to the MDR team violated the IDEA. The court found the District's denial to be "troubling," but noted that the parents must demonstrate that the violations of IDEA's procedural rules *significantly* impeded the parents' opportunity to participate in the decision making process. The court noted that even if the IEP team member had participated in the MDR meeting, given that the District's participants were unanimous that the student's conduct was not a manifestation of her disability, the District still would have prevailed. Although the student had been disrespectful, the evidence demonstrated that the IEP team member had never observed her exhibit aggressive behavior.

Key Takeaway: Schools should consider a parent's request for a specific IEP team member to participate on the MDR team, but procedural violations must significantly impede the decision making process and result in a denial of FAPE to be a violation under IDEA.

Child Find Obligation, Case No. 23-11749

The parents of a 14-year-old diagnoses with ADHD filed a due process complaint alleging that the District failed to identify the student as a child with disabilities in need of special education services.

When the student was diagnosed with ADHD in first grade, the psychological report indicated that the student did not have a learning disability. When the student's mother discussed the student's ADHD diagnosis with the District, the mother did not specifically request an evaluation under IDEA or Section 504. In 2022, the District recommended that the student remain in the eighth grade due to his performance on the Math and Reading portions of the Georgia Milestones. The parents alleged that the District overlooked clear signs of a disability and negligently failed evaluate for special education services. -continued on next page

Key Takeaways from Recent Due Process Decision, continued

For a district to determine when an ADHD student is disabled and in need of special education services, the district must draw upon information from a variety of sources, including aptitude and achievement tests, parent input, and teacher recommendations. a student is unlikely to need special education if: (1) the student meets academic standards; (2) teachers do not recommend special education for the student; (3) the student does not exhibit unusual or alarming conduct warranting special education; and (4) the student demonstrates the capacity to comprehend course material. The court found that a student not passing two classes, poor performance on two portions of Georgia Milestones, and involvement in three disciplinary incidents did not constitute "clear signs of disability."

Key Takeaway: A District aware of a student's ADHD diagnosis that is not currently eligible for special education services should consider evaluating that student for special education services when the student is not meeting academic standards or is exhibiting unusual or alarming conduct warranting special education.



Beth F. Morris, Partner

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470.240.3464

2024 Theodore Smith Scholarship

This year, a record-breaking *twenty-eight* special educators applied for the Theodore Smith Scholarship! Theodore Smith devoted his life to education as a teacher and administrator with more than fifty years of service. This \$1000 award allows Special Education teachers or Special Education paraprofessionals the opportunity to continue their own pursuit of excellence. To qualify, teachers must be pursuing a higher degree in special education, a bachelor's degree in special education (paraprofessionals), or added certification to meet the standards for highly qualified in special education.; must be currently employed in a special education teaching position or as a special education paraprofessional with one or more years of experience and have a desire to remain in the profession of education of students with special needs; and, if a teacher, must be a current CEC member.

This year's winners are **Tracie Flowers**, Special Education Paraprofessional in Cook County, and **Melissa Barbieri**, Bilingual SLP in Rome City.



Melissa Barbieri



Tracie Flowers



G-CASE Represented at PAGE Day on Capitol Hill

G-CASE Legislative Co-Chair Sean Cooper and Executive Director Sarah Burbach joined members of PAGE, GAEL, and GACTE (Georgia Association of Colleges for Teacher Education) for PAGE Day on Capitol Hill during the legislative session in February. Legislators and other policy-makers dropped by to explain the current educational bills and the Governor's budget, answer questions, and discuss the impact each bill would have on local systems. Following this meeting, groups walked over to the Gold Dome to meet with their own state legislators to further the discussion, and share the list of GAEL priorities. Then they joined State Superintendent Richard Woods for lunch.

G-CASE joined other GAEL affiliates earlier in the year to create a list of Legislative Priorities for the 2023-2024 School year. They include:

- 1. Provide Adequate Funding and Resources for Georgia's Students by protecting the interests of Georgia's children served by Georgia's public education system; mandating accountability and transparency; committing annual state support to increased school, staff, and stakeholder safety; creating a multi-year plan for increased pupil transportation funding to local boards; providing professional development and training funding for Georgia's educators; and restoring recession-era austerity cuts to all RESA organizations.
- 2. Provide Qualified Teachers and Leaders to Serve Georgia's Students by encouraging teachers to remain in Georgia and in the profession; expanding efforts to recruit and retain teachers and leaders; reducing the critical shortage of teachers; and ensuring fair accountability for teachers and school leaders through valid, reliable, and effective measures.

3. Support Local School Board Authority by standing for local governance by community Boards of Education, and ensuring that superintendents serving children continue to be

appointed.

GAEL Policy Analyst Dr. Jimmy Stokes and G-CASE Executive Director Sarah Burbach at PAGE Day on Capitol Hill

Larissa Beecher Honored by G-CASE: GAEL 2024 Jimmy Stokes Service Award

Larissa Beecher is the *G-CASE* recipient of the 2024 *Jimmy Stokes Service Award*, given at the 2024 Winter GAEL Conference in January. Larissa is the GLRS Coordinator/School Improvement Specialist for Middle Georgia RESA. Every *G-CASE* conference participant has met Larissa, who has become our "CEC Ambassador Captain" — working with on-site conference registration, training ambassadors, and responding to every need from our conference partners and exhibitors.



Sarah Burbach, G-CASE Executive Director; Valerie Suesmith, GAEL President; Larissa Beecher; Dr. Jimmy Stokes; Cindy Flesher, GAEL Interim Executive Director



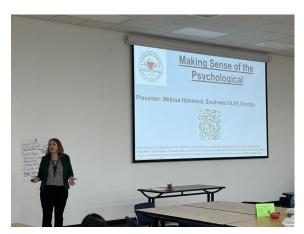
Award Winner Larissa Beecher with G-CASE President Michele Sayles Harris at Winter GAEL

Coordinator Skills Institute (CSI)

The annual G-CASE Coordinator Skills Institute (CSI) was held in February. Sixty coordinators from across Georgia gathered together in Perry to enhance their special education leadership skills. The Institute opened with keynote speaker Dr. Mike Duncan, former Pike County Superintendent and now President and CEO of Battelle for Kids, a national, not-for-profit organization whose mission is to help educational leaders engage their community to re-envision and transform their school systems. Breakout Session topics were chosen based on surveys sent to directors and coordinators and included Making Sense of the Psychological (presented by Melissa Hammock), Manifestation Determination Review (presented by Dr. Carrie Powell and Mary Ward Hendrix), Dyslexia: Rolling out the Process to Meet the New Rule (presented by Jamie Black and Chanda Bourgeois), How to Talk to Parents and Administrators (presented by Dr. Kay Fannin), Special Education Discipline, (presented by Dr. Carrie Powell and Mary Ward Hendrix), FBAs and BIPs (presented by Dr. Carrie Powell and Mary Ward Hendrix), and FTE: Advanced/Maximizing Funding/Allotments (Presented by Dr. Kristi-Lee Arrington and Alissa Green). One hundred percent (100%) of the survey respondents stated that they "would like to attend future workshops such as this one."



CSI Breakout Sessions



Melissa Hammock, GLRS Director Southwest GA RESA



Dr. Kristi-Lee Arrington , Director of Student Services and Alissa Green, Coordinator for Student Services Houston County Schools



Dr. Carrie Powell, Interim Director for North Metro GNETS, and Mary Ward Hendrix, Behavior Specialist Coordinator for North Metro GNETS



Dr. Kay Fanning, Exceptional Children's Coordinator Fayette County Schools



Jamie Black, District MTSS Coordinator and Dr. Chanda Bourgeois, Interim Special Education Director, White County Schools



Dr. Mike Duncan, President and CEO, Battelle for Kids

Special Education Administrator Development Academy (ADA): Another Successful Year!

ADA has afforded me invaluable opportunities to learn from some of our nation's best leaders in inclusive education.

I'm thankful for not only what I've learned this year, but also the relationships I've built with other participants and presenters along the way. -Jessica Beam, Rome City

ADA has been such a privilege and opportunity to connect with highly motivated and like-minded educators all over the state. I have appreciated a peek into all the good things happening in Special Education across the state and have a clearer vision of how to bring back those ideas to help my own county. Thank you! -Alison LaFevers, Stephens County

"Participation in this esteemed academy helped me to revisit and refocus on 'My Why.'
I'm here to speak up for those who may not be able to speak up for themselves, and to ensure they have the same access and opportunities as all others." -Tiffany Canty, Douglas County

G-CASE showed off the thirty-four educators participating in this year's Special Education Administrator Development Academy (ADA) during the G-CASE Spring Conference. Each ADA member presented their final culminating project to the four hundred conference participants during the ADA SHOWCASE. Projects were presented in "Science Fair style" via laptops, tri-fold boards, handouts, oral presentations, charts/graphs, and slide shows. Each conference attendee was given a list of all the ADA projects along with the QR Code that granted them access to each project, and many directors have reported that they have already used much of the information gleaned from these informative, high-quality projects! Following the Showcase, each ADA member received a certificate and unique pin to honor of their accomplishments. The fifth cohort of ADA will begin on June 26th!





G-CASE



Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education

2023-2024 Special Education Administrator Development Academy (ADA)

Culminating Projects

The curriculum of the Special Education Administrator Development Academy (Special Education ADA) is based upon the seven Administrator of Special Education Advanced Leadership Standards set forth by the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). As part of the Special Education ADA, participants completed a culminating project in which they illustrated their understanding of a chosen advanced standard by creating a product that is representative of the components related to the selected standard that can be used to advance the outcome of students with disabilities in their own school systems. (Many of the projects can be replicated across all systems!) Click on the QR Code above to visit the projects.

Participant/System	Topic
Melissa Andrews Washington County	1. Scaffolding Math with Algebra Tiles
Jessica Beam Rome City	2. The RCS Parent Guide
Tiffany Canty Douglas County	 Transition Academy: Supporting SWDs through Graduation & BEYOND
Julie Chancey Gilmer County	4. Transition Opportunities for SWDs
Jenean Cooper-Bolston Wilkinson County	5. The Meeting Place
Kyle Davis Treutlen County	6. GAA 2.0: An Inside Look
Lee Anne DeSilets Houston County	 Paraprofessional Handbook and Handout for Teachers Working with Paraprofessionals
Courtney Eaton Pulaski County	8. Guide to SWD: Behavior, Discipline, & Manifestations
Gwendolyn Edmond Muscogee County	A Hybrid Instructional Service Model - Providing a continuum of support for Mild to Moderate range students
Hope Gore-Williams Coffee County	 Collaborative IEP Meeting Guide: Creating a Positive Relationship Between Parents and School
Brooke Hartley Bibb County	11. Mastering the ABCs: Empowering Educators one FBA at a Time
Jennifer Hartwell Jackson County	 Quick Reference Guide to All Things Special Education: An Administrator's Toolkit
Latoya Henry Atlanta Public Schools	 Specially Designed Instruction: Making the Connections and Promoting Access
Anquanette Herndon Marietta City	14. SDI Internship Program
Marco Hicks-Brown Department of Juvenile Justice	15. Putting the Pieces Together: Using Data to Drive the IEP for a Whole Child Representation within the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice

ADA Cumulative Projects, continued

Sabrina Hill Bibb County	16. Yearly Individualized Education Program Preparation Template
Krisie Howard	17. Specially Designed Instruction Creating a Classroom of Success
Whitfield County	17. Specially Designed instruction creating a Classifold of Success
Kimberly Jarrell	18. Informal Student Transition Questionnaire (ISTQ)
Taylor County	16. Informat Student Transition Questionnaire (151Q)
Sara Kulik	19. Retaining New Special Education Teachers: "Retention Is The New
Hall County	Recruitment"
Alison LaFevers	20. Behavior Bites-Behavior Support Newsletter
Stephens County	20. Deliavior Discs-Deliavior Support Newslesser
Brandi Mauney	21. Planning Your Future
Houston County	21. I mining Total Total
Janet McClendon	22. Specifically Designed Instruction
Greene County	22. Specifically 2-congaco 220 and and
Stacev Morgan	23. True Colors
Thomasville City	25. 21.0 561113
Courtney Murphy	24. Community-Based Instruction
Quitman County	
Angella Phillips	25. Special Education Procedure Checklists
Crawford County	
Macie Rooke-Smith	26. Setting up Warriors for Successful Progress Monitoring
White County	
Christie Simpson	27. GNETS Resources Website
Colquitt County	
Kayla Smith	28. A Parent's Resource to Eligibility
Walton County	
Joshua Stanley	29. IEP Goal Tracker
Murray County	parts Transfer Transf
Stephanie Voyles	 Strategies to Engage and Motivate Students with Disabilities
Muscogee County	
Kelly Wade	31. Processing the Process: SpEd 101
Barrow County	THE STATE OF THE S
Tanya Woods	32. Assistive Technology and Accommodation Checklist
Polk County	
Carolyn Wright	33. A New Teacher's Guide to Special Education
Dawson County	
Erin Young	34. Creating a Supportive Self-Contained Autism Classroom
Glynn County	





Putnam County Charter School System is Unlocking Focus with Mindfulness and Movement (M & M) Room!

The Mindfulness and Movement (M & M) Room at Putnam County Primary School (PCPS) is an invaluable addition to the school's resources. A grant awarded from the state allowed the Special Programs Department to create a special room designed to assist students with sensory needs. Mrs. Cathy Dixon, Occupational Therapist, led the design and equipment selection process. This unique room serves as a dedicated space for students with sensory needs to engage in sensory input and output activities. By providing a safe and supportive environment for students to explore various sensory experiences, the room aims to help students regulate their emotions, improve focus, and enhance their overall well-being.

Rooms like the M & M Room play a crucial role in supporting students' social and emotional development. For students with sensory needs, having a designated space where they can engage in activities that help them self-regulate can make a significant difference in their ability to participate fully in the classroom environment. These rooms offer a variety of tools and equipment tailored to individual needs, allowing students to explore different sensory inputs and find strategies that work best for them. Ultimately, the goal is to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment where all students can thrive. The M & M Room serves as a testament to PCCSS' dedication to meeting the diverse needs of our students and ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn and grow in a supportive environment.







To learn more about PCCSS' M&M Room, please scan the QR Code to watch the Putnam Pieces videocast.

Support our

G-CASE Spring Conference Sponsors All Year!





















G-CASE offered our vendors the opportunity to partner and help sponsor the 2024 G-CASE Spring Legal Conference. Sponsors report back that they cherish this opportunity to meet in dividually or in small groups with our members during conference breaks or at small dinners during the conference to answer questions, demonstrate new products, and receive feedback from our participants. Sponsor contributions help offset some of the costs to host the conference at The Classic Center.



G-GACE gives special thanks to:

- Beable for sponsoring the Past-Presidents' Dinner
- Goalbook for sponsoring the Executive Board Dinner
- Allied Instructional Services for hosting the Thursday Evening Social

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