



ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

July 24, 2008

Memorandum #08-1

DEVELOPMENT OF IEPs FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS (Implementation of Public Act 095-0257)

*This document is intended to provide non-regulatory guidance on the subject matter listed above.
For specific questions, please contact the person(s) identified in the document.*

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MEMORANDUM #08-1

TO: District Superintendents
Directors of Special Education
Other Interested Parties

FROM: Elizabeth Hanselman *Elizabeth Hanselman*
Assistant Superintendent for Special Education

DATE: July 24, 2008

SUBJECT: Guidance: Implementation of Public Act 095-0257
Development of IEPs for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide guidance regarding the implementation of Public Act 095-0257 which amends Section 14-8.02 of the School Code [105 ILCS 5/14-8.02]. This Act, effective January 1, 2008, affects the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students with a disability on the autism spectrum.

The legislation requires that “In the development of the individualized education program for a student who has a disability on the autism spectrum (which includes autistic disorder, Asperger’s disorder, pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified, childhood disintegrative disorder, and Rett syndrome, as defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition (DSM-IV, 2000)), the IEP team shall consider all of the following factors:

1. The verbal and nonverbal communication needs of the child.
2. The need to develop social interaction skills and proficiencies.
3. The needs resulting from the child’s unusual responses to sensory experiences.
4. The needs resulting from resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines.
5. The needs resulting from engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements.
6. The need for any positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports to address any behavioral difficulties resulting from autism spectrum disorder.
7. Other needs resulting from the child’s disability that impact progress in the general curriculum, including social and emotional development.

Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) may have unique educational issues as a result of the seven core areas outlined in P.A. 095-0257. The following information is provided to assist an IEP Team in understanding the needs of the student on the autism spectrum in these areas, and therefore develop a more effective educational program.

1. The verbal and nonverbal communication needs of the child

Impairment in communication is a defining characteristic of autism spectrum, and students with ASD need communication skill development. Communication

abilities of students with ASD may range from individuals who are nonverbal to those who are highly verbal but have difficulty in the social aspects of language.

Considerations for the student's IEP Team:

- The student's current level of communication
- The system of communication most effective for the student
- The functions for which the student uses and understands language
- The student's ability to use and understand non-verbal communication (e.g., eye gaze, facial expression, gesture)
- Emerging communication skills reported by the family or other Team members
- Alternative augmentative communication assessment, system and devices to enhance communication

2. The need to develop social interaction skills and proficiencies

Another core characteristic of autism spectrum is that of qualitative impairments in social interaction. Impairment in this area can range from seeming distant and avoidant with even close family members to misunderstanding social situations, being unable to initiate a social interaction or to carry on a conversation with a peer. A younger student may have restricted social or imaginative play or unusual play activities.

Considerations for the student's IEP Team:

- The student's ability to respond appropriately to the social approach of others
- The types of social interactions the student is capable of initiating
- The student's pragmatic skills
- Anecdotal information about the student's abilities within small and large groups and in typical age-level activities

3. The needs resulting from the student's unusual responses to sensory experience

A student on the autism spectrum may experience under- or over-sensitivity to stimuli in the environment. Family members often have critical information as to how this student responds to, or needs, specific sensory experiences in order to successfully participate in activities.

Considerations for the student's IEP Team:

- Tactile – Does the student demonstrate a lack of awareness to his/her body in space, and/or a need for higher level of input in tactile experiences?
- Visual – Is the student's eye gaze avoidant of, or fixated on, particular sights?
- Sound – How does the student respond to auditory events?
- Smell/taste – Does the student respond in an atypical way to olfactory events or tastes?

4. The needs resulting from resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines.

A student on the autism spectrum may have unusual or intense responses to a change in the environment or change in daily routine. Attention to the needs of the

student in this area can reduce anxiety and enable the student to anticipate change and focus on the important activities of the day rather than the change or sequence.

Considerations for the student's IEP Team:

- Preparing for transitions with visual supports and timers
- Previewing changes in environment and schedules
- An individual visual schedule – either written, pictures, photos, line drawings
- All supports provided in the most successful modality for this student for communicating upcoming change or transition

5. The needs resulting from engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements.

Another defining characteristic of autism spectrum is the existence of ritualistic behaviors, intense interests and/or repetitive phrases or behaviors.

Considerations for the student's IEP Team:

- Determine the function of the behavior, activity or verbalization
- Determine the extent to which the behavior interferes with engagement in other more appropriate activities (social or academic)
- The use of formal and informal data collection for significant behaviors
- The use of positive behavior supports to encourage participation in social and academic activities
- Depending on the behavior, effective practice can include modifying the behavior, teaching more appropriate replacement behaviors, providing sensory and motivating breaks, using special equipment, developing curriculum around student's topic of interest

6. The need for any positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports to address any behavioral difficulties resulting from autism spectrum disorder

As a result of the complexity of the disability, students on the autism spectrum may exhibit behaviors that are challenging in their intensity and/or frequency or interfere with engagement in appropriate activities.

Considerations for the IEP Team:

- Discuss the need for a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) of the target behavior
- Match the intensity level of the FBA to the behavior being addressed
- Use the information to determine positive behavior interventions, strategies and supports and replacement behaviors to teach
- Select the least amount of intervention likely to be effective and efficient

7. Other needs resulting from the child's disability that impact progress in the general curriculum, including social and emotional development

A student with ASD may have difficulties in executive function, organization and generalization, and tendencies to perseverate on unimportant factors that may distract and limit participation and learning.

Considerations for the IEP Team:

- Intervention strategies for social skill development
- Regular review of classroom and individual expectations
- Organizational supports
- Previewing information
- Direct instruction for learning new skills or generalizing skills
- Repeated instruction and practice in multiple environments with a variety of materials and people

Students on the autism spectrum often have complex needs that can be challenging for schools to provide effective and appropriate education experiences. Assessment of the needs as outlined in this memorandum can assist schools in framing effective supports which result in improved outcomes for a student on the autism spectrum.

Training and Technical Assistance

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) recognizes that districts may need access to training and technical assistance to ensure that the needs of students with ASD are addressed. The ISBE funds the Illinois Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project (IATTAP) to provide training opportunities – including online training, resource libraries, family supports, and a variety of other activities. Information about specific activities and resources is available on their website at www.illinoisautismproject.org. Districts are encouraged to visit the site and make use of the services of the IATTAP.

Should you have any questions about the information in this memorandum, please contact the Division of Special Education Services – Springfield at 217/782-5589.