



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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GWINNETT SCHOOLS LAWSUIT IS ABOUT STIFLING CHOICE

District willing to sacrifice 300 young students, not for lack of funding, but to maintain dominance

ATLANTA – The **Georgia Charter Schools Association** takes great exception with the apparent decision by the **Gwinnett County Public Schools** to sue, among others, a high-achieving, all-girls charter middle school solely for the purpose of maintaining control of the educational choice options of parents and students in the county.

Gwinnett school officials have falsely asserted that the state is reallocating local funds to **Ivy Preparatory Academy**, an ethnically and racially diverse, all-girls charter middle school in Norcross, and that this threatens the overall quality of public education in the county. Both are incorrect.

Lawsuit about controlling quality educational options

“We are sorry to hear that a school district with an annual budget of over \$2 billion dollars would file a suit against the State to prevent it from fulfilling its financial responsibility to providing a quality education for a diverse group of 300 young girls, many of whom are eligible for free and reduced price lunch,” said **Georgia Charter Schools Association Chief Executive Officer Tony Roberts, Ph.D.** “Their parents have made the choice that these girls are better served in a charter school.”

Through the **Georgia Charter Schools Commission**, an independent charter authorizing body created by the passing and signing of **HB881** in 2008, the state is now funding Commission-approved charter schools at a level equivalent to that of traditional public schools. Ivy Prep is one of just two charter schools (**Charter Conservatory for Liberal Arts and Technology** in Statesboro) approved by the Commission.

The funds being allocated to the schools – **\$850,000 for Ivy Prep** – are state funds. This is just **one-one thousandth (.0013) of the more than \$650 million Gwinnett receives** from the state for the education of its students.

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“That (\$850,000) payment represents a speck in the district's budget.” Roberts said. “It makes us question whether their priority is the education of all children in their district or maintaining their control regardless of their children's needs and the preferences of their parents.”

State Rep. Jan Jones (R-Milton), the House Majority Whip who sponsored HB881, agrees.

“The Gwinnett County School Board elected to sue the state over legislation that gave a few students the chance to attend a small public school of their choice,” Rep. Jones said. “Now it is time for Gwinnett citizens to elect a new board, one that actually puts students first and egos second.

“The Gwinnett Board earlier denied approval and local funding to the school. When Ivy Prep opened its doors anyway with half funding, its students scored among the highest achievement marks in Georgia,” Rep. Jones said.

Ivy Prep establishing track record of student success

Indeed, Ivy Prep enhances rather than diminishes the quality of public education in Gwinnett County. **Last school year, more than 90 percent of the students at Ivy Prep met or exceeded state standards in English/language arts, math and reading**, establishing it in Year One as one of the highest performing middle schools in the state.

“I am a law abiding, tax-paying citizen in Gwinnett County, and it is very disturbing to me that Gwinnett County Public Schools would sue one of its public schools over tax dollars for public education,” said **Veda Bills**, mother of a seventh grader at Ivy Prep. She and several other parents volunteer a few hours a week in the school's office.

“We know that our school's budget is stretched thin, and so we help out as much as we can,” Bills said. “It's a sacrifice we gladly make because Ivy Prep is an up-and-coming great public school. We chose to have our children here and I don't know why anyone would want it to close.”

“Shame on the Gwinnett County School Board,” Rep. Jones said. “Our state constitution compels Georgia to fund all public school students adequately, not preferentially and unfairly according to Gwinnett's rules.”

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For more information about Ivy Preparatory Academy visit www.ivypreacademy.org.

ABOUT THE GCSA

The [Georgia Charter Schools Association](http://www.gcsa.org) is the nonprofit membership organization for Georgia's charter school operators and petitioners, established in 2001. The mission of the GCSA is to be an effective advocate and service provider for all charter public schools in Georgia by:

- Advancing awareness of charter schools and their mission.
- Increasing awareness that charter schools are public schools.
- Communicating charter school needs to state and local officials.
- Supporting legislation to strengthen charter schools in Georgia.
- Facilitating opportunities for networking/collaboration among charter schools in Georgia and nationwide.
- Developing and implementing programs and services that advance student achievement, accountability and success in all of Georgia's charter schools.