



*Q&A with the
Georgia Department of Education Division
for Special Education and Supports*

Meet Deborah Gay

What is your role in the Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports at the Georgia Department of Education?

I am currently serving as Director of the Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports. My function is to keep the work of the Division focused and moving in the right direction. There are eight units led by program managers that provide the organizational structure for the work of our Division. Those units provide a framework to support activities in the areas of Professional Learning, School Improvement, and Curriculum, Georgia Project for Assistive Technology, Georgia Instructional Materials Center, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Compliance, Budget Management, Data Analysis and Dispute Resolution processes.

In the upcoming months, we will spotlight the work of each unit for this website. Our Division focuses on meeting the strategic plan of the Georgia Department of Education, as well as the State Performance Plan developed to help keep us working toward improving services for students with disabilities.

Some of the main targets our activities focus on include: improving graduation rate, decreasing drop out rate, moving more SWD (students with disabilities) into less restrictive environments and improving performance on core academic subject areas. Our decisions regarding the use of our resources are data driven from a state level and at the individual school district level. Most importantly, our work must be collaborative and seamless as the Department of Education. Local school districts and parents work together to put the best possible educational programs in place for students.

What are some important things parents can do to help their child who receives special education services transition back into the routine of the school day?

Speaking from my experience as a special education teacher, local school district special education director and now from the state perspective, one of the most critical components to the success of the child in school is communication between the classroom teacher, the parent and the student.

Research has shown time and again, the value of relationships in creating an atmosphere for problem solving, sharing information and planning as a team. Everyone has a role in making this happen.



There are several important communication tools that are useful in this process.

These include being a good listener, asking clarifying questions when planning, communicating around successes, as well as concerns and most importantly providing "follow through" when agreement is reached on an action. Mutual respect is built when these components of communication are in place. With good communication in place, the teacher and the parent can work together to develop activities to support the student moving to a new environment.