Executive Summary

Georgia School for the Deaf
State Schools of Georgia

Leslie Jackson, Principal
232 Perry Farm Road, SW
Cave Spring, GA 30124
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the School</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School's Purpose</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Information</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Every school has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a school stays faithful to its vision. Many factors contribute to the overall narrative such as an identification of stakeholders, a description of stakeholder engagement, the trends and issues affecting the school, and the kinds of programs and services that a school implements to support student learning.

The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to provide a school with an opportunity to describe in narrative form the strengths and challenges it encounters. By doing so, the public and members of the school community will have a more complete picture of how the school perceives itself and the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement. This summary is structured for the school to reflect on how it provides teaching and learning on a day to day basis.
Description of the School

Describe the school's size, community/communities, location, and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students, staff, and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the community/communities the school serves?

The Georgia School for the Deaf (GSD) is a state-operated residential school established for students who are deaf and hard of hearing according to State-defined eligibility requirements. The State Superintendent of Schools serves as the local superintendent, and the State Board of Education serves as the local board of education. GSD is funded through an appropriation from the Georgia General Assembly and does not receive FTE funds.

All students attending GSD are referred from their local school system (LSS). Placement at GSD is determined by the student's IEP team for students whose educational needs are best met in this language-rich environment utilizing direct instruction in ASL. GSD specializes in providing appropriate educational programs for students who are deaf and hard of hearing, with full implementation of the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) in a fully-accessible environment. The rigor of the standards is not compromised as we build background knowledge, scaffold instruction, and provide necessary visual support to provide this access. Students with secondary disabilities are also provided with access to these standards at appropriate levels as measured by the Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA). GSD has a varied student body of students ages 3 through 21 coming from across the state of Georgia. GSD currently serves 115 students representing 108 families (approximately 35 Elementary, 30 Middle School and 50 High School) from 58 different local school systems from the Florida line to the north Georgia mountains, and from the Alabama line to the coastal areas. Student transportation to and from school is a related service provided by the local school systems north of Macon. GSD provides charter bus service to and from Macon to provide access for students in south Georgia. Residential students are typically transported on Sundays and Fridays. Five local systems provide daily transportation.

Deaf students that are placed at GSD typically arrive with severe language and academic deficits. Approximately 97% of the students come from non-signing families, and thus have had no language until arriving in their school setting. With a dearth of qualified Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) teachers and ASL interpreters throughout most of the State, their public schools often cannot provide appropriate services, and their language and academic gaps grow even larger. The average age of enrollment at GSD has decreased from about 15 years old to about 12 years old over the last 3 years, with a sharp increase at the Primary level. Until that time, most new students enrolled 6-10 years behind in language and 3-5 years behind in mathematics. With the success of our academic program over the last 3 years, more and more local school systems are referring students at an earlier age, and more and more parents are advocating for their young students to attend GSD. As we acquire students earlier, prepare them more appropriately, monitor their progress more thoroughly, and use the data to drive our instruction, trend lines for average standard scores on every standardized test are rising. Taking standardized tests in a second language that they have never heard will never be easy for our students, but our standards-based, bilingual classrooms are providing them with the tools to do their very best.

GSD is comprised of eleven buildings and is located on approximately 450 acres in rural Cave Spring, Georgia. GSD was founded in 1846, and is the 10th oldest residential deaf school in the United States. The Cave Spring community has about 1000 residents, and GSD serves as the largest employer, although only a handful of Cave Spring residents work at GSD. The community is largely supportive of the school, and many local businesses participate in programs to provide work experiences for our special needs students. Many Cave Spring residents have some sign language skill, and welcome our students and staff as customers to local businesses.
Since the last SACS review, there have been organizational changes that have impacted the school. The former School Director position has been reallocated to support a director for the three State Schools at the Georgia Department of Education. The Principal has thus been charged with the dual role of instructional leader and School Director. GSD has two academic coaches, 26 classroom teachers, and 5 instructional paraprofessionals. 42% of the classroom teachers are deaf themselves, thus provided a native language model for the students, as well as a being a role model as a successful Deaf adult. This percentage of Deaf staff is very high compared to other Deaf school around the country, which average 15-20% Deaf instructors.

Support staff include one federally funded employee - a parent involvement coordinator, one special education coordinator, one student support secretary, one business operations specialist, one accounting clerk, one school secretary, one personnel representative, one speech and language pathologist aide, one school social worker, one school psychologist, one media specialist, one instructional technology specialist, one micro-systems support specialist, ten maintenance employees, one janitor, and four cafeteria employees. Part-time staff include two retired teachers, one audiologist, one occupational therapist, one speech language pathologist, and one clerk. A second- and third-shift residential staff is employed to supervise students beyond the academic day.

GSD was a recipient of the United States Department of Education's 3-year School Improvement Grant (SIG) for lowest performing schools beginning in the 2010-11 school year. GSD received more than 2 million dollars over these years, and was held to rigorous standards of accountability for gains in academic achievement. A School Improvement Specialist from the State was placed at the school for support, and every area of the grant was closely monitored for fidelity. The implementation of the best practices required by the grant have radically changed the quality of education at GSD, and the academic success of our students.

Teacher leaders are a vital part of building sustainability. We have teacher representatives from each area (Elementary, Middle School, High School and Special Needs) on the school's Leadership Team, and veteran teachers serve as teacher mentors to new teachers. 100% of teachers are highly qualified using the consultative model (Title II) with each teacher who needs additional certification paired with a highly-qualified mentor. These pairs meet bi-monthly to discuss progress toward certification attainment, instructional planning, instructional strategies, assessment, differentiation, professionalism, and other related areas. Since the Georgia School for the Deaf is a special education facility, all teachers are required to have dual certification (special education field and content area/s) as well as Advanced proficiency in American Sign Language, making the hiring of experienced and highly qualified teachers challenging at best, and impossible at times. In order to ensure that all students receive the most effective instructional services possible, given the variability of experience and certification preparation level, every teacher is provided with the following: support from academic coaches; participation in the teacher mentor program; ongoing, job embedded professional learning; weekly lesson plan review and feedback; opportunities for peer observation and modeling of instructional practices; shared planning times; and participation in data teams.
School's Purpose

Provide the school's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the school embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.

The GSD mission statement is as follows:

All GSD students will graduate with a positive Deaf identity as bilinguals in American Sign Language and English, and will be prepared to make successful life choices.

The vision statement is as follows:

The Georgia School for the Deaf offers high quality educational and extracurricular activities that prepare its graduates for further academic, social, and career success. This is achieved in a fully-accessible American Sign Language (ASL)/English bilingual environment, which recognizes ASL users as a distinct cultural and linguistic group. This fosters a positive self-acceptance and self-esteem, affording each student the ability to effectively navigate the world they encounter beyond their K-12 experience. As part of this lifelong learning philosophy, all staff and students consistently strive to improve their use of both ASL and written English.

There are 3 distinct parts to our mission statement (plus a foundational, non-negotiable premise on which these stand).

Our mission statement begins with this premise: all GSD students will graduate... by "all", we mean: ALL, and by "graduate", we mean: receive a regular diploma, having earned the appropriate credits at the appropriate level of rigor, and having passed the appropriate tests administered with fidelity OR a regular diploma earned by a student with a secondary disability who has earned appropriate credits through inclusion in academic classes and who has met the requirements of the Georgia Alternate Assessment GAA). We are amazingly proud of our accomplishments in this area! We have had 9 students graduate with regular diploma in 2 of the last 3 years. This is a remarkable statistic compared with our counterparts both within this State and around the country. It is born of a school culture of high expectations and resiliency. GSD students and teachers refuse to accept defeat, and often take each Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT) 10-15 times or more. For example, our 2013 graduating class had taken the ELA GHSGT in excess of a cumulative 230 times!

How do we do it? Our teachers employ research-based instructional techniques that give our students full access to the CCGPS. The two foundational ones are standards-based instruction, and bilingual instruction. Our teachers first plan the work: they unpack the CCGPS, and frame the units using GADOE's curriculum maps and our school-wide assessment schedule. Then they set appropriate weekly/daily learning goals, diligently align the Opening, Work session and Closing to that learning target, use data to plan differentiation for individual students, build in multiple assessment opportunities (both formative and summative), and gather resources (including integrated use of classroom technology).

Bilingual instructional strategies and activities must be embedded within each lesson, so that students have access to standard written English through American Sign Language (ASL). This includes planning visual support for new vocabulary, word walls with ASL signs and pictures, embedded video in SMART Board lessons, additional time to read text before signing, highlighting/underlining key words, using bridging concepts in decoding English, allowing time for students to take notes (as they cannot do that and listen at the same time), directing attention to the speaker in a class discussion, and a myriad of other methods that allow students to develop both languages to appropriately access the standards. Once they plan the work, the teachers are ready to work the plan! Their instruction is hands-on, technology rich.
extremely visual, deep and accurate. They often pause to build the background knowledge that is assumed for hearing students (most of our students have no access to incidental learning in their homes, and have missed huge chunks of curriculum while under-served in public schools), and adjust their pace to scaffold the instruction appropriately for access. The achievement gaps that our students bring must be filled in and shored up so that they can earn their regular diploma and have an equal opportunity for post-secondary success.

What if a student STILL does not pass the required GHSGT, yet the credit requirements have been met? We place that student in a Focus group with a highly-qualified teacher specifically to prepare for that GHSGT. The class is focused on the specific standards tested for that subject. We employ standards-based instruction as well as computer-based (USA Test Prep, Study Island, and OAS) in these courses. Students are expected to fully participate in class AND practice outside of class. Additional tutoring is often offered by kind-hearted teachers after school hours as well.

Once the foundation of graduation has been laid, we look to the work of the student's Deaf identity. Deafness is NOT a disability at GSD, it is a culture, and thus has it's own language and mores that must be modeled, explicitly taught and internalized. ASL instruction is embedded in every moment of the school experience, from Pre-K through 12th grade, from breakfast to bedtime in the dorm. Research clearly shows that fluency and accuracy in a first language is key to a person's success in a second language. ASL is a full, rich language with components that must be modeled and taught for our students to fully access Deaf culture. These are implicitly taught, especially by our Deaf adults, at all times, and explicitly taught through ASL classes. Deaf culture also involves social norms that are different from the hearing culture, as well as important history that is vital to their identity. The development of their positive Deaf identity is just as important as the walk across the Commencement stage. This, too, is both implicitly and explicitly taught through the same channels.

Our students are part of an important and impressive Deaf culture, but they must also live and thrive in a hearing world. So the second part of our mission statement is that they must graduate as bilinguals in ASL and English, equally proficient in their native and borrowed “tongues”. This means that everything read or written on campus must be standard English, and everything signed must be standard ASL. They must be able to fully communicate in both worlds, and their languages must not be mixed or "broken". This challenge faces us every day, as our students try to become proficient in a language that they have never heard. We employ the research-based bilingual strategies consistently and continually, and provide them an environment that is rich in both languages. It is the expectation at GSD that every student and staff member sign at all times, voice off, unless they are in speech therapy of a specified speaking zone.

Thirdly, our students must be prepared to make successful life choices- work, technical college, college, etc. Our academic programs prepare them well for further academics, but we must also prepare them for transition from this campus to their next path. GSD uses the Teachers As Advisors (TAA) model to ensure that every GSD student has at least one adult who knows him/her well, and who is helping them to explore that transition. We use Career Awareness curriculum in Elementary school , and Georgia 411 for middle and high school students. We have recently purchased the Conover program, which will further educate and document student exploration and education for transition. We also house a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor on campus one day per week to assess, instruct and guide our older students as they plan to transition from GSD. More basic skills, such as cooking, gardening, budgeting, washing clothes, etc. are taught through our Career Technical Agriculture Education (CTAE) programs, as well as through experiences and classes taught in the residential setting. VR also provides Driver training for our students, as most of their parents elect not to provide this instruction.

With the three-pronged mission completed, the walk across the commencement stage into the real world begins for our students. Most of them will come back for Homecoming, to hang out at football and basketball games, to see old friends and old teachers... Some of them will come back to work- to be the role models for our students- to teach, to guide, to coach, to supervise, to love...

This is GSD.
Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

Describe the school's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the school is striving to achieve in the next three years.

Student achievement for GSD students has improved remarkably over the last three years. This has come as a result of purposeful school improvement efforts, and a shift in school culture and expectations for both students and instructional staff. As a result, trend lines for average standard scores on all areas of State summative assessments, both CRCTs and EOCTs are rising.

As described in the School's Purpose section of this report, GSD has completed a deliberate and comprehensive process including feedback from all stakeholder groups to revise the schools mission and vision statements. This collaborative work has cemented a culture based on these shared values and beliefs that provides all students with an excellent education. Vertical teams discuss and provide feedback on a section of the school improvement plan weekly. GSD's Leadership Team has taken an important role in this process as well - reviewing feedback from these teachers and other stakeholders, and making appropriate adjustments to the school improvement plan (SIP). GSD's leadership and staff foster a culture that supports our mission and vision - GSD staff, students, families, and other stakeholders know that student learning and preparation for the future is the priority here, and the expectation is that students will graduate with a regular diploma, with a positive Deaf identity as bilinguals in ASL and English, and prepared for a successful future.

With the full implementation of the Teacher and Leader Keys Effectiveness System (TKES/LKES) in the 2012-13 school year, a comprehensive evaluation system, focused on best practices for teachers and leaders has resulted in improved professional practice leading to the noted student success. Instructional staff have directed focus on the ten standards in TKES: Professional Knowledge, Instructional Planning, Instructional Strategies, Differentiated Instruction, Assessment Strategies, Assessment Uses, Positive Learning Environment, Academically Challenging Environment, Professionalism and Communication. This has come through professional learning on the instrument in the fall of 2012 and 2013, targeted professional learning based on 2012-13 results, individual teacher feedback given during required Walk-through & Formative Assessments and teacher conferences, and discussion during collaborative meetings.

Full implementation of the rigorous CCGPS as GSD's curriculum is now in its third year. This implementation is monitored through weekly lesson plan checks and feedback, as well as through the TKES process and professional learning (targeted for teachers who have "Needs Development" in Instructional Planning). GSD's expectation for classroom instruction is that standards-based instruction incorporating bilingual strategies is evident bell-to-bell in every class, every day. This is monitored through TKES evaluations, and informal classroom visits as well as professional learning (targeted for teachers who have "Needs Development" in Instructional Strategies). Feedback is given to every teacher to support improvement of instructional strategies, and the Leadership Team monitors the data from these observations and discusses it with their corresponding collaborative teams (vertical and grade-level). New teachers and those who need additional certifications are paired with a veteran teacher to improve and monitor implementation of these core instructional strategies.

Concentrated effort and success in the area of family engagement is an important area of improvement. With the implementation of the SIG, a position was created to hire a Parent Involvement Coordinator (PIC). The increase in family engagement has been dramatic, and we have sustained this vital position through Title I and State funding. The PIC has ensured that GSD families are well-informed of their student's learning progress and have multiple opportunities to be meaningfully engaged with his/her education. This area of improvement is also enhanced and monitored through the matching portion of the TKES, and professional learning provided by the PIC.

A Teachers as Advisors (TAA) program was developed and implemented in the 2011-12 school year whereby every student is paired with a...
teacher for at least one school year (multiple years for Middle and High School students). They meet with their TAA groups weekly to support the students' educational experience. The TAA teacher is also the student's IEP case manager, and therefore is able to know each assigned student more deeply and advocates for them in that formal setting as well. This program was developed and is monitored by the Graduation Coach for content and fidelity. The program has been enhanced recently with the addition of software specific to transition, and will be expanded to include student-led IEPs in the 2014-15.

The SIG allowed GSD to purchase state-of-the-art technology and resources to support the visual and differentiated learning needs of our students. Each classroom is equipped with a 72" Multi-touch SMART Board, a classroom set of laptops, a classroom set of iPads, a SMART Response system, a SMART Cube, a SMART slate and a video camera. 21st Century Technology pieces for CCGPS support have been added to the media center, the auditorium, both dormitories, and the CTAE/Elective classroom building. The technology infrastructure has been upgraded to support this additional media. Supplemental software and printed resources to support the acquisition of the CCGPS are also plentiful. Instructional time is fiercely protected, and the school schedule was developed to add an hour and a half of instructional time to the school day for targeted support in identified areas of need (see our FLP/RTI data). Student services including speech/language, physical and occupational therapy, medical care, counseling, and graduation/transition support are available to all students.

Data-driven instruction, fueled by appropriate data collection, analysis and use has been a notable area of improvement at GSD. The school has established and maintained a clearly-defined and comprehensive student assessment system since the 2009-10 school year. Each year, the system has been refined, more closely monitored for fidelity, and more obviously linked to student achievement. Diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment both State and locally developed are used to collect data on student progress. Teachers and leaders are charged with the task of timely analysis of this data to be used to drive instruction. Teachers meet individually with the Principal at the beginning of each school year to discuss required and additional data to be collected over the course of the school year, then quarterly with the Principal and school psychologist/testing coordinator to discuss assessment results and instructional implications.
Additional Information

Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted in the previous sections.

Initial and follow-up job-embedded professional learning (PL) in the areas of: bilingual education, Fairview Learning, Thinking Maps, SMART technology, standards-based instruction, CCGPS, TKES. Writing Aviator, Writer's Workshop, GoIEP, Math Navigator, CCRPI, Longitudinal Data System (LDS) has been provided (in part through SIG funding) to integrate the various programs and resources needed for appropriate standards-based instruction and additional support for our students to promote student achievement. Much of this PL has been in the form of initial large or small group instruction followed by consultant modeling in the classroom, observation by the consultant and one-on-one or small group feedback with the consultant. In this way, the practices and processes have been embedded into the classroom culture, and sustainability of the practice has been nurtured. Fidelity checks have been completed by Instructional coaches, the Leadership Team, and the Principal as well. Standards-based instruction (with bilingual strategies) is a consistent topic in collaborative planning time for both vertical and grade-level teams.