Executive Summary

Georgia Cyber Academy

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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.
Georgia Cyber Academy (GCA) is unique in many ways. We currently serve students in grades Kindergarten through twelfth grade. As of the Fall 2016 term, our school's enrollment is approximately 14,000 students. GCA serves students from 159 counties across Georgia and is the largest virtual program of its kind in the state. Our current student population consists of 40% minority students, 9% advanced learners/ gifted, and 0.6% English Language Learners. GCA is a Title One school with 69% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. GCA also serves a large number of special education students with approximately 12% of our student population receiving special education services. GCA employs a diverse faculty and staff from across the state.

GCA is a true equalizer, providing students in Georgia with equal opportunities and access to a high quality public education. Many of our students come to us with significant achievement gaps and have experienced little to no success previously in regard to their schooling experiences. We believe our success is due in large part to our unique ability to bring outstanding curriculum and instruction in an individualized manner within an environment which allows flexible scheduling to students and families from all corners of the state with varying learning needs and academic goals. GCA is on a journey to excellence.
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 mission of the Georgia Cyber Academy (GCA) is to provide and support an interactive virtual learning environment to support individualized and differentiated student-centered educational experiences serving students from kindergarten through the 12th grade. Student success is measured by valid and reliable assessment data, parent and student satisfaction, and continued institutional growth within the academic community.

Our current mission statement was developed in the Spring of 2016. It was a collaborative effort with input from various internal and external stakeholders. This is the third iteration of the mission statement. We systematically re-visit the school vision and mission statements, making sure they are aligned with our present levels of performance and school goals. While we see validity in our original path, our discussions and reflections had led us to agree that revisions are often necessary to clarify our future purpose in raising student achievement and standards for all students in the school.

This reflective approach has also led us to initiate a focus on strengthening community relationships and improving understanding and commitment to the vision and mission statements among all stakeholders. The GCA vision and mission are cited as guides for the creation of policies and practices throughout our organization. The vision and mission are the foundation of all instructional practices and drive professional learning initiatives. The vision and mission statements have also been elevated to the forefront of Board of Directors meetings, as well as meetings with our educational management company, as they articulate our belief that the focus of student achievement is the priority over any other factor in the implementation of best practices school wide.
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.

Georgia Cyber Academy (GCA) is deeply committed to the success and welfare of our students, families and their communities. The vision at GCA envisions a learning environment where students are empowered—through the collaborative partnership of its students, parents, learning coaches, teachers, and administrators—to successfully reach their full academic potential and emerge career or college ready, and prepared to assume roles as positive contributors to society.

The first facet of the school vision is our dedication to helping students reach their full academic potential. We take great pride in the gains that our students are making academically. GCA outlines school goals annually, focused on making gains and meeting/exceeding state averages. We are pleased with the progress that we are seeing in the first two years of our new state assessments, the Georgia Milestones. Specifically, we have seen gains in grades K-8, in English/Language Arts and Science. In grades 9-12, we have seen solid gains across the board.

In addition to the state assessments, our students are assessed in a myriad of ways including: Online Middle School (OMS) and Online High School (OHS) are used for performance and progress monitoring of day to day mastery of the curriculum, USA Test Prep is used for both standards practice and formative assessments, and teacher created Interim Assessments (IAs) are used for longitudinal growth and benchmark data. K-5 provides assessment data results through a web-based grading system to communicate to students and parents. Grades 6-12 utilize an embedded grade book within the OMS and OHS, which provides daily access to assignment and assessment results to students and parents.

We have a strong system in place for collecting and analyzing data. We have three data coaches who collect and provide teachers with their student performance data on a regular basis. Our teachers are trained in analyzing data in order to determine instructional groups and to identify individual enrichment and/or supports needed. Teachers also use student performance data to develop each student's Individual Learning Plan and to collaborate with their colleagues within professional learning communities (PLCs). Ongoing professional development ensures that all faculty/staff members have the necessary skills to not only analyze data within their respective schools but with comparable groups in the state, as well as how to share this information with students and parents. With a highly qualified team in place to assist in the analysis of student performance data, we are also able to provide appropriate support to students with special needs within the RtI process, which includes all tiers of instruction and interventions. Tier 4 serves students in gifted, special education, ELL and students with 504 plans.

Without a doubt, Georgia Cyber Academy’s (GCA’s) greatest challenge is the lack of equitable funding for our students. GCA serves these students with the lowest per-pupil funding of any school district in Georgia, receiving approximately 50% of the state average. Currently, our per-pupil funding is approximately $4800 compared to average funding levels in the state of $8400.

In 2011, the state of Georgia approved the Georgia Charter School Commission as a governing body with power to approve statewide charter schools. GCA stakeholders hoped to significantly close the resource gap under the Charter Commission, but this has not happened. Equitable funding levels would give our students the level of support they need to be successful and place them on a level playing field with other students in the state of Georgia, as well as virtual students in other states, as the national per-pupil funding for virtual schools is $6400. The trade-offs required due to GCA’s low level of funding include higher class sizes and fewer resources to support transition, as many students come to GCA academically far behind.
Additional funds for GCA students remain elusive, however students and families are still committed to remaining with our school. The demand for virtual school options in Georgia is overwhelming. Students, parents and teachers are committed to this school choice option for the children and families of Georgia. K12 Inc. has continued its financial commitment to help GCA maintain a balanced budget and offset any financial deficits incurred to provide the high-quality academic experience for all GCA students.

While we continue to fight on behalf of fair funding formulas for all students, GCA stakeholders continue their commitment to hard work and academic success for all students. GCA has been successful with doing more with less. GCA spends 89% of funding directly on instruction, compared to 67% in other Georgia schools. The academic and operational results that we have achieved with our current level of funding has been striking, but as a school community we do not want to settle for our students having to compromise on their academic and extracurricular resources to choose a school that best meets their needs. We believe there is tremendous untapped potential for our students, who are deserving of the resources necessary to reach their goals and support their dreams. The GCA community will not compromise on our goals and aspirations due to the low level of funding that we currently receive and will not settle until our students have access to the resources that they deserve.
Additional Information

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

Georgia Cyber Academy (GCA) is proud to provide a quality school choice option for students and families in Georgia. GCA is leading the way for students across the state to have access to outstanding curriculum, individualized instruction and support, and flexible scheduling to allow them to reach their full potential. Online learning is certainly the next wave in 21st century educational paradigms. The world is dependent on technology and this generation of students is unfamiliar with a world without cell phones, personal computers and digital technologies. A growing number of researchers have published the results of studies that provide substantive evidence that technology can play a positive role in academic achievement. Several organizations like Edutopia, the Center for Applied Research in Educational Technology (CARET) and the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) are documenting research studies that link technology to increases in academic achievement. GCA is proud to provide the link between technology and education to all of our students, especially our low income students who may have previously been victims of the digital divide. Secondly, our platform for delivering curriculum and instruction shrinks the world and places it at the fingertips of our students. Our students and their learning are no longer bound by time or space allowing them to grow and discover at their own pace.

We are also proud of the continued growth we have experienced since we opened. A times it has been a difficult stretch, with our limited resources, but GCA stakeholders work tirelessly on behalf of the needs of our students to make this option available to them and their families. The core of our school vision and mission is our focus on the students as individuals. Witnessing student gains with our limited funding is highly impressive. GCA faculty and staff are determined to meet each child's educational needs and to provide experiences in the classroom that will help the students learn in a way that is meaningful and motivating. The GCA model is committed to bringing individualized learning to all students and to removing barriers that keep students from reaching their true potential, while preparing students to be college and career ready. It is not uncommon to hear our stakeholders use the phrase, "It's a great day at GCA"! We feel that this sentiment encapsulates our story perfectly.