



### PROFILE

**Industry:** Education, K-12  
**Name:** Georgia Cyber Academy  
**Location:** Atlanta, GA  
Founded: 2007  
Website: [www.georgiacyber.org](http://www.georgiacyber.org)

### CHALLENGE

As a statewide tuition-free online public charter school, Georgia Cyber Academy needed to find a way to supply their 11,000 students with a reliable color printer than would not overburden the student's families with expensive cartridge purchases.

### SOLUTION

Combined with top-of-the-line Chromebooks and wireless internet hotspots, the Epson WorkForce ST-2000 Supertank printer empowered Georgia Cyber Academy students with near-limitless color printing throughout their school year and beyond.

# Top 10 Ways to Make Virtual Learning Work

## Advice from one of the nation's best K-12 online academies

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, many school districts are considering virtual education once again, for at least part of their weekly mix.

If that's the case in your area, Angela Lassetter, Superintendent of the Georgia Cyber Academy (GCA), would like to help.

GCA is a free, full-time, online K-12 public school, founded in 2007, that serves approximately 11,000 students throughout the state of Georgia. Having put her own children through the academy and served on its board, Lassetter understands how well a virtual program can work and believes online has a place in every school district.

Recently she's been sharing insights gleaned from a remarkable improvement in academic performance at GCA.

***"[The Epson Supertank printer] was unlike any printer I'd used. The ink levels never seemed to go down, and it never failed, still hasn't even jammed."***

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GCA has done particularly well in two measures. First, because a large number of their students come to GCA several grade levels behind in academic proficiency, Georgia's "Closing the Gaps" score is a key metric for them. In 2018/2019, GCA earned an 85.3 or higher on the measure versus the state average of 50, depending on the grade level. As important, the school has made across the board growth in all grade bands. That's no small achievement because more than 70 percent of GCA students qualify as low-income under Title 1.

Lassetter's suggestions are surprisingly straightforward, to be implemented using simple, proven technology, such as Epson Supertank printers.



# Epson Business Inkjet Printer

## Case Study | Georgia Cyber Academy



**1. Live classes.** In the effort to improve GCA's academic performance, Lassetter says the most crucial change was a requirement that students attend classes live every day.

"You show up at 8 a.m., raise your hand, write on the whiteboard, work on projects together," she explains. "No matter what their age, students need structure and constant reinforcement. Interaction is central to learning."

There are exceptions, she says, "but now our students have to earn the right to a more flexible schedule by showing consistent proficiency and growth. That's not typical in cyber schools, and it was a game changer for us."

**2. Accountability and testing.** Another major change was monitoring students with a live camera and microphone during all tests, while at the same time activating software to ensure that they do not have extra browser windows open while they take them.

"Testing helps us understand where kids are deficient so we can focus on those areas," she explains. It's just human nature that children –and their parents– want to see good scores, so locking down testing has made a crucial difference.

**3. Simple but effective technology.** GCA provides just three pieces of equipment to each student and one to each family: a Chromebook™, a headset with a microphone, a mouse, and an Epson WorkForce® ST-2000 Color MFP Supertank Printer.

That said, "We know we are totally dependent on our technology, and so we buy models with every bell and whistle," Lassetter says.

The printer is a good example. For years GCA bought standard, cartridge-based inkjets, but purchasing replacement ink was always the parents' responsibility.

"It was amazing how fast the ink would go and how costly it could be for a Title 1 family," she recalls. "Yet children like to touch what they're writing on, so we always felt that the ability to print a worksheet or a project was very important."

She says when Epson introduced their first EcoTank® printer, she and her husband bought one to try in their home. "It was unlike any printer I'd used. The ink levels never seemed to go down, and it never failed, still hasn't even jammed."

Next they purchased a professional WorkForce ST-4000 Supertank for GCA administrators, and again kept wondering when it would fail or run out of ink. This multifunction device, which scans and faxes as well as prints, features easy-to-fill, supersized ink tanks includes enough ink to print up to 14,000 black and white pages and 11,200 in full color,<sup>1</sup> equivalent to about 30 ink cartridge sets.<sup>2</sup>

Based on that experience, they began supplying Supertank printers for all of their students' families.



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“Our parents love them. They don’t break, and with the large ink tanks, they often don’t have to buy ink for the whole year,” she says.

The printers’ fast, precise scanning function is extremely useful as well, making it easy to digitize hand-written assignments and art projects to send them to the teachers.

**4. An adult in the room.** In a typical brick and mortar school, the teacher is not only the instructor but the classroom monitor. When children attend at home, someone else must assume that monitoring role.

At minimum, a parent or another adult must be nearby to make sure the child attends every class, does all the required work, and takes the quizzes and exams. In addition, parents must check their email at least once a day, to stay on top of their child’s progress.

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**5. Engagement makes all the difference.** It’s obvious to anyone who has taught online that the environment can be challenging, but Lassetter says it is not necessarily harder once you understand the differences.

“Most people do not realize how much they change the way they present themselves based on feedback from other peoples’ faces. You have to find ways to compensate for the loss of those cues.”

To stay engaged, “we say that we have to learn to be kindergarten teachers for all 12 grades,” avoiding lectures and changing up activities more often than in a physical classroom.

“You have to call out your students by name, add videos, demos, illustrations, surveys, ask them to write on their virtual whiteboards. You constantly have to have them doing something at home that lets you know they’re still there and paying attention.”

**6. Integrated platforms.** Because the learning environment at GCA is totally virtual, Lassetter says their software platforms must be designed specifically with K-12 online classes in mind.

At GCA, three are of highest importance: Jigsaw Interactive, the Canvas Learning Management System, and the Infinite Campus student information system. She adds that GCA has invested in fully integrating them to save time and provide the maximum benefit to students.

**7. Extra support for families.** As a public school, GCA must meet all the normal federal and state requirements for counseling, special education, gifted programs, and more—but GCA goes beyond the minimums by keeping 80+ full-time Family Success Liaisons on staff.

Each “FSL” will normally stay with a family throughout their years at GCA, providing day-to-day support, answering questions and making sure paperwork is turned in on time. In normal years, they help facilitate in-person social opportunities as well.

“In a virtual school, the families are crucial to their children’s academic success, so we have to take special care to support them.”

**8. School-supplied Internet.** GCA also provides fast Internet connections for those families otherwise unable to afford one, putting everyone on a level playing field.

“Where there’s a local provider, we will send a monthly check,” Lassetter says. “If they’re in a rural area, or if they’re homeless, we will ship the family a satellite-based hotspot and pay for the service.”



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**9. Training, training, training.** Like any school, GCA invests a lot in training their teachers, but the focus is on online methodology, especially on how to engage a class virtually.

Parent training is crucial as well. A summertime “Strong Start” program offers new GCA parents orientation videos and live webinars on systems and software plus preparing for the first days in school. “Our FSLs reach out to them as well, so that they are confident that they will be ready.”

**10. Outreach to other educators.** Training does not end within GCA. Since the beginning of the pandemic, staff have spent a great deal of time helping other educators to teach online. “We have already fallen into all the holes and are happy to help you learn to stay on your feet,” Lassetter says.

A resource section on the GCA website is especially helpful. It includes written explanations, videos and webinars, broken down by grade level:

<https://www.georgiacyber.org/resources-for-online-educators>

Although making online K-12 education work well takes a commitment, Lassetter believes “you’ll be able to use whatever you invest in for the future, not just for this horrible thing we’re facing today.”



Most online curricula, she says, can work in-person as well. Online textbooks are often far less expensive than printed books, and most of the technology, for example the Epson Supertank printers, are of lasting value no matter where they’re used. “Then too, now you’ll be able to reach out to your homebound students every single day.”

Her most important advice is to manage expectations. “Switching to a virtual environment is not a simple thing.

“Everybody just has to give themselves some patience and some grace and in dealing with this change.”

1 Included ink bottle yields based on the ISO/IEC 24712 pattern with Epson’s methodology. Actual ink yields will vary considerably for reasons including images printed, print settings, temperature and humidity. Yields may be lower when printing infrequently or predominantly with one ink color. All ink colors are used for printing and printer maintenance, and all colors must be available for printing. For more information, visit [www.epson.com/inkinfo](http://www.epson.com/inkinfo)  
2 Equivalent cartridge sets estimate based on print yields of the included Black and color ink bottles as compared to Epson standard-capacity ink cartridge sets for similarly featured cartridge printers as of October 2018.