

GAfutures

Explore. Plan. Succeed.

Frequently Asked Questions

Administrative Users

05/2016

GSFC | Georgia Student
Finance Commission

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GENERAL INFORMATION

What is the name of the new website?

GAfutures.org - The website should be referred to as GAfutures with the letters “G” and “A” pronounced as letters not as “Georgia”. GAfutures will replace GAcollge411.

When is GAfutures going to launch?

GAfutures is currently scheduled to launch in **July 2016**.

What type of browser should be utilized in accessing the GAfutures.org website?

Mainly your common browser options from Microsoft, Google, Firefox, and Apple are compatible. Attempting to access GAfutures through other browsers may cause compatibility issues.

Will student account information transfer to GAfutures?

Student profiles from GAcollge411 (*active within the last two years*) will automatically transfer to GAfutures. Most users will be able to sign in with their *existing* GAcollge411 account credentials. Some users however have a username that contains prohibited special characters and will have to modify their username before signing in the first time – No worries, a handy FAQ will be available to make this a snap. Please be advised that non-profile information will not transfer to the new site.

Will my STARS/SURFER account information transfer to GAfutures?

Yes, you will be able to Sign In to GAfutures using your STARS/SURFER information and through the *Admin Center*, you will be able to gain access to STARS/SURFER through GAfutures.

If a student had multiple accounts will all their information migrate to GAfutures.org?

Student profiles *will* migrate. If a student has multiple accounts, he/she needs to sign in with the account that contains their **most current information**. If they cannot remember their sign in information, the student can use the easy *Forget Username* and *Forgot Password* functionality on the site.

Will the services provided on GAfutures be free like on GAcollge411.org?

Yes. GAfutures and all of the services it provides will be free. There will be tools for career exploration, planning and applying to college, and increased information on how to pay for college available to users.

Will GAfutures be more user-friendly in terms of content and navigation?

GAfutures' content will be more consistent and at an appropriate reading level. GAfutures' navigation is more streamlined and intuitive to aid in the user experience.

How is “designated staff” defined and access set up in GAfutures for each school?

“Designated staff” includes anyone with approved access to certain areas of information on GAfutures. Designated staff can include:

- **District Administrator** – Set up by GSFC. The District user will have access to all system users and students for all schools within their district.
- **Institution Administrator** – (e.g. the top administrator at a given school) may be set up by the District Administrator or GSFC.
- **Institution User** – (counselors, teachers) are typically directly set up by the Institution Administrator at a given school.

NEW FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS

What are some of the new features and functions available on GAfutures?

- GAfutures has a fresh new look with a more engaging, user-friendly experience. GAfutures is well-organized and allows users to find relevant, up-to-date information quickly and easily.
- The Create an Account process has been streamlined with a more user-friendly design. The five screen process from GAcollge411 has been condensed to one screen and has less required information making account creation quicker, easier and faster.
- New single sign on capabilities allow authorized users to sign in to GAfutures only once and automatically have access to other systems including STARS and SURFER. No need for separate usernames and passwords.
- Usernames can be retrieved and passwords reset by the individual user in real time using the new *Forgot username?* and/or *Forgot your password?* functions.
- Users can now provide a secondary email address to retrieve their username and/or reset their password.
- Security questions are unique to different age groups to make them easier for users to remember.
- New account sharing function allows parents and legal guardians to view their student's account. It is easy and secure.
- GAfutures' search function is more advanced, easier to use and is powered by Google.
- In addition to the advanced search functions, an easy-to-use Site Map will be available. It will aid as another option to help users navigate the website and find specific information.
- GAfutures' content is professionally written for its respective audiences, search engine optimized and meets required state and national education standards.
- For designated staff, the "Admin Center" replaces the Professional Center and is the centralized location for access to other systems (STARS, SURFER) and messages.
- For students and other site users, "My GAfutures" is the centralized location for messages and managing their account profile. "My Transcript" allows high school students to request their transcripts be sent to designated postsecondary institutions.
- For designated staff, an easier transcript exchange process is now inside STARS and SURFER.

- With the launch of GAfutures, GSFC has expanded the transcript calculation cycles for the HOPE GPA. There will now be two cycles per day instead of one.

Can two or more accounts share the same email address?

Yes. The username must be unique, but the email address does not have to be unique. It is common for parents to use their own email address for their account as well as for the account of their younger children.

PASSWORDS, USERNAMES AND DUPLICATE ACCOUNTS

What if a student forgets their username and/or password?

For convenience, GAfutures has a “*Forgot your username?*” and a “*Forgot your password?*” function on the sign in page.

Passwords can be reset by:

- Use Forgot password
- Email
- Answering previously chosen security questions
- Contacting designated staff (counselors and teachers) – an email with login assistance will be emailed to the email designated in student’s profile.
- Contacting GSFC

Usernames can be retrieved by:

- Use Forgot username
- Email
- Contact a designated staff member with an administrative account (counselors, teachers) – look-up student username
- Contacting GSFC

The *Forgot your username?* and *Forgot your password?* functions should significantly reduce the number of duplicate accounts created.

Will designated staff be able to retrieve and/or reset student username and passwords on GAfutures?

With GAfutures, designated staff (counselors, teachers) will be able to:

- Retrieve individual usernames for users associated with their school
- Initiate Password Reset for users associated with their school – email with temporary password will be sent to student through email in GAfutures Profile.

Note: For security reasons, viewing, retrieving or printing existing passwords is prohibited.

Will designated staff have the ability to mass reset passwords?

No. For security reasons, only students, authorized users (parents, legal guardians) and designated staff have the ability to reset individual passwords.

On GAfutures, will designated staff (counselors, teachers) have the ability to look up student accounts to help prevent creating duplicate accounts?

Yes. Depending on the level of access, certain users can look up students on the school level, district level or system-wide.

- Designated staff (counselors, teachers) can look up any student at their school.

- District administrators can look up any student in their district.
- Designated staff can help students retrieve their own username and/or reset their own password through the *Forgot your username?* and *Forgot your password?* functions regardless of the school.
- GSFC can look up any student anywhere.

This wide variety of options should also significantly reduce the number of duplicate accounts created.

If a duplicate account is created, what can a designated staff member do so the duplicate account(s) do not reflect in their reports?

Designated staff can either merge the accounts or opt to 'hide' specified accounts so they are not reflected in their reports. Both features are available in *Admin (General Management)*.

What accounts are migrated to GAFutures?

- Only accounts active within the last two years will be uploaded into the GAFutures database;

Note: Administrative Accounts will be initially migrated with Admin Center access if user has STARS/SURFER access prior to the launch of GAFutures.

Resolving conflicts with existing user names when uploading accounts from GSFC and Xap:

- STARS/SURFER accounts have priority over Xap accounts. If conflicts are detected, Xap user names will be altered.

Special characters replacement algorithm for user names in imported accounts. Only the characters below will be replaced in the user names:

Special Character	Replacement	
'	1a	Single quote
;	2b	Semicolon
,	3c	Comma
&	4d	Ampersand
"	5e	Double quotes
'	6f	Apostrophe
-	7g	Dash
(space)	8h	
/	9i	Slash
\	0j	Back Slash

** Special characters replacement in user names may result in conflicts with other user names. The strategy to handle user name conflicts will be defined in the data testing cycle 2.*

Resolving conflicts with existing user names after replacing special characters:

- After performing special characters replacing, if another user account already exists with same user name, the user name being updated/loaded will be changed to: **New User Name + “_” (underline) + First Letter of User’s First Name in lowercase**. In very few cases, a “_1” will be added to the new user name along with “_” + first letter of first name. If this happens, it means the same account exists in all 3 account sources.
 - Example: John Doe has an account with the username gafutures. This username could be updated to gafutures_j if a duplicate exists.

Special character replacements/removal for other user account fields:

In order to prepare for the launch of GAfutures, current users can help prepare their accounts to ensure profile information is migrated correctly.

User Phone Number:

- Remove dashes, parentheses, and spaces;
- Remove ‘X’ for extension, and extension number. Keep only phone number;
- If phone number field has more than 1 number separated by comma, remove dashes, parentheses, spaces, and comma. Keep only first phone number in the list.
- If phone number starts with “1” keep “1” in the phone number after special characters clean up.

Date of Birth:

- Enforce format MM/DD/YYYY when possible.

State/Province, and Country:

- If record has valid state 2-letter code then find corresponding ID in normalized State/Province and Countries table. If not, leave it blank.

ADMIN CENTER AND ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

Will there be a Professional Center in GAfutures?

No, instead there will be an Administrator Center where district and school users will manage access for school administrators and those who need access to STARS/SURFER (Transcript Exchange will be a part of STARS/SURFER). Counselors and teachers can still use GAfutures in the classroom but will not have access to student accounts or profiles (including password reset functionality). Students will be responsible for their username and passwords and will be able to reset or retrieve their credentials as with other websites.

Will designated staff be able to print a list of students from GAfutures?

Yes. In the Administrative Center, designated staff will be able to print lists of students with accounts on GAfutures.

How can student account information be retrieved for a student at my school?

Within GAfutures, there are several ways to look up student information.

- Designated staff (counselors, teachers) can look up any student at their school.
- District administrators can look up any student in their district.
- Designated staff can help students retrieve their own username and/or reset their own password via the *Forgot your username?* and *Forgot your password?* functions regardless of school.
- GSFC can look up any student.

Will designated staff (counselors, teachers) be able to see students new to their school that may have created an account somewhere else?

If the student's account has *not yet been updated* to show the new school:

- Designated staff (counselors, teachers) from the previous school can look up any student at their school.
- District administrators associated with previous school can look up any student in their district.
- Designated staff can help students retrieve their own username and/or reset their own password via the *Forgot your username?* and *Forgot your password?* functions regardless of school.
- GSFC can look up any student anywhere.

If the student's account has *already been updated* to show the new school:

- Designated staff (counselors, teachers) from the new school can look up any student at their school.
- District administrators associated with the new school can look up any student in their district.

- Designated staff can help students retrieve their own username and/or reset their own password via the *Forgot your username?* and *“Forgot your password?”* functions regardless of school.
- GSFC can look up any student anywhere.

If a student is associated with a school, but no longer attends that school, and the designated staff does not know what school the student now attends, can that student be removed or deleted from the original school?

No. The student’s record cannot be deleted but designated staff can ‘hide’ any student from reports or groups without associating them with another school. By hiding the student’s account, the student’s information (saved activities) will not reflect in the school’s reporting.

BRIDGE FUNCTIONALITY AND TRANSCRIPTS

Will my students be able to complete BRIDGE activities on GAfutures?

No, students will not complete Bridge activities through GAfutures. Both GSFC and the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) have decided that BRIDGE and CCRPI requirements are best suited to be maintained by the GaDOE. This will allow GSFC and GAfutures to be more focused on our mission of helping all Georgians access higher education through the financial aid programs we administer and the educational services we provide. Further, GaDOE has the systems and resources to provide schools with single-system access and more up-to-date course lists, career clusters and pathways. DOE is in the process of developing a transition plan for the 2016 -2017 school year and will share that information in the coming month.

Message from GaDOE regarding BRIDGE and CCRPI Requirements for 2016-2017 –

“The GaDOE has established a task force of counselors and GACollege411 users around the state to work on a plan to complete BRIDGE Bill requirements as well as CCRPI indicator requirements for the upcoming 2016-17 school year. This plan will be both short term for next year as well as some long term planning. The summer workshops for counselors will be held on May 31 through June 2—counselors can register through the CTAE Resource Network or at the following link:

<http://goo.gl/forms/Nwxed39QAL>

During these workshops, the plan will be discussed in more detail and counselors will have the opportunity to ask questions in order to plan accordingly for next year.”

Who do I contact at DOE with questions or concerns?

Dr. Myrel Seigler at mseigler@doe.k12.ga.us or Maria Grovner at mgrovner@doe.k12.ga.us are the contacts at DOE.

Will a student who has had a portfolio on GACollege411 for a few years still have access to his/her portfolio information on GAfutures?

Once GAfutures launches, portfolio information from activities on GACollege411 will no longer be accessible. If schools would like to retain any portfolio information or results, they will need to do this prior to the launch of GAfutures. Once GAfutures launches, portfolio information on GACollege411 will no longer be accessible.

My students have completed tasks on GACollege411. Will this roll over to GAfutures?

No, GACollege411 accounts which have been logged into within 3-years will migrate over to GAfutures, but activities completed on GACollege411 will not be retained. We encourage you to print any and all information you want retained before GAfutures is launched this summer. Examples of what you might want to print:

- Assessment Results
- College Interests
- Career Interests
- Plan of Study

Anything else stored in GAcollge411 portfolios or the Professional Center that might help you or your students in guidance activities.

How will I complete the requirements of the BRIDGE Law?

DOE will be communicating any and all expectations in regards to the BRIDGE Law for the 2016-2017 school year and beyond.

Will Xap continue to handle transcripts?

Transcripts will no longer be processed by Xap. With the launch of GAfutures, GSFC will manage all aspects of transcripts processing. Currently, transcripts are uploaded from the high school to Xap. GSFC then continuously downloads the transcripts from Xap daily to be used for HOPE GPA calculations. GSFC then completes the calculation and provides reports to the high schools for their verification. When GAfutures launches, the high schools will upload their transcripts directly to GSFC through STARS which will eliminate Xap entirely. This process change, once GAfutures launches, will allow GSFC to process transcripts more times per day.

Will Xap continue to process applications?

Yes, this process is not changing. Students will be able to apply to college through GAfutures and colleges will continue to access applications through Xap in the Control Center.

POSTSECONDARY AND TRAINING/PREPARATION

Will students still be able to access college applications through GAfutures?

Yes. If a postsecondary institution currently has a link to their admissions application on GAcademy411.org, students will be able to access that college application through GAfutures. Colleges will access and download their applications through the same process in the Control Center.

How will transcripts be received at colleges for admissions purposes?

With Transcript Exchange being handled solely by the Georgia Student Finance Commission, transcripts can be retrieved and downloaded in SURFER. The Control Center will only be used to download applications for your school.

Are there any privacy restrictions for postsecondary institutions whose students are largely adults and over 18?

Yes. Postsecondary institution staff cannot look up any accounts (other than their own) as these users, in general, are legally adults.

What can my school do to prepare for the transition from GAcademy411.org to GAfutures.org?

Schools and students can best prepare for the transition to GAfutures.org by updating profile information on GAcademy411.org prior to the migration of the data. The more information in the user profile prior to the transition, the easier it will be to retrieve and initiate user accounts on the new site.

Will there be training resources available for GAfutures?

Resources will be available on GAfutures (within the Resources Tab) to aid users in different tasks on the new site. There is a *Help* feature throughout the site to assist users and questions can always be sent to GAfutures@gsfc.org.

How can customers receive more information or submit questions regarding GAfutures?

Questions about the website and requests to be added to the GAfutures email list to receive updates about the new site can be submitted to GAfutures@gsfc.org.