

Proposed Competencies for Special Education Teachers Working with Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)



Minnesota Autism Project

The purpose of these competencies is to assist in building the knowledge and skills of staff that provide special education and related services for children with ASD. These should be viewed as a Promising Practice, as Minnesota does not have a license specific to ASD and these competencies are not a requirement. These ASD Competencies are intended to 1) provide a common base of understanding that outlines relevant knowledge and skill competencies in ASD consistent with current promising practices and research, 2) guide the organization of staff development initiatives and selection of training topics, 3) influence the development of coursework and ASD certificate programs in institutes of higher education and, 4) provide an option for staff to individually guide and document their educational experience and expertise in ASD.

A number of critical factors have influenced the development of this set of ASD Competencies including; the increasing identification of students with ASD that has led to a growing demand for highly qualified staff to educate these students. This increasing demand paired with the scarcity of teacher preparation curriculum, coursework and programs that address ASD further prompted the development of these specialized competencies.

These competencies were developed by the ASD Work Group following an examination of current research and a review of previous efforts to develop teacher competencies in autism which included: Recommendations from the National Academy of Science Report "Educating Children with Autism" (2001), numerous documents from other states and university programs (Additional Resources in Appendix A). They were developed in collaboration with the Teacher Competency Work Group for ASD in 2003, the Low Incidence Disabilities Regional Projects, and the Minnesota Autism Project and Network under a grant from the MN Dept. of Education/ Special Education Policy

These competencies have undergone critical reviews and consensus building including five draft revisions and field validation. They have been rated by teachers, consultants, administrators, parents and university faculty across the state and national experts who have extensive experience in ASD (Appendix B). Additional organizations and professional groups that participated in the review and field validation process included; Special Education Policy and the Division of Compliance and Assistance/MDE, MN State Autism Network, MASE, Autism Society of MN, Low Incidence Regional Projects and the Higher Education/Low Incidence Work group. These competencies were rated as "moderately essential" to "essential" in the effective provision of special education and related services for individuals (Birth to 21 years) with ASD.

The proposed ASD Teacher Competencies are promising practices that are organized utilizing the model for professional standards established by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). The ASD Competencies are organized into two types of statements; Knowledge (K) = Individual understands or has knowledge of ... and Skill (S) = Individual can or has the skill to ... These are specialized competencies that build upon the "Common Core" Competencies for beginning teachers published by CEC.

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Foundations in the Education of Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

K1. Theories and research that provide the basis for special education and related services for individuals (birth to 21 years) with ASD.

K2. Legal issues that impact education and practice in the field of special education and related services for individuals with ASD.

K3. Impact of medical and neurological perspectives on the education of individuals with ASD.

S1. Access information regarding theories, research, medical and legal requirements and their relation to current promising practices in education for individuals with ASD.

Development and Characteristics of Learners with ASD

K1. Early indicators of ASD in infants/toddlers, preschoolers and school age individuals.

K2. Possible courses of development and outcomes in individuals with ASD from infancy to adulthood

K3. Range of communication, social and behavioral characteristics, and coexisting conditions associated with ASD.

S1. Articulate the early indicators, characteristics, and learning styles of students with ASD to parents and other staff.

Individual Learning Differences in the area of ASD

K1. Impact of the combined effect of the restricted range of interests, limited social cognition, impaired language skills and idiosyncratic sensory behaviors upon the individuals ability to benefit from incidental learning opportunities.

S1. Implement a range of direct instructional strategies that promote the generalization of skills.

Instructional Strategies for Learners with ASD

K1. Research supported instructional methods and promising practices for toddlers, preschoolers and school age individuals with ASD.

S1. Implement research based instructional practices and strategies appropriate for toddlers, preschoolers and school age individuals with ASD.

S2. Consider assistive technology options for individuals with ASD (e.g. picture/symbol exchange communication systems, electronic devices, sensory equipment, visual schedules and others).

S3. Implement instructional programs that improve social skills and interactions between students with ASD, their peers and adults across various settings.

S4. Implement instructional programs that address transition needs of individuals with ASD (i.e. jobs and training, home living, recreation and leisure, community living and post secondary education).

S5. Demonstrate the ability to accurately collect and interpret data to document progress on outcomes for students with ASD, and make necessary changes in programming when indicated.

Learning Environments and Social Interactions for Learners with ASD

K1. Methods and strategies specific to managing behavior in ASD.

K2. Associated factors such as mental health, sensory issues, diet, medication and their possible relationship to behavior in individuals with ASD.

K3. Effective structured teaching methods, communication systems, environmental adaptations, and their possible relationships to managing behavior of individuals with ASD.

K4. Functions of behaviors, and their possible communicative intents or purposes for individuals with ASD.

K5. Instruction to promote communicative and social alternatives to undesirable behaviors for both non-verbal and verbal students with ASD

K6. Potential of proactive strategies to teach pro-social behavior in ASD, prevent development of interfering behaviors, and decrease the need for reactive strategies (i.e. time-out/crisis intervention).

S1. Design a learning environment with physical modifications/accommodations to address the possible visual, auditory or other sensory needs of students with ASD.

S2. Collaborate with building staff in making physical and environmental modifications/accommodations for students with ASD in regular classroom settings as well as other natural environments (including home, daycare, and other school settings).

S3. Provide environmental and structural accommodations across learning environments (e.g. use of visuals, picture schedules, transition management techniques, classroom routine, and others) for students with ASD.

S4. Demonstrate consistent use of proactive strategies and positive behavioral supports for individuals with ASD.

S5. Foster social skills development for individuals with ASD through on-going peer interactions, direct instruction, and role-playing in a variety of settings.

S6. Write a variety of behavior change plans for individuals with ASD including proactive behavior modification plans to teach alternative behavior/skills.

Language/Communication in the Education of Learners with ASD

S1. Design and implement instructional programs that promote effective communication skills using appropriate verbal, augmentative, and alternative communication systems for individuals with ASD.

Instructional Planning for Learners with ASD

S1. Write and implement individualized goals and objectives to address the core features of ASD based on individual strengths and needs identified through evaluation.

Assessment of Learners with ASD

K1. Strengths and limitations of instruments and procedures used to screen and evaluate for eligibility under ASD category.

K2. Minnesota state criteria for eligibility and comprehensive evaluation for students with ASD.

K3. Impact of cultural and linguistic diversity on the evaluation of individuals with ASD (i.e. social values, customs, language comprehension, etc.).

S1. Use procedures and instruments to screen and evaluate for ASD eligibility and determine needs.

S2. Interpret assessment results to design appropriate interventions for individuals with ASD.

S3. Conduct a functional behavioral assessment, including consideration of possible sensory needs, and apply its findings to programming for individuals with ASD.

Professional and Ethical Practice in the Education of Learners with ASD

K1. Professional resources including publications/journals, state agencies, organizations, and web sites for ASD.

S1. Participate in continuing professional development activities regarding ASD.

Collaboration in the Education of Learners with ASD

K1. Range of educational and service options for students with ASD.

S1. Provide strategies and training for parents, paraprofessionals, and other school staff to work more effectively with individuals with ASD.

S2. Communicate with outside agencies (e.g. private OT, speech/language, sensory integration services, doctors, psychologists, and others) working with the individual with ASD.

S3. Share current research and other resources regarding ASD with parents and school staff.

Note:

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The ASD Competencies are organized into two types; knowledge (K) and skills (S).

K = Individual understands or has knowledge of ...

S = Individual can or has the skill to ...

Appendix A - Resources

- Bevilacqua, S., *Best Practices for Educating Students with Autism*. Horsham, PA: LRP Publications, 2001.
- Booth, L.T. & Magnus, E. L., *Providing a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to Autistic Students*. Mpls: Rider Bennet Eagan & Arundel LLP, 1999.
- California Depts. of Education and Developmental Services. *Best Practices for Designing and Delivering Effective Programs for Individuals with Autistic Spectrum Disorders*, 1997.
- CEC Common Core Knowledge and Skills for Beginning Special Education Teachers, *What Every Special Educator Must Know*, Council For Exceptional Children (CEC), 2000.
- Cohen, D. and Volkmar, F., *Handbook of Autism and pervasive Developmental Disorders*, 1997.
- Connecticut Dept. of Education, *Report of Task Force on Issues for Education of Children with Autism*, 1998.
- Dalrymple, N. & Ruble, L., *Technical Assistance Manual on Autism for Kentucky Schools*, Kentucky Dept. of Education, 1997.
- Dawson, G. & Osterling, J., Early Intervention in Autism. In M.Guralnick (Ed.) *The Effectiveness of Early Intervention*, 1997.
- Florida, Specialization Requirements for Endorsement in Autism - Academic Class. 6A-4.01796 Specific Authority 229.053(1), 231.15(1), 231.17(6) FS.
- Indiana Resource Center for Autism. *Early Intervention for Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Recommendations for Designing Effective Programs*, 2001.
- Institute on Community Integration/U of MN & MN Department of Children, Families, and Learning. *Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 2000.
- MN Department of Children, Families, and Learning. *Issues and Standards for Autism Spectrum Disorders, Appendix G-1, Special Education Local Implementation Plan*, 2000.
- MN Department of Children, Families, and Learning. *Promising Practices: Effective Early Intervention in Autism, training video*, 2001.
- MN Department of Human Services & MN Department of Children, Families, and Learning. *Task Force: A Report to the 1999 MN Legislature*. 1999.
- National Research Council. *Educating Children with Autism*. Lord., C., et. al., Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2001.
- NY State Education Department, *Autism Program Quality Indicators: A Self-Review and Quality Improvement Guide for Schools and Programs Serving Students with ASD*, 2001.
- Rogers-Adkinson, D., et.al., *Developing Cross-Cultural Competence: Serving Families*, Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, vol.18, #1, 2003.
- Scheuermann, B., et.al., *Problems with Personnel Preparation in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, vol.18, #3, 2003.
- Yell, M., & Drasgow, E., *Litigating a free appropriate public education*, The Journal of Special Education, vol.33, 2000.