

Autism Classroom Placement Considerations and Guidelines

Student Characteristics

School aged students must have an educational identification of autism.

Students being considered for this program must have severe social and communication deficits. Appropriate candidates are students who:

- Struggle to initiate interactions
- Appear content to be in their own world
- Language is mostly absent, with little functional language used
- If language is present, it is usually scripted or echolalic in nature
- Cannot initiate or maintain back and forth conversations
- Rarely uses eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions to share attention, emotions and interests with others.

When deciding the appropriate placement, IEP teams should consider that most students with autism benefit from being educated with typically developing peers who exhibit age appropriate social and communication skills.

Due process procedures:

- To refer a student for placement in an autism classroom, the school psychologist must contact the building coordinator. If a student moves in from a district outside of the catchment area, the coordinator will contact the Autism Specialist to initiate a screening to determine appropriateness of placement.
- Evidence based strategies should be implemented and special education resources utilized to the maximum extent appropriate before considering this program. Documentation that supports the student's placement in the autism program is required and should be shared with the receiving teacher at a pre-placement meeting, prior to the student beginning the program. These documents are (but not limited to) any formal / informal testing results and documentation describing why the previous placement failed including classroom strategies implemented, work modifications, accommodations, additional support provided, etc.
- If a student exhibits severe problem behavior, teams should be prepared to share interventions tried and data collected indicating what worked and what didn't work.
- The school psychologist will contact the Autism Specialist before any meetings are scheduled.
- A pre-placement meeting will be held to review testing, history of student, interventions tried and discuss placement options, etc.
- An IEP will be written in collaboration with the receiving teacher. Completion of all paperwork is the responsibility of the sending school IEP team.
- No student will start without all documentation, including health care plans and support services hired.

Curriculum:

The vision of the autism program is to assess students with autism and develop a program that will allow each student to be successful in the least restrictive environment.

Evidence-based methods such as discrete trial teaching, naturalistic intervention, Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS), and visual supports are used to meet the academic, communication, and social-emotional needs of the students. Some students who have a dual diagnosis of autism and intellectual disability may participate in alternative curriculum developed to address educational and functional needs.

Paraprofessional Support:

Paraprofessional support will be determined based on the number of students and the needs within the classroom.

Inclusion:

While students are attending the autism program they will have limited contact with their non-disabled peers. When appropriate, students will be included with typical peers during the day (e.g. lunch, music, art, PE, classroom parties, and other limited opportunities). If a student's educational and socialization needs can be met in the general education setting with minimal pull out support, he/she should not be considered for placement in an autism program. The ultimate goal is for the student to return to their neighborhood school. A plan will be developed outlining the teaching methods and interventions necessary for the student to be successful in their home school.

School Calendar:

Students will follow the school calendar set forth by the district where the program is placed. If for any reason our school calendars do not coincide with their home district, we will let parents and other pertinent school officials know in advance to avoid confusion.

Re-evaluations:

Re-evaluations will be conducted by the school psychologist from the student's home district.

LEA:

The LEA representative for each student will be their home district principal.

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