

Review of Autism Services for  
Rochester City School District

Report by the Community Consultation Program,  
Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities  
University of Rochester Medical Center

Final Report  
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## Introduction

Children with autism present unique and challenging needs that require specific supports in their educational programs. Autism is a pervasive developmental disability, and while there are common features in many children with autism, there is also a great deal of variability from one learner to the next. Research has shown that children with autism require different learning techniques and environmental supports to maximize school success and independence. Therefore, it is essential that school personnel and families work closely together to identify and develop quality educational programs to address the individual needs of each child.

The Rochester City Schools has recognized that there is an increase in the number of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) being served in their district as well as the need for providing supports within the district for those children currently placed out of district. The City Schools recently participated in an evaluation of their special education services (i.e., Improving Special Education in the Rochester City Schools) by the Council of the Great City Schools that has also led them to reevaluate their current services for children with autism. They contacted the Community Consultation Program (CCP) at the Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities to conduct a review of their current autism programs to help them identify areas of concerns and to develop an Action Plan for next step in reforming the educational supports for students with autism.

The review by the CCP was conducted over a 3 month period between May-August 2009. The review included interviews and planning with the Rochester City leadership team; observations of classrooms from kindergarten through high school; interviews with classroom teachers, staff, and the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Team; and finally a review of student's central office records.

To evaluate the current status of the autism programs, a modified version of the Autism Program Quality Indicators (APQI) was used. The APQI was developed by the New York State Education Department, the State University of New York, and the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) in August of 2001. The APQI was developed as an assessment tool that could be used either internally by school districts or by external evaluators as a quality improvement guide for those programs serving children with autism. We used it as a guide for our observations, interviews and records review in addition to collecting information more anecdotally.

Findings from the interviews, surveys, and records review are summarized according to the following categories: Instruction, Instructional Environments and Inclusion, Assessment, Transition, Personnel, Challenging Behavior, Family and Community Supports, and Organization and District Policy Issues. Each section will have a description of the positive findings as well as concerns. Recommendations will then be provided as well as a preliminary plan for implementing the recommended actions.

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## **SUMMARY OF REVIEW METHODS**

### **Classroom Observations**

10 classrooms with students with autism were observed:

- 5 elementary classrooms (three classes in School 28, School 5, and School 4)
- 5 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms (Wilson Foundation, East High School)
- 3 high school classrooms (Edison Tech, WEP, SOTA)

Students who were observed had diagnoses that varied from severe autism to Asperger syndrome. The classrooms observed varied from those with a high degree of support (i.e., a special education classroom) to blended classes with both special and general education teachers, to classrooms where the child was fully included in a general education setting. In addition, the degree of support by a paraprofessional or consultant teacher also varied from student to student.

### **Interviews**

At each observation site, at least one classroom teacher or CASE was interviewed either before or after the observation. Other staff such as paraprofessionals and related service staff were also interviewed whenever possible. Topics for the interview included: current educational and behavioral supports that were in place in their classroom, opportunities for inclusion, degree of parent involvement, opportunities for community collaboration, opportunities for professional development, and school and district-level supports.

### **Records Review**

A total of twenty-nine student's central-office files were reviewed. Ninety-three percent of the students sampled were male (27) and seven percent were female (2). Students attended twenty-one different schools and all were classified as having an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

### **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Team Interview**

In addition, we interviewed the current ASD Team members: Gayle Harrison (Licensed Psychologist), Kyle Jones (Speech and Language Pathologist), and Barb Nittoli (Social Worker). In the past, the ASD team has included members from additional disciplines such as Special Education and Occupational Therapy. The team provided information on the history and initial goals of the team. They also described the current intake process and consultation process. The number of students in the district who need consultation services and have consultation hours on their IEPs has resulted in the team currently being understaffed. The ASD team also provided the reviewers with a description of their vision of how RCSD could better serve students with autism. Many of these suggestions were supported by the review and are incorporated below.

## **Areas of Review**

- A. Instructional Methods and Activities (including IEP development and Curriculum)
- B. Instructional Environments and Opportunities for Inclusion
- C. Transition between Settings
- D. Challenging Behavior
- E. Personnel
- F. Individual Assessment
- G. Family and Community Collaboration
- H. Program Evaluation
- I. District Level Policy

## **A. Instructional Methods and Activities**

As part of the review, we evaluated the degree to which the program and teaching methods provide a variety of developmentally and functionally appropriate activities and materials that engage students with autism in meaningful learning.

Evaluation methods: direct observation of ongoing instruction, teacher interviews and review of IEP goals and documented instructional supports. Where possible, the educational curriculum was also assessed.

### **Strengths**

- Overall, instructional activities used were appealing and interesting and promoted active engagement of the students, especially at the elementary level.
- The instruction was embedded within natural routines and activities.
- Communication toward students was geared to their language abilities and was clear and relevant.
- A variety of teaching formats were used (one-to-one, small group, large group, teacher-directed), although we did not observe peer-mediated or play-based formats.
- Instructional methods were adapted to the range of ages, functional abilities of students and to some degree, the learning styles of students with autism.
- The majority of the IEPs reviewed generally described the student's development, health, social emotional and behavioral needs.

### **Concerns**

- Instructional strategies were not clearly based on empirically validated practices nor did they emphasize the use of naturally occurring reinforcers.
- Classrooms did not encourage communication and social interaction, particularly between peers.
- Little effort was made to teach children to cope with distractions and disruptions of school environment; most of the environments were somewhat disruptive although the children did not consistently appear negatively affected by these distractions.
- It was unclear if teachers were maximizing the use of functional communication systems (e.g., augmentative and alternative communication systems).

- Although IEP goals and objectives generally related to a student's present level of performance and identified specific needs, the format for writing the goals and setting their evaluation criteria varied significantly from one document to the next.
- IEP goals and objectives did not consistently cover all areas of need for the students with ASD.
- It did not appear that goals were regularly evaluated and updated if they were met during the school year. It appeared that modification to the goals were only made annually.
- The curriculum goals described did not focus on communication or social needs of students.
- A systematic method for conducting intake to the ASD team, determining the number of hours for consultation, and defining the parameters of that consultation were not clearly delineated in student files, IEPs or CSE meeting notes.

## **Recommendations**

- Form a task group to evaluate the current IEP process. Under their direction the following concerns should be addressed:
  - Develop a policy for writing goals that includes a clear description of the behavioral targets and multiple levels to each goal so that ongoing progress toward each goal can be more easily measured each marking period.
  - Develop a systematic method for evaluating goals on an ongoing basis rather than quarterly.
  - Evaluate ways to relate IEP goals directly to the daily instructional activities and curriculum goals for each student.
  - Evaluate the strengths and weakness of using IEP Direct for formulating and monitoring IEP goals. This program appears to encourage the use of generic goals that may not meet the needs of individual students.
- Professional development opportunities should be provided to teachers, administrators, and paraprofessional staff in the areas of supporting learners with autism at varying levels of performance (see suggested training schedule in Appendix A).
- Topics may include:
  - Curriculum development specifically for children with ASD
  - Learning styles of children with ASD
  - Empirically validated teaching strategies
  - The role of early intervention
  - Maintenance and generalization of skills learned in the classroom.

- Evaluation of peer-mediated teaching strategies to enhance learning for students with autism. For example, use classroom peers and student mentors from upper grades to support students with autism in social and academic areas.
- Provide more opportunities for peer-to-peer social interaction both in the classroom and within the school environment. Provide additional opportunities for inclusion with typical peers for students across social and learning environments.
- Development of a district-wide social skills curriculum.
- Evaluate whether teachers are maximizing the use of functional communication systems and determine if there are better forms of communication via augmentative communication tools.
- Work with ASD Team to develop an action plan around the following issues:
  - a consistent referral and intake process for students to the team
  - development of a model to provide mentoring services with a goal of diversifying knowledge of ASD and education of students with ASD throughout the district
  - a process for deriving the number of consultation hours for each student
  - methods for providing ongoing classroom team participation and student goal development

## **B. Instructional Environments and Inclusion**

We evaluated the degree to which educational environments provide a structure that builds on a student's strengths while minimizing those factors that most interfere with learning. In addition, the degree to which there were opportunities for interaction with nondisabled peers was assessed.

Evaluation Methods: Direct observation of classrooms and interviews.

*Note:* The students observed were in both inclusive to non inclusive settings.

### **Strengths**

- Overall, teaching environments were set up to match the needs of students in the classroom.
- Generally, positive teacher-student interactions were observed.
- Age appropriate play and instructional materials were available in elementary classrooms. Environments were safe and appropriate for students at each age level.

- Although not all children were in inclusive settings, strengths of those observed included:
  - the use of team teaching model in blended classrooms (one special education and general education teachers)
  - most students with ASD were included at appropriate age and skill level
  - general support from peers (or at least the absence of problems, bullying, fighting)

## **Concerns**

- Classrooms often lacked defined areas that provide clear visual boundaries for specific activities and distraction-free environments.
- Environmental supports (e.g., the use of visual schedules) were not often used to facilitate the students' ability to:
  - predict events and activities
  - anticipate change
  - understand expectations
- Limited opportunities for peer-to-peer interactions and social interaction.
- Absence of inclusion opportunities.
- Many ASD students were not given instruction or support around interacting with typical peers by teaching staff.
- Typical peers were not given any support or instruction on interaction with ASD peers to maximize successful interactions.

## **Recommendations**

- Provide consultation to individual classrooms to evaluate, implement and modify the environmental supports so that learning opportunities are maximized and distractions minimized. This will help to reduce off-task and challenging behavior.
- Implement a social skills curriculum across all student settings.
- Provide monthly working "make and take" sessions to elementary classroom teachers to develop visual schedules and supports for individual students.
- Provide professional development and ongoing consultation to special education teachers to work at school level to maximize the opportunities for inclusion for all students.

- Provide professional development and ongoing consultation to general education teachers on the educational and behavioral issues associated with ASD and methods for including them to the greatest degree possible.
- Sensitivity training should be provided to general education classrooms that will be supporting students with ASD prior to the student's entry into the class. This training should be an open dialog where students can ask questions and any of their concerns can be addressed.

### **C. Transition**

The degree to which transition planning occurred from classroom to classroom, from school to school, and beyond high school was evaluated.

Evaluation methods: Transition plans in IEPs, other file documents, and interviews.

#### **Strengths**

- For students age 14 or older, a transition plan was documented in the student's IEP.

#### **Concerns**

- Transition plans were not specific and objectives were not outcome-oriented.
- It was difficult to determine if any planning took place to facilitate the transitions between classrooms and/or schools, even for those transitions that are expected well in advance (e.g., to high school).
- Students and families did not appear to be actively involved in the transition process.
- There was no clear identification of a transition team for each student (i.e., parent, student, and relevant educational professionals).

#### **Recommendations**

- Develop a district-wide transition planning team with at least one member with expertise in autism.
- Team should evaluate current methods and develop appropriate policies and procedures for placing students in classrooms/schools.

- Methods for transition to new classrooms and new schools involving the students, their families, and instructional staff should be developed.
- Post-secondary transition planning and opportunities are especially important for students with autism spectrum disorders. Current post-secondary transition planning and follow-through should be evaluated with ways to increase involvement of the student and family in the planning process.

#### **D. Challenging Behavior**

This is the degree to which functional behavioral assessments and behavior plans are developed to decrease the incidence of challenging behavior. Additionally, we evaluated the degree to which general classroom management strategies are implemented to promote positive behavior and reduce or eliminate challenging behavior.

Evaluation methods: Classroom observations and review of functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) and behavior plans in the central files.

*Note:* There were no behavior plans or FBAs in place for students observed. In addition, there were only 2-3 behavior plans present in the 29 student files that were reviewed.

Several students with autism and significant behavioral issues have been placed out of district due to the behavior interfering with learning. If these students are to return to the district, both classroom consultation and supports must be built to meet their needs.

#### **Strengths**

- In a few classrooms with more behaviorally-involved children, teachers did have several environmental accommodations and adaptations in place to prevent or minimize problem behavior (e.g., schedules, timers, warnings).
- Teaching staff appeared to monitor proactively the level of anxiety as well as possible antecedents to problem behavior so that accommodations could be made (e.g., decreasing demands, moving to a different activity).
- We observed several teaching teams providing the students with gross motor and sensory-based activities on a regular basis in an effort to break up sedentary activities and to avoid problem behavior.

#### **Concerns**

- There was no clear evidence that the schools had a positive school-wide behavioral systems that:
  - defined expectations for appropriate behavior
  - used proactive approaches to managing behavior
  - established strategies for crisis intervention
- For students with challenging behavior:

- no data-based functional behavioral assessments (FBA) were identified
  - if an informal behavior plan was in place, it did not appear to be based on the outcome of an FBA or on evidence-based intervention strategies
  - no focus on developing replacement skills for problem behavior
  - no system for monitoring changes in behavior or evaluating long-term outcomes
- No current plan in place for supporting the more behaviorally-challenging students that are currently placed out of district when they return to the district.

## **Recommendations**

- Provide professional development to teachers on:
  - general classroom management strategies to minimize challenging behavior
  - intervention strategies to directly address noncompliance, classroom disruption and other challenging behaviors associated with autism
- Provide support to school administrators on school-wide strategies that help promote positive school behavior. These strategies may need to be modified to address the individual needs for student with autism.
- Develop an action plan for building classroom level supports (both educationally and behaviorally) for students with significant behavioral challenges as these children begin returning from out-of-district placements. Specific classroom could be identified where staff will get additional training as well as an increased level of support from ASD team.

## **E. Personnel**

The degree to which teaching staff (including related-services staff) are knowledgeable and skilled in educating students with autism in the areas of appropriate instructional and behavioral strategies, and effective inclusion of students with ASD with students without disabilities.

Evaluation Method: Classroom observations, interviews.

## **Strengths**

- Teaching staff are highly motivated to obtain additional professional development to address their classroom needs.
- Positive interactions were generally observed both towards students and other staff by teachers, paraprofessionals, and related service staff. There were some negative interactions observed by teaching and support staff in the more inclusive settings.

- Staffing ratios were appropriate given the student needs.

## **Concerns**

- Staff lacked knowledge in:
  - characteristics of autism
  - use of assessment methods
  - developing IEP goals that meet the unique needs of the students
  - curriculum development, environmental adaptations, and instructional methods that are most appropriate with students with autism
  - strategies to improve social skills
  - strategies to improve communication skills
  - general behavior management techniques
- Staff do not have regular opportunities to participate in continuing professional development (e.g., consultation, workshops, conferences) designed to further develop their knowledge and skills in the area of autism and related issues.
- Paraprofessionals do not receive specific instruction and supervision regarding student IEP goals.
- ASD team does not receive adequate opportunities for training so that they can in turn provide the level of support necessary to school personnel. The team should have specialized skills in a variety of areas that would allow them to provide ongoing professional development to the district as their expertise increases and the team expands.
- Members of the district ASD team do not consistently have the training necessary to effectively train, mentor, and support classroom teachers and students.
- Support and technical assistance are available from ASD Team, but given time demands of the ASD Team, this support is often only in reaction to crisis situations.

## **Recommendations**

- Need to seek expertise from individuals from other agencies with specific knowledge of ASD to provide a comprehensive plan of support.
- Develop a plan for systematic professional development in those specific areas needed for teaching teams. Provide district financial support to allow staff to attend additional trainings (either by bringing in speakers, or allowing staff to

- Provide a high level training to the ASD Team so that they are able to provide the necessary support to school teams.

## **F. Individual Assessment**

This included evaluation of the degree to which a thorough diagnostic, developmental, and educational assessment was conducted using a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to identify students' strengths and needs.

Evaluation Method: File review, focusing on most recent triennial review.

### **Strengths**

- Evaluations were conducted by multidisciplinary teams made up of certified personnel, and typically included cognitive and achievement measures, review of progress, and speech and language skills.
- Evaluation tools focused on a student's strengths and needs.
- Evaluation reports integrated results across areas and were written in an understandable manner.
- Evaluation reports were usually shared with the student (if appropriate), parents, and other members of the educational team, at least via the triennial review process.
- Evaluation reports were written in a manner judged to be understandable to the majority of readers.

### **Weaknesses**

- Focus of evaluation process was on testing rather than observation of student across typical learning situations.
- Outcomes from evaluation did not always translate into instructional goals or activities.
- There was limited use of autism-specific measures during evaluation process to assess ASD-specific strengths and limitations.

- There was over use of verbal assessment tools although there is significant empirical evidence that students with autism perform poorly on verbal assessments.

## **Recommendations**

- Conduct student specific evaluations of characteristics of autism on an annual basis to assess social, communication, behavioral strengths and weaknesses.
- Use autism screening tools with those students suspected to have autism. Refer to appropriate evaluators in the community, if needed.
- Identify and use a variety of nonverbal tools to evaluate academic achievement and cognition that use both verbal and nonverbal assessment methods.

## **G. Family Involvement and Community Collaboration**

This area evaluates the degree to which parents are recognized and valued as full partners in the development and implementation of their children's IEPs and the program links with community agencies to assist families in accessing supports and services needed by students with autism.

Evaluation method: Staff interviews and file review.

### **Strengths**

- To some degree parents receive regular communication from the program regarding their child's progress, but this varies significantly from classroom to classroom and is often based on the degree to which parents request/respond to the teacher communication. Thus, those parents who ask for information are the ones most likely to get it.
- There was a mixed level of participation by families in CSE meetings.

### **Concerns**

- It was unclear whether parents were well-informed about the range of educational and service options. It was unclear what types of resources were available to families.
- The program does not make available parent counseling and/or training opportunities.
- Parents were not provided with opportunities to meet regularly with other parents and professionals in support groups.

- Parents were not assisted in accessing services from other agencies (when available and as appropriate) such as respite, in-home behavior support, home health care, transportation, etc.
- The program was not linked to community agencies that provide the comprehensive services needed by students with autism.
- Parents were not assisted in defining their child's outside-of-school needs, such as respite, in-home behavior support, home health care, transportation, etc. nor help them access services from community agencies.

## **Recommendations**

- Provide parents with learning opportunities at a variety of times across the day/week to promote access by working families.
- Identify resources for families such as the Information and Referral service available through the Rochester Regional Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders that can inform families about specific services available in the area.
- Provide parents with volunteer opportunities in their child's classroom.
- Provide more frequent Open House activities or activities that parents can attend that are modified so their children can participate (e.g., classroom talent shows, science projects).
- Actively encourage parental participation in CSE meetings with information about ASD and ASD supports made available.
- Consider a district-based parent support group.

## **H. Program Evaluation**

This is the degree to which the district has the means to conduct a program-wide evaluation of effectiveness related to the mastery of IEP goals, the evaluation of long and short-term educational outcomes, and the collection of consumer satisfaction data.

### **Strengths**

- Current district leadership is motivated to reform the current program and improve the educational and behavioral supports for its students with autism. By entering into this review and using it as a basis for reform demonstrates the desire to make the needed improvements.

## **Concerns**

- There are currently no systems in place to provide data or information to allow the district to engage in the program evaluation process.

## **Recommendations**

- Develop data-based tools that allow the district to engage in ongoing review from all of its constituents of its current programs.
- Use the data to identify greatest areas of need.
- Develop an action plan for implementing changes systematically across the district.
- Evaluate progress regularly and obtain satisfaction information from all levels of district staff.

## **I. District Level Policy**

The district clearly recognizes the need for improved services to students with autism spectrum disorders. The Council of the Great City Schools report is clear on this need. While building level changes need to be made, it is necessary that on a systemic level the district realize the significance of the problem and seek to address the problem as soon as possible.

## **Concerns**

- Based on CDC incidence data (and more recent data from the National Institutes from Health), the prevalence of autism has increased to 1 in 100 individuals. Based on these statistics, the Rochester City School District, with approximately 34,000 students, can be expected to have at least 340 students per year with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
- Currently, 30% of the students with autism living in the District are educated out of district at significant cost to the District. Challenging behaviors are the most frequent cause of students with autism being educated outside of the district.
- The cost of educating students with autism increases as they grow older and is estimated to be up to \$60,000 to 80,000 per year for those with the most severe disabilities.
- Children with autism can be difficult to educate because of challenging behavioral, sensory, cognitive, and social difficulties.

- However, most students with autism can be educated in inclusive classrooms, even with those difficulties given the proper supports for students, teachers, and paraprofessionals.

## **Recommendations**

- There should be a district-wide strategic plan for all children with autism and related significant developmental disabilities.
- There must be a financial commitment to support that strategic plan.
- The strategic plan should be followed with a Policies and Procedures document that clarifies screening for ASD, evaluation, information and referral, CSE processes, classification and placement, support services, IEP goals and objectives, and follow up of behavior plans and IEP's with outcome measures throughout the year.
- All students with an ASD should receive language services appropriate to their needs. For most students this would include pragmatic language services.
- Every effort should be made to include students with their same age peers in schools of their choice. In the event that students temporarily require a more restricted setting, multiple opportunities for interacting with "typical" peers should be provided.
- The District should return students with autism to their home schools with the necessary supports and services, including but not limited to:
  - a clear and detailed plan for transitioning student to new school
  - continuation of services provided outside of the District
  - an evaluation of those services during the first quarter of the school year
  - involvement of the ASD Team before, during, and after transition to new school
  - insurance that teaching staff in new school has the appropriate skills to instruct students with autism spectrum disorders.
- The District ASD Team should be a well-trained, knowledgeable full-time multi-disciplinary team that provides professional development and ongoing consultation to education professionals working with students with autism. They should also train and mentor building level autism specialists in those schools with higher numbers of students with autism spectrum disorders.
- The District ASD Team should be comprised of highly trained individuals with at least one of the members having certification in Applied Behavior Analysis,

- The District ASD Team should report to zone directors of special education in the district on the status of the students with autism in their region. The leader of the District Team should report to the Assistant Director for Special Programs.

## Action Plan

### Activities conducted with support from the Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities team:

- 1) For Year 1, increase the size of the ASD Team to 3 FTE's. The ASD team as a whole should have specific expertise in autism in the following areas: pedagogy, language development, social skills, behavior, supporting parents, and crisis management. It is imperative that the training for the ASD team be provided immediately.
- 2) For Year 2, develop and implement a **mentoring model** for supporting students with autism at district level. This would mean redefining the role of the ASD Team from that of consultants to that of mentors for teachers with students with ASD. This will enable the District to have increased and diversified knowledge of ASD throughout the District. The ASD Team would be redefined so that it was made up of teachers with students with autism in their class. The speech and language, social work, and psychology members of the Team would serve as resources for teachers, parents, administrators and related services personnel.
- 3) This model would require moving away from the current consultation model of the ASD team and changing the way IEPs are written (i.e., recommending a certain number of consultant hours per year). For those students with significant learning or behavioral needs, outside consultation from SCDD would be provided to the mentor team to help them develop a plan to address these concerns.
- 4) Develop an initial mentoring system with School 28, School 45, and East classroom teachers and related staff who should be targeted for initial consultation support, classroom model development and professional development. Specific activities include:
  - a. Conduct a needs assessment for each classroom.
  - b. Provide intensive all day training on educational and behavioral supports for students with ASD (scheduled for Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>) which includes the following topics:
    - i. Characteristics of learners with autism
    - ii. Academic and cognitive strengths and weaknesses
    - iii. Curriculum adaptations
    - iv. Instructional adaptations
    - v. Environmental (classroom level) modifications and supports
    - vi. Guidelines for support staff
    - vii. Evidence-base approaches to intervention
    - viii. Providing opportunities for inclusion
  - c. Follow up training in each classroom to develop ideas for implementation at individual student level.

- d. Identify additional areas for training to be conducted once per month during professional development period on Wednesday afternoons.
  - e. Hold weekly team meetings with entire classroom staff (program administrator attends monthly).
  - f. Implement a system for measuring improvement in student outcomes and staff satisfaction (internal system of program evaluation) at administration (district, zone) and classroom levels.
  - g. Provide the opportunity to participate in University of Rochester Autism Certificate program (information to follow)
- 5) Professional development – all teachers currently providing support to students with autism, TCOSEs, CASEs and related service staff
- a. Introduction to educating students with autism (NY State Education Department training)
  - b. Quarterly training on additional topics including: behavior management, social and communication deficits, and inclusion and transition beyond school.
- 6) Evaluation of Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) process
- a. Review current district plan and tools used for FBA and BIP process and evaluate for effectiveness for students with autism.
  - b. Revise tools and process, if needed, to meet the specific behavioral needs of students with autism.
- 7) Student Inclusion Plan
- a. Students currently in district
    - i. Determine whether students are placed in most appropriate, least restrictive environments with the supports and services necessary for them to succeed.
    - ii. Evaluate the effectiveness of current segregated classrooms and inclusion opportunities for students with ASD, particularly in School 28, School 45, and East classrooms.
    - iii. Provide training and technical assistance to improve inclusion opportunities for students with ASD.
    - iv. Review inclusion practices more broadly within the District.
  - b. Out-of-district students
    - i. Evaluate current level of need for of out-of-district students and categorize as:
      - 1. Students with the least educational and behavioral needs that can be moved into current classrooms
      - 2. Students who will need some additional supports and can be placed in classrooms that are currently under development
      - 3. Students who will need significant educational and behavioral supports will be placed in classrooms with significant, specialized internal (e.g., highly trained one-to-

one paraprofessional and teaching team) and external supports (e.g., ASD consultant).

- ii. Determine a time line for placing each student in district classroom
- 8) Parent and community support for families of students with autism
    - a. Obtain parent input by conducting a parent focus group to identify the specific needs of families of children with autism. Use the outcome of the focus group to develop an action plan around family involvement and support
    - b. Based on the results of the focus group, hold quarterly support group with invited speakers based on parent interests at parent friendly times (evenings, weekends) and focusing in interests identified by families.
    - c. Identify most needed community resources and make available through support group and through parent resource center.
    - d. Identify possible after school program for students with autism – focus on social skills and community-based activities.
  - 9) Program Evaluation Plan – develop a plan to measuring the success of the actions described above that would include:
    - a. Obtaining baseline information on status of classrooms, student documents, and district policies (e.g., information obtained for report)
    - b. Conducting a survey of teachers and administrators across the district who have or had students with autism to determine current concerns and needs for professional development.
    - c. Obtain current level of satisfaction with services at teacher, parent and administrator level.
    - d. Develop an action plan to implement these measures annually and use for a basis to evaluate progress in meeting goals and to develop additional actions.

**Other recommended activities – not conducted by SCDD**

**IEP/CSE Work Group**

- to develop policies around IEP development
- ongoing evaluation of progress, including family involvement
- consistent and school-based CSE meeting process (based on recommendations of the Council of Great City Schools)

Evaluate efficacy of the mentor model and program evaluation plan with other student groups (e.g., students with behavior disorders, with learning disabilities, with hearing or visual impairments).



## Appendix A: Training Matrix of topics for Professional Development

Training Domain	Topics for Discussion	Recommended Participants
<b>Introduction to Autism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diagnostic characteristics</li> <li>• Autism across the “spectrum”</li> <li>• Core deficits</li> <li>• Etiology</li> <li>• Demographics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Staff (Teachers, Paras, Speech, OT, PT, Psychology, ASD Support Team)</li> <li>• Administrators</li> </ul>
<b>Understanding Asperger’s Disorder</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differential diagnosis</li> <li>• Social-communicative deficits</li> <li>• Unique learning and living issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Staff</li> <li>• Administrators</li> </ul>
<b>Educational Impacts to the Learner with Autism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typical learning profiles</li> <li>• Social and communication impacts</li> <li>• Adaptive impacts</li> <li>• Universal strategies to assist learning</li> <li>• Planning for generalization of skills</li> <li>• Maintaining learned skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Staff</li> </ul>
<b>Shadow Model: The Paraprofessional Role in Inclusion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keys to fostering independence</li> <li>• Social facilitation</li> <li>• Behavior support</li> <li>• Data collection</li> <li>• Collaborating with teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paraprofessionals</li> <li>• ASD Support Team</li> <li>• Psychology</li> </ul>
<b>Problem-Solving Challenging Behaviors - I</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foundations of behavior analysis</li> <li>• Hypothesizing function</li> <li>• 3-Term Contingency</li> <li>• Understanding Function-based Intervention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• ASD Support Team</li> <li>• Psychology</li> </ul>
<b>Problem-Solving Challenging Behaviors - II</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting an FBA</li> <li>• Developing function-based intervention plans</li> <li>• Monitoring progress and modifying the plan</li> <li>• Data collection and review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• ASD Support Team</li> <li>• Psychology</li> </ul>
<b>Modifying Curriculum for the Learner with Autism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the learner with Autism</li> <li>• Differentiated instruction</li> <li>• Approaches to curriculum modification (reading comprehension, writing, math)</li> <li>• Graphic organizers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• ASD Support Team</li> </ul>
<b>Evidenced-based Approaches to Intervention and “The Behavioral Teaching Method”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of Autism intervention techniques</li> <li>• Evidenced-based defined</li> <li>• “How to” for empirical review of interventions</li> <li>• Behavioral Method if Instruction (Teach, Model, Rehearse, Feedback, Reinforce) as applied to academic/social/adaptive learning)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• ASD Support Team</li> </ul>
<b>Discrete Trial Teaching (DTT) and Direct Instruction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABA defined</li> <li>• Discrete trial teaching as one element of ABA approach</li> <li>• Elements of the discrete trial teaching exchange</li> <li>• Developing a DTT curriculum</li> <li>• Uses of DTT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selected Teaching and Para Staff</li> <li>• ASD Support Team</li> <li>• Speech</li> <li>• OT</li> <li>• PT</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct instruction defined</li> <li>• Examples of direct instruction strategies</li> </ul>	
<b>Visual Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rationale: understanding the learner with Autism</li> <li>• Visual supports as part of the inclusive classroom</li> <li>• Uses and types of visual supports</li> <li>• Examples of visual supports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Staff</li> </ul>
<b>Social Skill Development - I</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socialization as core deficit of Autism</li> <li>• Social skills from a life span perspective</li> <li>• Understanding the “hidden curriculum”</li> <li>• Bullying/victimization and Autism</li> <li>• Social Impacts to the Learner with ASD</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• Speech</li> <li>• ASD Support Team</li> <li>• Psychology</li> </ul>
<b>Social Skill Development - II</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies for social skills instruction (social stories, scripts, circle of friends,</li> <li>• Examples of peer mediated instruction and modeling in the inclusive setting</li> <li>• Review of curriculums for social skills instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• Speech</li> <li>• ASD Support Team</li> <li>• Psychology</li> </ul>