Scalable Model
BreakThru is a powerful learning community that connects students with disabilities and mentors in a 3D virtual world and with social media to promote universal learning and accessibility to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) instruction and degrees.

This 5-year project connects experienced mentors with secondary and post-secondary students in Georgia, creating pipelines that provide transition assistance, mentoring, instruction, academic support, research and vocational guidance. Its use of available digital media will make it scalable to other secondary and postsecondary institutions throughout the nation.

BreakThru's goals are to increase the number of students with disabilities enrolling in STEM classes and majors; increase retention and graduation rates; and increase successful entry rate into STEM graduate programs.

Second Life
A key BreakThru tool is the creation of virtual Mentoring Islands in Second Life to allow students, mentors and teachers vigorous and immersive experiences as they solve STEM challenges together. Users can create avatars that simulate disabilities, or choose to be someone different altogether. BreakThru is ensuring an accessible experience for all users through partnerships with IBM AbilityLab Virtual Worlds Accessible U, the Virtual Guidedog Project, and its own research into universal design and accessibility for virtual worlds. Users are connected via the Mentoring Islands and an integrated package of social media to create a robust community of online learners.

Communication Model
BreakThru has initiated an integrated package of new media communication tools to provide a truly “online” alliance for students with disabilities. Centered upon the Mentoring Islands on Second Life, BreakThru’s efforts will include numerous tools to provide students the best options for their unique set of strengths and weaknesses, and allowing for porous communication between all students, mentors and teachers. The collaborative use of these outlets will allow the project stakeholders to communicate among themselves and also with STEM/educational researchers and the public at large.

BreakThrus
BreakThrus are a series of updates that highlight success, or BreakThrus, made by students and mentors and/or advancements made in areas of research and practice. They are created and housed on the BreakThru blog and then shared and disseminated across the web using various social media accounts. They include:

- **Student BreakThru**: Student success stories and practices
- **Mentor BreakThru**: Mentor promising practices
- **My BreakThru**: Teachers, principals, parents, and other stakeholders guest blog and share successes
- **Research BreakThru**: Updates on research
- **Practice BreakThru**: Promising practices
- **Accessibility BreakThru**: News and cultural pieces on advancements in accessibility

BreakThru is an initiative sponsored by the Georgia STEM Accessibility Alliance (GSAA), a collaborative effort between the University of Georgia and Georgia Institute of Technology. The GSAA is funded by the National Science Foundation Research in Disabilities Education Program (NSF-RDE) award #1027655.