

November 4, 2016

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Georgia State Board of Education
Richard Woods, State Superintendent
205 Jesse Hill Drive, SE
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Re: GAE Supports Equal Education Opportunities For Children With
Disabilities In An Integrated Setting

Dear State Board of Education & Superintendent Woods:

I am writing this letter on behalf of 30,000 GAE members working to improve the educational experiences for Georgia's public school children. GAE is committed to excellence in education for all children, including children with disabilities that receive instruction, support and love from our special education educators. Any segregation or exclusion of those students from the complete educational experience is illegal and contrary to our values as an organization. Georgia's Network for Educational Therapeutic Supports or GNETS fails to offer an equal educational opportunity to those students and it should end.

GNETS isolates students with behavioral challenges into centers, reducing opportunities for interaction with typically developing students. Students with behavioral related disabilities thrive on peer modeling. Many students with social and communication delays require interactions with non-disabled students to learn. Education is not just reading and math: students learn to value diversity, develop compassion and increase awareness and understanding by going to a public school with students with differences. Segregation of students with disabilities prevents this part of character education.

Behavioral services are needed for every classroom, not just those segregated classrooms for children with behavioral challenges. Funding

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specifically designated for the GNETS should be combined with other available funds to develop an integrated system of behavioral health services and supports in our local schools. The behavioral specialist that trains a teacher how to manage a difficult behavioral situation impacts not just one student – but an entire classroom of students. Behavioral experts in local schools can focus on one child at a time, but they enhance the entire school climate in the process. These benefits should be provided to local schools and not left isolated in separate programs. Finally, the statewide systemic funneling of all behavioral health support and services to classrooms outside of our neighborhood schools has prevented the natural and needed development of crucial behavioral health services in local school.

We thank you for the opportunity to give input into the proposed rule. To be clear, segregation is illegal and wrong. GAE objects to any such program and reaffirms the value established by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954 – separate is inherently unequal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael McGonigle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Michael McGonigle
GAE General Counsel

cc: Dr. Sid Chapman, President
Chris Baumann, Executive Director