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**An Overview and Needs Assessment of Special
Education Programs for Students with Autism Spectrum
Disorders within the Sachem Central School District.**

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I. Rationale and Overview:

Sachem Central School District is dedicated to providing an appropriate education for all its students with special needs. There has been a dramatic increase in servicing students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders within the district setting. According to the US Department of Education, incidence of Autism Spectrum Disorders is rising by 10-17% per year. In response to this alarming increase, Sachem implemented its Sachem Transitional Elementary Program for students with Autism in September 2001. The S.T.E.P program was unique in its allocation of services and was originally designed specifically to meet the needs of students on the autism spectrum. The S.T.E.P program currently services kindergarten through third grade students. The original goal of the S.T.E.P program was to give incoming kindergartners diagnosed with an ASD the extra support they required in order to successfully transition into the mainstream by first grade. Not all students have been successful with their transition out of the S.T.E.P program. The S.T.E.P II class was developed to address the needs of students who were not successful in these other settings and returned to S.T.E.P. According to the S.T.E.P staff, the reason these students have not been successful outside the S.T.E.P program is that they displayed interfering or challenging behaviors that could not be appropriately dealt with in these other settings.

Integrating students with Autism Spectrum Disorders into our schools and into our communities continues to pose challenges on many levels. Research shows that these students do not learn using the same methodologies that schools have typically used. School districts throughout the region are looking to change the paradigm of what they thought special education to be and are looking for effective ways of incorporating students with Autism into the least restrictive environment. The Sachem School district has begun to satisfy this need with their creation of the S.T.E.P Program. However, Autism Spectrum Disorders is a lifelong disability. While Sachem has been successful with its flagship program, there needs to be a more effective and efficient continuum of services from K-12. A continuum of services would entail training and supports for children with Autism in all placements, not just that of the STEP program. This continuum would allow for seamless transitions from year to year no matter what the student placement might be.

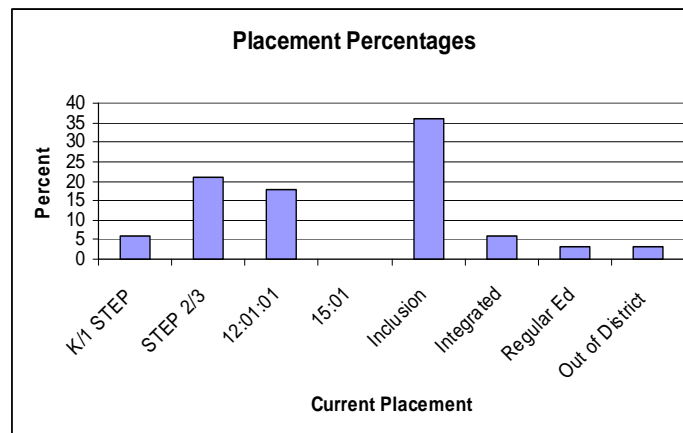
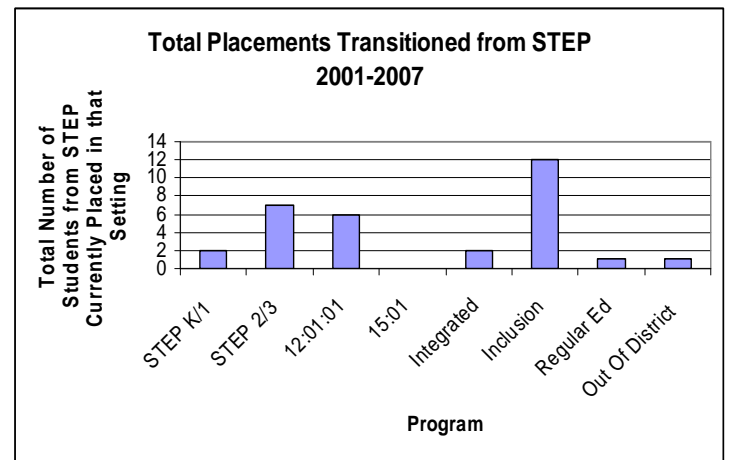
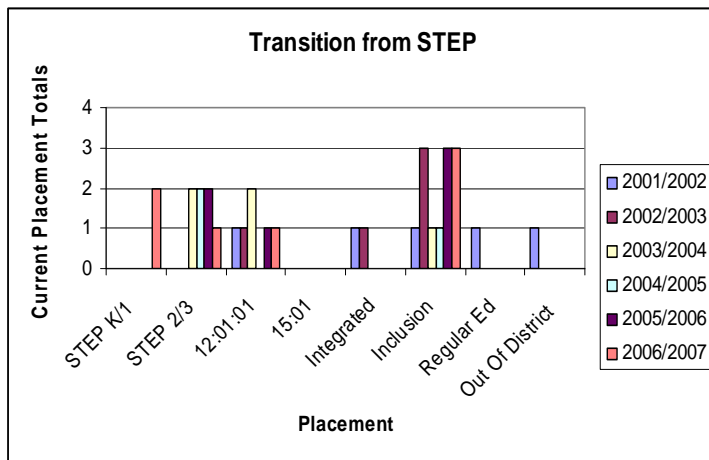
A needs assessment was conducted of the district's special education program k-12 in relation to services for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Current practices as well as current program service models within the Sachem School District were observed and reviewed in accordance with the NYS Autism Program Quality Indicators. The goal was to determine the effectiveness of these

programs for students with ASD and develop recommendations on how to more effectively implement the continuum of services for these students.

II. Placement Analysis

Where are the students with ASD currently serviced?

Data was collected on the current placement of students who have transitioned from the STEP program in previous years. This data consists of current placements only (including those students who were unsuccessful in other placements and returned to STEP).



Many students have successfully transitioned to inclusionary environments with 45% of students being currently placed in non self contained settings (36% of these students are currently being serviced in full inclusion settings). There are no students who have transitioned to 15:1 placements. 39% of students are currently being educated in self contained settings (not including the current K/1 STEP students). 21% of the students have been placed and are

currently successful in the STEP 2/3 program where 18% of the students are placed and having success in the 12:1:1 placements.

III. Current Service Models:

The following overview was provided by the Sachem staff to outline the profiles of students within the varying programs.

Profile Categories	8:1:1	12:1:1 (STEP)	12:1:1	15:1	15:1 (Integrated)
IQ Range	IQ 65 and below	Diagnosed- ASD IQ-Borderline/Average	IQ Borderline- 65-85	IQ Average to Superior 85 and above	IQ Low to High Avg 85-120
Social Level/Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inappropriate interactions with peers • more interaction w/ adults • misinterprets social situations • naïve, could become victim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ difficulty verbalizing or expressing feelings appropriately ▪ behaviors could include aggression, withdrawal, acting out ▪ inappropriate social skills with peers/ adults ▪ misinterprets social situations ▪ difficulty following routine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ difficulty resolving conflicts ▪ immature social skills ▪ difficulty verbalizing or expressing feelings appropriately ▪ emotionally fragile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ emotional concerns impede ability to function ▪ inappropriate social skills ▪ behaviors could include aggression,, withdrawal or acting out ▪ difficulty expressing feelings ▪ difficulty following routine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ generally appropriate social interactions with peers and adults ▪ could have poor self esteem or little self confidence
Physical Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delayed fine/ gross motor skills ▪ weak sensory/perceptual skills ▪ could have specific physical disabilities or health concerns ▪ could have toileting needs ▪ Attentional difficulty, distractible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ could have weak fine/gross motor skills ▪ attention difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ could have weak fine/gross motor skills ▪ attention difficulties-health concerns 	No significant health concerns EXCEPT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ attention ▪ psychiatric ▪ may take medication 	Possible fine motor needs or perceptual weakness
Academic Levels/ Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant academic delays ▪ Needs life skills curriculum ▪ language, memory, reasoning, processing all weak ▪ concrete cannot generalize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ moderate to severe delays in academic areas ▪ weak organizational skills ▪ varied skills in reasoning, memory and processing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant delays in all or most academic areas ▪ weakness in language, reasoning, memory, concept formation and processing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ moderate to severe delays in academic areas ▪ weak organizational skills ▪ varied skills in reasoning, memory and processing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ moderate to severe delays in academic areas ▪ weak organizational skills ▪ varied skills in reasoning, memory and processing
Management Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ individual attention ▪ constant supervision ▪ structure ▪ refocusing ▪ positive concrete reinforcers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ structured behavior plan to address frustration, distractibility, impulsivity, inappropriate language, aggression, non compliance ▪ individual or small group instruction ▪ re-teaching/ reinforcement of concepts ▪ mainstreamed with consistent support and monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ individualized or small group instruction ▪ consistent support ▪ Behavior mod to address behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ structured behavior plan to address frustration, distractibility, impulsivity, inappropriate language, aggression, non compliance ▪ small group instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual, small & large group instruction ▪ re-teaching/ reinforcement of concepts ▪ consistent support and monitoring.

District Wide Supports

Behavior Specialists:

There are two district wide behavior specialists to assist staff in addressing behavioral issues specific to children with Autism Spectrum Disorders throughout the district. These behavior specialists assist building psychologists in the development of Functional Behavior Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans. These services are not depicted as a related service on the child's IEP but rather given on an as needed basis.

Elementary

PIN Pals:

The PIN Pals (Peer Interaction Network) is now located in most elementary buildings. This program assists in developing social skills and forging appropriate relationships by training typical peers in working with students with ASD. Students are taught how to help students who have difficulty with social behavior throughout the school day.

IV. Program Evaluations

Programs were evaluated using observation, staff interviews, documentation review and the NYS Education Department Autism Program Quality Indicators (APQI). It is important to state that the deficient areas were consistent across many of the programs. This indicates the need for a systems change rather than specific programmatic changes. Individual programmatic evaluations and recommendations will appear repetitive. Additional recommendations will be district wide in order to address this repetition.

8:1:1 Program

With the 8:1:1 classes observed most classes had at least one 1:1 aide present. These students presented as significantly delayed across all domains. Staff were observed implementing small group instruction in order to address social skills such as waiting and turn taking. While the curriculum themes are in alignment with grade appropriate curriculum, significant modifications must be implemented in order to present material at the student's functional level. Students were also working on activities of daily living such as toileting. 8:1:1 students participate in the NYS Alternate Assessments. The 8:1:1 program is self contained for almost the entirety of the school day with the exception of some specials. Reading and math instruction is implemented 1:1 or in groups not to exceed 2. It must be noted that the staff in these classes were highly organized and energetic. There was efficient use of time and available staff. APQI assessments were not conducted due to the demographic of students that are serviced by the 8:1:1.

8:1:2 Program

The 8:1:2 program is currently in its second year and has expanded to 2 classes. The 8:1:2 program was developed for transitioning students classified with Autism Spectrum Disorders or Developmental Disabilities who required more intensive structure than that provided by the current S.T.E.P. program. The students entering the 8:1:2 program require 1:1 instruction as well as the teaching of the pre-requisite skills necessary for effective inclusion. The goal of the program is for all of the students to transition to a less restrictive environment after one or two years of this more intensive instruction. In addition to functional and pre requisite academic skills, students are exposed to grade level curriculum (Foundations). The curriculum is modified to be appropriate to the child's functional level. Language instruction, organizational skills, sensory motor skills and activities of daily living are built into the structure of the school day. Social skills are addressed in the form of small group lessons addressing turn taking and waiting. APQI results for the 8:1:2 program were as follows:

Domain	Description	Score
Individual Evaluation:	Thorough diagnostic, developmental, and educational assessments using a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach are used to identify students' strengths and needs.	90%
Team approaches are utilized to evaluate each student's progress and functional level. The team includes, but is not limited to, a speech therapist, occupational therapist, social worker, psychologist and special education teacher. Each member of this team has been specifically trained in the area of autism. Not only as an overview of the disability, but also in relation to behavioral and educational characteristics unique to this disability. Deficit areas within this category relate to the availability of a variety of diagnostic tools specifically geared towards children with autism.		
Development of the IEP:	Use of evaluation results, parent and family concerns, and present levels of performance in developing individualized education programs to meet students' needs.	67%
Development of the IEP is an area of weakness due to the current district wide format utilized. The use of a goal bank often results in the use of general language in relation to goals. These goals often do not reflect the level of task analysis required to address the splinter skills of children with autism. Interaction with non disabled peers, while embedded into the program as much as possible, is not always reflected on the IEP. Augmentative and alternative communication systems are not always considered and reflected on the IEP. Parent Training and Counseling, as part of the NYSED Part 200.13 is mandated for students classified with Autism Spectrum Disorders. This is not consistently indicated as a related service on the IEP.		
Curriculum-	The program uses curriculum that addresses the significant skill deficits of students with autism as it relates to the NYS Learning Standards.	95%
Curriculum in the 8:1:2 setting is individualized and in accordance with the NYS Learning Standards. However, there is no set protocol in place to address maximizing independent functioning in home, school and community settings. Plans for the generalization of skills should be clearly defined.		
Instructional Activities	The program provides a variety of developmentally and functionally appropriate activities, experiences, and materials that engage students in meaningful learning.	100%
Instructional Methods:	Teaching methods reflect the unique needs of students with autism and are varied depending on developmental appropriateness and individual strengths and needs.	89%
The instructional methods reflect the needs of students with autism. However, there is no set protocol to teach the toleration of distractions in natural environments or any plans for generalization clearly defined. These protocols should be individually developed for each student and run as part of their educational program.		
Instructional Environments:	Educational environments provide a structure that builds on a student's strengths while minimizing those factors that most interfere with learning.	100%

Review and Monitoring of Progress	The program uses a collaborative, ongoing, systematic process for assessing student progress.	100%
Family Involvement and Support:	Parents are recognized and valued as full partners in the development and implementation of their child's IEPs	83%
Parents are considered an integral member of the team. However, the program is deficient in assisting parents with accessing services from other agencies (i.e. respite) on a regular basis.		
Inclusion:	Opportunities for interaction with non disabled peers are incorporated into the program	75%
There is no current social skill protocol or instruction utilized to assist students in interacting with non disabled peers. The amount of time the class spends with non disabled peers can be increased. However, it is important to note that this is a new program, in a new building. As the children and staff become more acclimated, this can be easily rectified. Additionally, non disabled peers should be provided with knowledge and support in relation to the disability in order to facilitate more meaningful interactions.		
Planning on move from one setting to another:	Parents and professionals work collaboratively in planning transitions from one classroom, program or service delivery system to another.	80%
Transition planning is still in the early stages for this program. While the goal is for these students to transition to a less restrictive environment, no planning has been done in regard to this area. A list of criteria for enrollment into each possible placement should be developed which would serve as a guide for teachers.		
Challenging behavior:	Positive behavior supports based on a functional behavioral assessment are used to address challenging behaviors.	81%
There is currently no school wide behavior support system that can address the significant behavioral needs of the students within this program. The evidence of the use of behavioral systems was inconsistent from class to class. A district wide behavior support system protocol is currently in the process of being developed and will assist in addressing these deficit issues district wide. This support system is to include an FBA (functional behavior analysis) for direct intervention planning, data collection, observational procedures, environmental generalizations, proactive procedures, reactive procedures, environmental accommodations, functional replacement behaviors, and long term outcomes.		
Community Collaboration:	This program links with community agencies to assist families in accessing supports and services needed by students with autism .	22%
The program is deficient in assisting parents with accessing services from other agencies (i.e. respite) on a regular basis. A parent manual should be developed to assist parents in becoming aware of such services. Ongoing support should be given to parents through the social work department. Parents must become fluent in navigating the maze of paperwork that is required to access services from NYS and OMRDD.		
Personnel :	Teachers, teacher aides and assistants, related services providers, school psychologists, administrators, and support staff are knowledgeable and skilled related to the education of students with autism.	83%
Staff in this program received an initial in service in working with students with Autism. Ongoing support and professional development in this area is deficient. Staff should receive training on an ongoing basis to assist them in developing proficient skills with regard to educating students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. This is especially important for teacher assistants and 1:1 aides. Staff must also be trained in aspects of scheduling and providing individualized instruction given the current class ratio.		
Program Evaluation:	Systematic examination of program implementation and impact is conducted, including the aggregation of individual student outcomes and consumer satisfaction.	67%
Student progress and parental feedback is given on an ongoing basis. However, there is no set system in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the program as a whole and consumer satisfaction. Each program should develop yearly goals (for the program, not only the students) and assess progress in relation to these goals each year. The APQI, standardized test scores, percentages of student mastery in regard to all domains can be used as measures.		
Overall Average Score		81%

12:1:1 S.T.E.P (K/1 and 2/3)

The S.T.E.P program has evolved since its inception in 2001. While the technical ratio of the S.T.E.P program is that of a 12:1:1, in actuality it is a 12:1:3. Each class level is at about 50% capacity. The S.T.E.P program only services students diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. The S.T.E.P program continues to include students for a portion of the school day. The K/1 class includes students from 9:15-11:30 daily with a 2:1 ratio supporting them in this environment. Students then return to the self contained portion of their day for whole group (7 students) instruction, pre-teach and re-teaching. Individualized instruction is not utilized. The 2/3 class runs in similar fashion, however students that are included have a 1:1 ratio (additional aides are available in this class). Two of the students are included for the majority of the day and return to the self contained class for a resource room period only. Those who are included for only half of the day then return to the self contained portion to participate in grade level small group instruction. Both sections of the S.T.E.P program are in alignment with the curriculum and materials provided in the mainstream settings. Modifications to these materials are implemented in the small group instruction by the special education teacher. In observing the students within the mainstream setting, support staff were not required to make any modifications and engaged mostly in prompting and redirection. Students in the S.T.E.P program participate in the regular NYS assessments. In regard to social deficits, no formalized social skills curriculum is utilized. However, it is highly emphasized and addressed daily, during group speech and language sessions. These skills are generalized to the mainstream setting when the opportunity arises, however, no social interaction was observed during mainstream observations. Behavior plans are implemented throughout the entirety of the school day. These plans are highly individualized and are monitored (with consistent data collection) on an ongoing basis. These plans are then adapted when necessary. APQI results for the S.T.E.P Program are as follows:

Domain	Description	Score
Individual Evaluation:	Thorough diagnostic, developmental, and educational assessments using a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach are used to identify students' strengths and needs.	90%
The multidisciplinary team that currently works with the STEP program is the most highly trained in the district with regard to working with students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Deficit areas within category relate to the availability of variety of diagnostic tools specifically geared towards children with autism. Report formats for IEP progress should also include detailed narratives in addition to current functional levels.		
Development of the IEP:	Use of evaluation results, parent and family concerns, and present levels of performance in developing individualized education programs to meet students' needs.	71%
Development of the IEP is an area of weakness due to the current district wide format utilized. The use of a goal bank often results in the use of general language in relation to goals. These goals often do not reflect the level of task analysis required to address the splinter skills of children with autism. Interaction with non disabled peers, while embedded into the program as much as possible, is not always reflected on the IEP. Augmentative and alternative communication systems are not always considered and reflected on the IEP.		
Curriculum-	The program uses curriculum that addresses the significant skill deficits of students with autism as it relates to the NYS Learning Standards.	90%
Curriculum in the STEP setting is in alignment with the NYS learning standards. Grade level curriculum is in alignment with that of the building level peers. However, differentiated instruction geared towards a		

student's functional level and the generalization of skills is not always evident. However, every opportunity is given to provide pre teach and re teach of the grade level curriculum.		
Instructional Activities	The program provides a variety of developmentally and functionally appropriate activities, experiences, and materials that engage students in meaningful learning.	93%
Instructional activities are appealing and focus on basic skills before complex skills. Skills are all presented using small group (STEP) and large group (inclusion) instruction. 1:1 teaching situations are not provided based upon the individual needs of the student.		
Instructional Methods:	Teaching methods reflect the unique needs of students with autism and are varied depending on developmental appropriateness and individual strengths and needs.	89%
The instructional methods reflect the general needs of students with autism. The degree of structure and intensity of teaching is not always geared to the functional abilities of the student. Additionally, plans for generalization are not clearly defined. These protocols should be individually developed for each student and run as part of their educational program.		
Instructional Environments:	Educational environments provide a structure that builds on a student's strengths while minimizing those factors that most interfere with learning.	100
Review and Monitoring of Progress	The program uses a collaborative, ongoing, systematic process for assessing student progress.	100
Family Involvement and Support:	Parents are recognized and valued as full partners in the development and implementation of their child's IEPs	100
Inclusion:	Opportunities for interaction with non disabled peers are incorporated into the program	92
The STEP program provides ample opportunities for students to be included with their grade level peers. Staff are assigned in a 2:1 ratio to shadow students in these environments. Students are expected to complete grade level assignments given modifications (but no modifications were observed). There is a school wide system of support for this process. The mainstream students have been working with these peers on an ongoing basis. However, there is no set curriculum in place to train non disabled peers and give them the knowledge and support required to facilitate and encourage spontaneous and meaningful interactions. It is currently done on an informal basis. This should become a formalized program.		
Planning on move from one setting to another:	Parents and professionals work collaboratively in planning transitions from one classroom, program or service delivery system to another.	93
Transition from one setting to another has been fairly systematic within the STEP program. However, a list of criteria for enrollment into each possible placement should be developed to serve as a guide for the teachers and families. Additionally, the goals and expectations for an "included" placement should be more clearly defined.		
Challenging behavior:	Positive behavior supports based on a functional behavioral assessment are used to address challenging behaviors.	89
There is currently no school wide behavior support system that can address the significant behavioral needs of the students within this program. Evidence of individualized behavior support plans was observed in both classes. A district wide behavior support system protocol is currently in the process of being developed that will assist in addressing these deficit issues district wide. This support system is to include an FBA (functional behavior analysis) for direct intervention planning, data collection, observational procedures, environmental generalizations, proactive procedures, reactive procedures, environmental accommodations, functional replacement behaviors, and long term outcomes.		
Community Collaboration:	This program links with community agencies to assist families in accessing supports and services needed by students with autism .	100
Personnel :	Teachers, teacher aides and assistants, related services providers, school psychologists, administrators, and support staff are knowledgeable and skilled related to the education of students with autism.	94
The STEP staff are the most highly trained staff in the district in regard to working with students with		

Autism. However, staff should receive training on an ongoing basis to assist them in developing and elaborating their skills in terms of working with children with ASD. This is especially important in regard to teacher assistants and 1:1 aides. Staff must also be trained in aspects of scheduling and providing individualized instruction given the current class ratio.		
Program Evaluation:	Systematic examination of program implementation and impact is conducted, including the aggregation of individual student outcomes and consumer satisfaction.	60
Student progress and parental feedback is given on an ongoing basis. However, there is no set system in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the program as a whole and consumer satisfaction. Each program should develop yearly goals (for the program, not only the students) and assess progress in relation to these goals each year. The APQI, standardized test scores, percentages of student mastery in regard to all domains can be used as measures.		
Overall Average Score		90%

12:1:1 Program

The 12:1:1 program consists of students classified with varying disabilities. 12:1:1 classes are offered from Kindergarten to 5th grade in two elementary schools. Few of the 12:1:1 classes are at maximum capacity. 12:1:1 classes stress academics through the use of whole, small group and some individualized instruction. 12:1:1 teacher's stay in alignment with grade level curriculum (12:1:1 teacher's plan with the mainstream teachers) with modifications implemented to facilitate independence. Most students participate in the state assessments with very few students engaging in the NYS Alternate Assessments. Students are mainstreamed into academic areas as appropriate as well as for lunch, recess and assemblies. Special areas are self contained in nature (except P.E). Due to the cross categorical nature of the classes (students have varying abilities and deficits, some students have social strengths and are appropriate social models), social skills are embedded into the classroom routine through structured cooperative learning experiences. No formal social skills curriculum is currently being utilized. There was a 5th grade class at Gaetlot that utilized a "Buddy System" with a mainstream 5th grade class. These two classes would team up weekly to facilitate social interactions between the two classes. Behavior modification plans are created but evidence of the utilization of these plans to address behaviors was not evident in all classes. APQI results for the 12:1:1 Program are as follows:

Domain	Description	Score
Individual Evaluation:	Thorough diagnostic, developmental, and educational assessments using a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach are used to identify students' strengths and needs.	67
Team approaches are utilized to evaluate each student's progress and functional level. The team includes but is not limited to a speech therapist, occupational therapist, social worker, psychologist and special education teacher. Few professionals on these teams have been trained in the area of autism, not only an overview of the disability but also in relation to the behavioral and educational characteristics unique to this disability. Training should be a focal area for all staff working with students with disabilities. Additional deficit areas within this category relate to the availability of a variety of diagnostic tools specifically geared towards children with autism. These diagnostic tools should be researched and placed as part of a battery of tests that can be consistently utilized from year to year for students with ASD.		
Development of the IEP:	Use of evaluation results, parent and family concerns, and present levels of performance in developing individualized education programs to meet students' needs.	62

Development of the IEP is an area of weakness due to the current district wide format utilized. The use of a goal bank often results in the use of general language in relation to goals. These goals often do not reflect the level of task analysis required to address the splinter skills of children with autism. Interaction goals with non disabled peers and classmates, are not always reflected on the IEP as an area of focus. Augmentative and alternative communication systems are not always considered and reflected on the IEP. Parent Training and Counseling, as part of the NYSED Part 200.13 is mandated for students classified with Autism Spectrum Disorders. This is not consistently indicated as a related service on the IEP.		
Curriculum-	The program uses curriculum that addresses the significant skill deficits of students with autism as it relates to the NYS Learning Standards.	48
Curriculum in the 12:1:1 setting is in accordance with the NYS Learning Standards. The level of individualized and or differentiated instruction varies from teacher to teacher. There is no set protocol in place to address maximizing independent functioning in home, school and community settings. Plans for the generalization of skills should be clearly defined. Curriculum that emphasizes communication and social skills should be clearly embedded into the daily routine.		
Instructional Activities	The program provides a variety of developmentally and functionally appropriate activities, experiences, and materials that engage students in meaningful learning.	73
1:1 instruction of the skills to be taught based on the individual needs of the students was minimal. Differentiated instruction of curriculum was not evident in all classes.		
Instructional Methods:	Teaching methods reflect the unique needs of students with autism and are varied depending on developmental appropriateness and individual strengths and needs.	33
The instructional methods utilized were not always adapted to the range of abilities within the classroom. Presentation of material was often not modified to meet the unique individual needs of each student with ASD in terms of both academic and language content. There was no set protocol evident to teach the toleration of distractions in natural environments or plans for generalization clearly defined. These protocols should be individually developed for each student and run as part of their educational program.		
Instructional Environments:	Educational environments provide a structure that builds on a student's strengths while minimizing those factors that most interfere with learning.	50
Environmental modifications to minimize distractions was inconsistent from classroom to classroom. Additionally the use of visual and communicative supports was also inconsistent. Environments should be modified with clearly defined boundaries to assist students with ASD in navigating the environment more independently.		
Review and Monitoring of Progress	The program uses a collaborative, ongoing, systematic process for assessing student progress.	100
Family Involvement and Support:	Parents are recognized and valued as full partners in the development and implementation of their child's IEPs	71
Parents are considered an integral member of the team. However, the program is deficient in assisting parents with accessing services from other agencies (i.e. respite) on a regular basis. Ongoing communication is inconsistent.		
Inclusion:	Opportunities for interaction with non disabled peers are incorporated into the program	42
There is no current social skill protocol or instruction utilized to assist students in interacting with non disabled peers. The amount of time the class spends with non disabled peers can be increased in a structured format. Additionally, non disabled peers should be provided with knowledge and support in relation to the disability in order to facilitate more meaningful interactions.		
Planning on move from one setting to another:	Parents and professionals work collaboratively in planning transitions from one classroom, program or service delivery system to another.	13
In observations and interviews with staff there appeared a lack of streamlining skills from one placement to another. A list of criteria for enrollment into each possible placement and skills required for each grade level should be developed. This would serve as a guide for the teachers. It would assist staff in ensuring they address all skills necessary (as well as the generalization of these skills). Additionally, transition support services for each child should be overseen by a staff member with a background in educating students with autism to make sure their unique needs are addressed during the transition process.		
Challenging behavior:	Positive behavior supports based on a functional behavioral assessment are used to address challenging behaviors.	30
There is currently no school wide behavior support system that can address the significant behavioral needs of the students within this program. The evidence in regard to the use of behavioral systems was inconsistent from class to class. A district wide		

behavior support system protocol is currently in the process of being developed that will assist in addressing these deficit issues district wide. This support system is to include an FBA (functional behavior analysis) for direct intervention planning, data collection, observational procedures, environmental generalizations, proactive procedures, reactive procedures, environmental accommodations, functional replacement behaviors, and long term outcomes.		
Community Collaboration:	This program links with community agencies to assist families in accessing supports and services needed by students with autism .	0
The program is deficient is assisting parents with accessing services from other agencies (i.e. respite) on a regular basis. A parent manual should be developed to assist parents in becoming aware of such services. Ongoing support should be given to parents through the social work department. Parents must become fluent in navigating the maze of paperwork that is required to access services from NYS and OMRDD.		
Personnel :	Teachers, teacher aides and assistants, related services providers, school psychologists, administrators, and support staff are knowledgeable and skilled related to the education of students with autism.	22
Staff in this program do not consistently receive training in working with students with Autism. Ongoing support and professional development in this area is deficient. Staff should receive training on an ongoing basis to assist them in developing proficient skills for educating students with Autism Spectrum Disorders.		
Program Evaluation:	Systematic examination of program implementation and impact is conducted, including the aggregation of individual student outcomes and consumer satisfaction.	40
Student progress and parental feedback is given on an ongoing basis. However, there is no set system in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the program as a whole and consumer satisfaction. Each program should develop yearly goals (for the program, not only the students) and assess progress in relation to these goals each year. The APQI, standardized test scores, percentages of student mastery of all domains can be used as measures.		
Overall Average Score		47%

15:1 Program

The 15:1:1 program consists of cross categorical populations. 15:1 classes are offered from Kindergarten to 5th grade in three elementary schools. Few of the 15:1 classes are at maximum capacity. 15:1 classes stress academics through the use of whole group instruction. 15:1 teacher's stay in alignment with grade level curriculum. All students participate in the state wide assessments. Students are mainstreamed into academic areas as appropriate for that individual child as well as for lunch, recess and assemblies. Special areas are self contained in nature (except P.E). No formal social skills curriculum is currently being utilized. The 15:1 programs can be highly behavioral in nature. Behavior modification plans are created to address these issues. The three buildings that house 15:1 classes have been assigned "Rethink Rooms" and "Rethink TA's", trained in crisis intervention, to assist staff in times of behavioral crisis. This was put into place to ensure the safety of the students and staff.. The "Rethink TA's" are distributed throughout the different classrooms as additional support when crisis intervention is not warranted. APQI assessments were not conducted, as no students placed in 15:1:1 classes have transitioned from the STEP program .

15:1 Integrated Program

At the elementary level, 15:1 students are placed in their appropriate grade level general education class with the necessary support services. A special education teacher and teacher assistant work with the regular education teacher throughout the day. APQI assessments were not conducted at this time. Focus was on self contained settings for this particular needs assessment.

Secondary

Best Buddies:

Sachem is currently utilizing a grant to implement the “Best Buddies” program in two of the middle schools, Sequoya and Samoset. The Best Buddies Program is a not for profit agency that trains non disabled peers on how to facilitate social friendships with their disabled peers.

Middle Schools:

As a transition model, 6th grade students (special education and non special education) are kept separate from other sections of the building. This allows students to become familiarized with the building in a more systematic fashion.

Collaborative Program:

Collaborative Programs are available at all four Middle School Buildings. Collaborative programs utilize 2 teachers (1 regular education and 1 special education) for extra support within the classroom settings. Collaborative programs are totally departmentalized. Classes are a combination of disabled and non disabled peers. A 1:3 ratio is the goal for each section. Re-teach periods are built into the program to address areas of academic difficulties. Pullouts for related services are utilized only if absolutely necessary due to the rigors of the secondary schedule. Push in services are the related service model of choice. Students in the collaborative programs partake in the all NYS assessments and are regents bound classes. For students requiring social skill development within the collaborative setting, groups are run with the psychologist during lunch periods to role play social situations and teach problem solving skills. These groups are limited to those requiring social skill instruction. All attempts are made to pair higher functioning students with lower functioning students to provide appropriate social models. Behaviors are addressed through classroom behavior modification supports and additional supports from the school psychologist of necessary.

15:1 program

Students in the 15:1 program are Regents or RCT bound. The 15:1 program is departmentalized and students are mainstreamed into subject areas as appropriate. Students are required to complete all grade level curriculum and state assessments. The 15:1 model allows for a slightly slower pace to assist students who are having difficulty obtaining and retaining the information. Pullouts for related services are utilized

only if absolutely necessary. Push in services are the related service model of choice. For students requiring social skill development within the 15:1 setting, groups are run with the psychologist during lunch periods to role play social situations and teach problem solving skills. State mandates in regard to curriculum and instruction leave little flexibility in the secondary schedule to address these issues formally at any other time. These groups are limited to those requiring social skill instruction (unless there are student volunteers) but all attempts are made to pair higher functioning students with lower functioning students (when available) in order to provide appropriate social models. Behaviors are addressed through classroom behavior modification supports and additional supports from the school psychologist if necessary. If more intensive behavioral supports are necessary, the district wide behavior specialist can be utilized.

12:1:1 Program

Students in the 12:1:1 program require additional modifications and supports in order to complete grade appropriate curriculum assignments. 12:1:1 classes limit transitions throughout the day as well. Students within the 12:1:1 setting partake in both the NYS Statewide assessments as well as the NYS Alternate Assessments, dependent on the student's individual needs. 12:1:1 teachers stay in alignment with grade level curriculum with modifications implemented to facilitate independence in regard to the material as well as functional applications when appropriate. Students can be mainstreamed into 15:1 or mainstream settings for specific subject areas where appropriate. The self contained setting allows for teachers to implement cooperative learning groups that emphasize not only curriculum content but appropriate social skills as well. Behaviors are addressed through classroom behavior modification supports and additional supports from the school psychologist if necessary. If more intensive behavioral supports are necessary, the district wide behavior specialist can be utilized. During observations, there was evidence of adequate supports for students with ASD. Modifications were embedded into each lesson to facilitate independence as well as social modeling.

8:1:1 Program:

The 8:1:1 Program emphasizes academic skills that are necessary in everyday life, preparing students to be independent members of the community. 8:1:1 classes emphasize functional academics, language skills, activities of daily living and prevocational skills. Social skills are taught as part of the program, with the skills embedded into the everyday curriculum, as well as taught as separate lessons. 8:1:1 programs often combine together to work on students tolerating increased ratios and generalization of skills. The students in the 8:1:1 program participate in school wide work programs and community integration. During observations, there was evidence of adequate supports for students with ASD. Visuals were incorporated throughout, modifications embedded into each lesson to facilitate independence as well as social modeling.

The APQI in regard to Sachem Middle School programs results are as follows:

Domain	Description	Score
Individual Evaluation:	Thorough diagnostic, developmental, and educational assessments using a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach are used to identify students' strengths and needs.	63
Classified students are evaluated by multidisciplinary teams. However, not all members of these teams have training specific to Autism. Evaluation teams should receive ongoing training in ASD. Additional deficit areas within this category relate to the availability of variety of diagnostic tools specifically geared towards children with autism. These diagnostic tools should be researched and placed as part of a battery of tests that can be consistently utilized from year to year for students with ASD. Evaluations and progress notes should be written in narrative form in order to specifically address all splinter skills.		
Development of the IEP:	Use of evaluation results, parent and family concerns, and present levels of performance in developing individualized education programs to meet students' needs.	57
Development of the IEP is an area of weakness due to the current district wide format utilized. The use of a goal bank often results in the use of general language in relation to goals. These goals often do not reflect the level of task analysis required to address the splinter skills of children with autism. Interaction goals with non disabled peers and classmates are not always reflected on the IEP as an area of focus. Augmentative and alternative communication systems are not always considered and reflected on the IEP. Parent Training and Counseling, as part of the NYSED Part 200.13 is mandated for students classified with Autism Spectrum Disorders. This is not consistently indicated as a related service on the IEP.		
Curriculum-	The program uses curriculum that addresses the significant skill deficits of students with autism as it relates to the NYS Learning Standards.	62
At the middle school level grade level curriculum (given modifications) continues to be the focus. Independent functioning and community integration is just beginning at this level. Although time and schedule constraints do not always afford this opportunity, teachers should attempt to embed social skill development, functional living skills, communication skills into their daily lessons on a more consistent basis.		
Instructional Activities	The program provides a variety of developmentally and functionally appropriate activities, experiences, and materials that engage students in meaningful learning.	73
Differentiated instruction was observed at different levels in the varied classes. 1:1 instruction based upon the individual needs of the students was minimal. Curriculum pace did not always appear to afford the repetition of skills necessary for many students with ASD. There was no set protocol evident to teach for the generalization of skills. Clearly defined protocols should be individually developed for each student and run as part of their educational program.		
Instructional Methods:	Teaching methods reflect the unique needs of students with autism are varied depending on developmental appropriateness and individual strengths and needs.	61
The instructional methods utilized were not always adapted to the range of abilities within the classroom. Presentation of material was often not modified to meet the individual needs of each student in regard to the unique needs of students with ASD in terms of both academic and language content. There was no set protocol evident to teach the toleration of distractions in natural environments or plans for generalization clearly defined. These protocols should be individually developed for each student and run as part of their educational program.		
Instructional Environments:	Educational environments provide a structure that builds on a student's strengths while minimizing those factors that most interfere with learning.	100
Review and Monitoring of Progress	The program uses a collaborative, ongoing, systematic process for assessing student progress.	92
Review and monitoring of progress was systematic. There are some deficiencies in monitoring for progress in the generalization of skills across all environments.		
Family Involvement and Support:	Parents are recognized and valued as full partners in the development and implementation of their child's IEPs	62
Parents are considered an integral member of the team. However, the program is deficient in assisting parents with accessing services from other agencies (i.e. respite) on a regular basis as well as offering Parent Training services and support groups. Ongoing communication is inconsistent.		

Inclusion:	Opportunities for interaction with non disabled peers are incorporated into the program	33
The middle school program does not have ample opportunities within the confines of the school day (Best Buddies is after school) for students to interact with their non disabled peers. There is no current social skill protocol or instruction utilized to assist students in interacting with non disabled peers. Additionally, non disabled peers should be provided with knowledge and support in relation to the disability in order to facilitate more meaningful interactions.		
Planning on move from one setting to another:	Parents and professionals work collaboratively in planning transitions from one classroom, program or service delivery system to another.	60
A list of criteria for enrollment into each possible placement and the skills required for each grade level should be developed. This would serve as a guide for the teachers. It would assist staff in ensuring they address all skills necessary (as well as the generalization of these skills). Additionally, transition support services for each child should be overseen by a staff member with a background in educating students with autism to make sure their unique needs are addressed during the transition process.		
Challenging behavior:	Positive behavior supports based on a functional behavioral assessment are used to address challenging behaviors.	32
There is currently no school wide behavior support system that can address the significant behavioral needs of the students within this program. The evidence of the use of behavioral systems was inconsistent from class to class. A district wide behavior support system protocol is currently in the process of being developed that will assist in addressing these deficit issues district wide. This support system is to include an FBA (functional behavior analysis) for direct intervention planning, data collection, observational procedures, environmental generalizations, proactive procedures, reactive procedures, environmental accommodations, functional replacement behaviors, and long term outcomes.		
Community Collaboration:	_This program links with community agencies to assist families in accessing supports and services needed by students with autism .	25
The program is deficient in assisting parents with accessing services from other agencies (i.e. respite) on a regular basis. A parent manual should be developed to assist parents in becoming aware of such services. Ongoing support should be given to parents through the social work department. Parents must become fluent in navigating the maze of paperwork that is required to access services from NYS and OMRDD.		
Personnel :	Teachers, teacher aides and assistants, related services providers, school psychologists, administrators, and support staff are knowledgeable and skills related to the education of students with autism.	61
Staff in these programs received a general in-service for working with students with Autism. Ongoing support and professional development in this area is deficient. Staff should receive training on an ongoing basis to assist them in developing proficient skills for educating students with Autism Spectrum Disorders.		
Program Evaluation:	Systematic examination of program implementation and impact is conducted, including the aggregation of individual student outcomes and consumer satisfaction.	53
There is currently no set system in place to evaluate the effectiveness of each of the educational programs as a whole in regard to addressing the needs of students with ASD as well as consumer satisfaction. Each program should develop yearly goals (for the program, not only the students) and assess progress in relation to these goals each year. The APQI, standardized test scores, percentages of student mastery in regard to all domains can be used as measures.		
Overall Average Score		60%

High School

Collaborative Program:

Collaborative Programs are available at both High School campuses. Collaborative programs utilize 2 teachers (1 regular education and 1 special education) for extra support within the classroom settings.

Collaborative programs are totally departmentalized. Classes are a combination of disabled and non

disabled peers. Re-teach periods are built into the program to address areas of academic difficulties for 9th and 10th grades only. Students in the collaborative program partake in all NYS Regents Assessments. Social skills are not addressed within the collaborative program. However if students are having difficulty they can make appointments to meet with the school psychologist or guidance counselor to address these issues. Behaviors are addressed on an as needed basis only.

15:1 Program

Students in the 15:1 program are Regents bound. The 15:1 program is departmentalized and students are mainstreamed into subject areas as appropriate. Students are required to complete all grade level curriculum and Regents Assessments. Pullouts for related services are utilized only if absolutely necessary so that students do not miss opportunities to earn graduation credit. Social skills are not addressed within the 15:1 program. However if students are having difficulty they can make appointments to meet with the school psychologist or guidance counselor to address these issues. Behaviors are addressed on an as needed basis only.

12:1:1 Program

12:1:1 programs are divided into two sections, 12:1:1 High and 12:1:1 Low.

12:1:1 High

The 9/10 12:1:1 High class is currently housed at Sachem East. This program is completely departmentalized and the students partake in a RCT curriculum when appropriate.

The 11/12 12:1:1 High is currently housed at Sachem East. This program is ½ day functional academics and ½ day community skills center (students partake in the in district program or are transported to vocational BOCES center where appropriate). This program also addresses generalization of skills learned through the implementation of internship programs within the community.

12:1:1 Low

The 9/10 12:1:1 low is currently located at Sachem North. These students address grade level curriculum with extensive modifications and concentration on functionality of these academics. Students in the 9/10 12:1:1 low remain at Sachem North all day. In addition to academics, emphasis is placed on communication skills and cooperative social/work skills within the classroom setting.

The 11/12 12:1:1 low classes are currently located at Sachem North & East. This program is a community skills class which focuses on communication, activities of daily living and pre vocational skills. The 11/12 12:1:1 participates in a ½ functional academics and ½ day day community skills curriculum (provided at Sachem East or BOCES center)

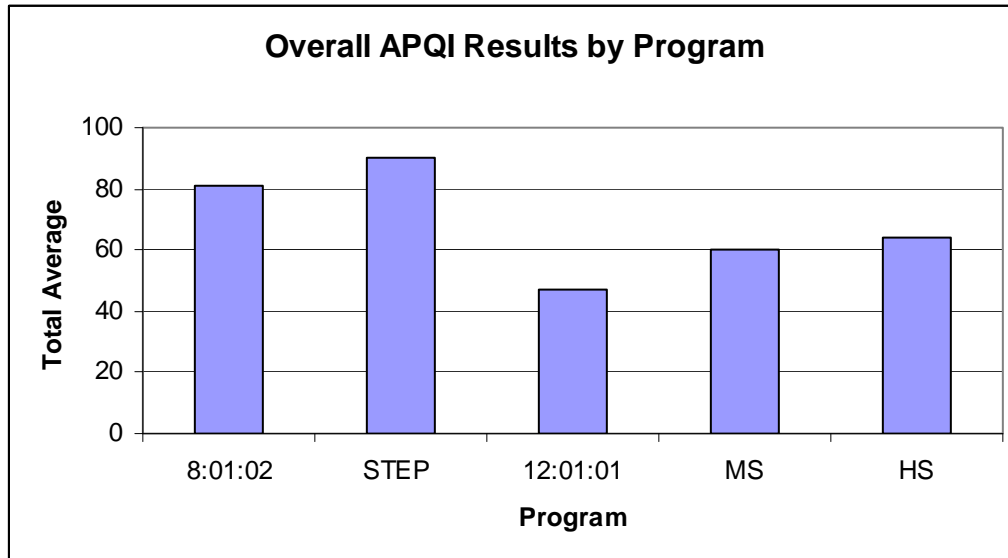
8:1:1 Program:

The 8:1:1 program housed at Sachem North focuses on functional academics, language and appropriate social skills. Students are required to practice negotiating through the building. Students engage in supported employment opportunities as well as practice vocational skills, activities of daily living skills and school to work skills on a daily basis.

The APQI results in regard to Sachem High School 12:1:1 and 8:1:1 programs is as follows:

Domain	Description	Score
Individual Evaluation:	Thorough diagnostic, developmental, and educational assessments using a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach are used to identify students' strengths and needs.	67
Classified students are evaluated by multidisciplinary teams. However, not all members of these teams have training specific to Autism. Evaluation teams should receive ongoing training in ASD. Additional deficit areas within this category relate to the availability of a variety of diagnostic tools specifically geared towards children with autism. These diagnostic tools should be researched and placed as part of a battery of tests that can be consistently utilized from year to year for students with ASD. Evaluations and progress notes should be written in narrative form in order to specifically address all splinter skills.		
Development of the IEP:	Use of evaluation results, parent and family concerns, and present levels of performance in developing individualized education programs to meet students' needs.	57
Development of the IEP is an area of weakness due to the current district wide format utilized. The use of a goal bank often results in the use of general language in relation to goals. These goals often do not reflect the level of task analysis required to address the splinter skills of children with autism. Interaction goals with non disabled peers and classmates are not always reflected on the IEP as an area of focus. Augmentative and alternative communication systems are not always considered and reflected on the IEP. Parent Training and Counseling, as part of the NYSED Part 200.13 is mandated for students classified with Autism Spectrum Disorders. This is not consistently indicated as a related service on the IEP.		
Curriculum-	The program uses curriculum that addresses the significant skill deficits of students with autism as it relates to the NYS Learning Standards.	81
The HS programs currently utilize highly individualized and functional curriculums. Deficiencies in this area relate to the emphasis of the curriculum on the development of functional communication systems for both verbal and non verbal students with autism and the systematic generalization of skills to more complex environments. Official protocols should be written on how staff wish to achieve these goals with their students.		
Instructional Activities	The program provides a variety of developmentally and functionally appropriate activities, experiences, and materials that engage students in meaningful learning.	73
Differentiated instruction was observed in the varied classes. Evidence of 1:1 instruction based on the individual needs of the students was minimal. Curriculum pace did not always appear to afford the repetition of skills necessary for many students with ASD. There was no set protocol evident to teach for the generalization of skills. Clearly defined protocols should be individually developed for each student and run as part of their educational program.		
Instructional Methods:	Teaching methods reflect the unique needs of students with autism are varied depending on developmental appropriateness and individual strengths and needs.	72
While instructional methods were focused on functionality in most classes, the degree of structure and intensity of teaching using multiple modalities suitable for children with ASD (highly visual) was not always evident. In addition there was no clear plan showing methods for systematically promoting the maintenance and generalization of learned skills to new environments. There was some evidence of this in the pre vocational program and the assessment rubrics. Formalized protocols for generalization and maintenance should be embedded into each component of the HS program.		
Instructional Environments:	Educational environments provide a structure that builds on a student's strengths while minimizing those factors that most interfere with learning.	100

Review and Monitoring of Progress	The program uses a collaborative, ongoing, systematic process for assessing student progress.	92
Review and monitoring of progress was systematic. There are some deficiencies in monitoring for progress and generalization of skills across all environments.		
Family Involvement and Support:	Parents are recognized and valued as full partners in the development and implementation of their child's IEPs	57
The program is deficient is assisting parents with accessing services from other agencies (i.e. respite)at a younger age. This information is thoroughly provided upon entrance to the vocational program. Parent Training services and support groups should be offered. Ongoing communication is inconsistent.		
Inclusion:	Opportunities for interaction with non disabled peers are incorporated into the program	33
The HS program does not have ample opportunities within the confines of the school day for students to interact with their non disabled peers. There is no current social skill protocol or instruction utilized to assist students in interacting with non disabled peers. Additionally, non disabled peers should be provided with knowledge and support in relation to the disability in order to facilitate more meaningful interactions.		
Planning on move from one setting to another:	Parents and professionals work collaboratively in planning transitions from one classroom, program or service delivery system to another.	80
The HS program has systematic procedures in place to facilitate transitions between environments. The deficiencies in this area result from not having transition support services provided by personnel with a background specific to ASD.		
Challenging behavior:	Positive behavior supports based on a functional behavioral assessment are used to address challenging behaviors.	32
There is currently no school wide behavior support system that can address the significant behavioral needs of the students within this program. The evidence in regard to the use of behavioral systems was not evident. A district wide behavior support system protocol is currently in the process of being developed that will assist in addressing these deficit issues district wide. This support system is to include an FBA (functional behavior analysis) for direct intervention planning, data collection, observational procedures, environmental generalizations, proactive procedures, reactive procedures, environmental accommodations, functional replacement behaviors, and long term outcomes.		
Community Collaboration:	This program links with community agencies to assist families in accessing supports and services needed by students with autism .	33
The program is deficient is assisting parents with accessing services from other agencies (i.e. respite)on a regular basis. A parent manual should be developed to assist parents in becoming aware of such services. Ongoing support should be given to parents through the social work department. Parents must become fluent in navigating the maze of paperwork that is required to access services from NYS and OMRDD.		
Personnel :	Teachers, teacher aides and assistants, related services providers, school psychologists, administrators, and support staff are knowledgeable and skills related to the education of students with autism.	56
Staff in these programs received a general in-service in regard to working with students with Autism. Ongoing support and professional development in this area is deficient. Staff should receive training on an ongoing basis to assist them in developing proficient skills in regard to educating students with Autism Spectrum Disorders.		
Program Evaluation:	Systematic examination of program implementation and impact is conducted, including the aggregation of individual student outcomes and consumer satisfaction.	67
There is currently no set system in place to evaluate the effectiveness of each of the educational programs as a whole in regard to addressing the needs of students with ASD as well as consumer satisfaction. Each program should develop yearly goals (for the program, not only the students) and assess progress in relation to these goals each year. The APQI, standardized test scores, percentages of student mastery in regard to all domains can be used as measures.		
Overall Average Score:		64%



V. Summary & Recommendations:

The Sachem 8:1:2 program and STEP program had adequate results in relation to the APQI. The one area that was consistently deficient in these programs as well as all other programs was program evaluation. It is strongly recommended that the APQI be conducted every year to assist in facilitating ongoing program evaluation. Student testing results should also be compared in order to demonstrate program effectiveness.

12:1:1, Middle School and HS programs did not score as well. These are all excellent, well established, structured programs. These programs were originally not developed for students with ASD specifically in mind. This is why the APQI scores appear low. However, the foundations of these programs are sufficient to educate students with Autism if the programs are given additional support. The cross categorical nature of these programs afford social opportunities and models not available to students in a program designated specifically for students with ASD. The following components are recommended to assist these programs in more efficiently addressing the needs of students with autism and providing a continuum of services for students with Autism throughout the district.

- 1) Appropriate Staff Identification, Staff Training and Supports-
- a. Teachers should be identified in each building that will be working with students with Autism. Staff members should be provided ongoing training in the areas of: autism spectrum disorders, behavior management, prompting, prompt fading, increasing independence, differentiating instruction, embedding social skills into the curriculum, modifications and alternate curriculums. They should meet one time quarterly to continue professional development skills.
 - b. New teachers should be identified each year with the goal of all special education teachers being trained in educating students with ASD.
 - c. A support staff cohort should be identified. This cohort would consist of teacher assistants and teacher aides specifically trained in working with students with autism. These staff members would be extensively trained in all areas of working with students with ASD. They would not be assigned to a building but rather be categorized as district wide staff. This would offer the Office of Student Services a pool of appropriate staff to pull from and assign to buildings on an as needed basis. This will also allow staff to be rotated in order to deter student dependency on any particular staff. Staff should not be assigned to any individual student for more than 2 years consecutively. The number of staff trained should be equal to no less than 1 TA and 1 aide per special education setting. This cohort would then meet quarterly to continue professional development skills.

Total anticipated TA's for cohort: 15 Elementary, 6 Secondary

Total anticipate aides for cohort: 15 Elemntary, 6 Secondary

Training Schedule (For Identified Teachers and Support Staff Cohort): Total hours 18

April- 2 ½ day trainings for the Overview to Autism and ASD

May- 2 ½ day trainings on Addressing Behaviors and data collection

June- 2 ½ day trainings on prompting, modifications and classroom supports.

Trainings will be conducted by in district specialists (Home Program Supervisors and Behavior Specialist). The training curriculum will be developed by an outside party specializing in educating Autism Spectrum Disorders.

- d. Staff ratio should be reviewed. For self contained settings consisting of more than 2 students with autism an additional staff member should be considered. The additional staff member would be assigned from the Autism cohort and would be responsible for all academic modifications for those students with autism. This additional staff member would also be responsible for inclusion opportunities and any individualized instruction for these students. The increased ratio would allow for the individualization required for students with Autism. Shared teaching assistants from the Autism cohort should also be utilized in inclusion settings.
- e. A consultant teacher position should also be created (especially in the MS & HS). This individual would be a certified special education teacher with a specialty in Autism. They would travel between the 4 Middle Schools. This person would be responsible for all the students with ASD as their consultant teacher (push in model, no frequency on IEP). The teacher would be responsible for creating modifications for the classroom staff, behavior plans and would act as the child's case manager. This would streamline the process.
- f. Staff working with students with Autism would have common planning time weekly in order to facilitate consistency in the implementation of protocols across all staff members.

2) Behavior Specialist Support-

- a) Currently there are only two behavior specialists to support the entire district. While these behavior specialists do their best to address all issues that arise, the caseload does not afford them the opportunity to their job as effectively as possible. In order to

assist psychologists in the development and monitoring of effective behavior intervention plans, it is recommended that the psychologists and behavior specialists meet 2x monthly to address a building's behavioral concerns. Data should be collected and analyzed at these meetings and the results collated and placed by the psychologist in the student's file. This would shape the behavior specialists role into a "mentor" position. Additionally the possibility of adding a third behavior specialist should be considered in order to assist with this task.

- b) Every student with Autism should have a behavior support plan on file. This BSP plan should not only address interfering behaviors but behavioral strategies to facilitate independence and social skills. These plans should be reviewed on an ongoing basis and should follow a student to any change in placement. A district wide format and procedure manual should be developed. This will ensure consistency from placement to placement.
- c) Each building should identify who is responsible for the creation and the monitoring of the implementation of the plan.
- d) Teams should be conducted for outgoing and upcoming staff to review the behavior support plans for all transitioning students.

3) Social Skills-

Structured social skill development is an area that would benefit from formalized instruction.

- a) Implement a structured social skills program with clearly defined objectives and lessons as part of the curriculum. Middle School and High School Students can address this curriculum twice weekly during social skills groups conducted during lunch sessions or have it embedded into their speech and language activities.

- b) Middle School and High School students would be offered a 3:1 ratio of support staff from the Autism cohort to attend after school clubs.
- c) Have social skills accountability with teachers. Plan books should state the social skills that are being embedded into each content area lesson.
- d) “Buddy Systems”. Each elementary self contained class should be designated a “buddy” class. These two classes should combine 1x weekly for a group lesson or project.
- e) Identify peers for social groups/ Best Buddies in September or at “clubs fair”
- f) Building level meetings should be conducted in order to address how they wish to implement training for non disabled peers providing them with knowledge and support in relation to the disability in order to facilitate more meaningful interactions.

Timeline for Social Skills

March 2008- Identify Social skills curriculum to be used.

May 2008- Identify individuals in each building who is responsible for ensuring social skills curriculum are implemented in classrooms as well as implementing “lunch buddies”

June 2008- Buddy teams identified for the 08/09 school year. Each building should review what is expected at building level faculty meetings.

4) Home/ School Communication-

- a) Home school communication currently varies from class to class and from building to building. Part of the APQI is parent involvement and articulation of progress. Students with Autism often cannot convey information to parents due to language deficits. A standardized communication form should be developed to depict home school communication. There should

be a standard form for elementary and a standard form for secondary.

- b) Parent Meetings are an integral part of home school communication. Team meetings involving the parents should be a designated part of the program at a frequency of 1x quarterly.

Time line for home/ school collaboration:

March 2008- Survey goes out to parents on what they feel is important.

Survey goes out to staff to determine what they feel is critical.

May 2008- Team develops forms for Elem and Secondary programs and are submitted for review.

June 2008- forms finalized and reviewed with school teams for consistent implementation.

5) Program Outlines-

- a) To deter misinformation and to facilitate consistency, outlines of each program should be developed.
- b) In addition to a program overview, procedures in parent contact, team meetings, behavior plan review and evaluation procedures should be depicted.
- c) Each program should develop:
 - Clearly defined criteria for entrance into the program
 - Clearly defined criteria for exiting the program into a less restrictive environment.
 - Clearly defined criteria that would warrant discharge into a more restrictive placement.

These guidelines will assist in appropriate student placements.

Timeline

Outlines completed by April 2008

6) Transitions-

Systematic Transition Plans should be developed for all students transitioning from one environment to another (both between and within buildings).

Timeline for Transitions:

February 2008- Transition plan format developed

March 2008- Transition plan format submitted to building for feedback.

May 2008- Transition plans begin implementation.

7) 12:1:1 Emphasis-

While providing consistent and appropriate support for children with Autism K-12 is priority, particular attention should be placed on the 12:1:1 programs. Given the additional training and supports, these programs would mirror the STEP 2 program. Students would then be able to transition from the STEP K/1 class to a 12:1:1 placement in a school that matches the child's natural feeder pattern. This would allow for relationships to develop that can continue past the elementary level. In addition, placement in 12:1:1 classes that are cross categorical in nature would afford students additional opportunities to address social interaction with students who do not have social deficits.

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AUTISM PROGRAM **QUALITY INDICATORS**

A SELF-REVIEW AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS SERVING STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

August 2001

**The University of the State of New York
New York State Education Department
Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities
Albany, NY 12234**

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FOREWORD

August 2001

Dear Parents and School Personnel:

Children with autism present unique and challenging needs that require specific focus in their educational programs. Autism is a pervasive developmental disability, and while there are common features of autism, there is also great variability in the disorder. There are different learning techniques and environments that will be more effective for certain children with autism than for others. Therefore, it is essential that school personnel and families work closely together to identify and develop quality programs to address the individual needs of each child.

This publication provides Autism Program Quality Indicators (APQI), intended as a self-review and quality improvement guide for schools and programs serving students with autism spectrum disorders. The APQI were developed by the New York Autism Network at the request of the New York State Education Department. The APQI promote the goal that all students in New York State receive special education that meets high educational standards by providing benchmarks of quality programs that result in successful outcomes for students with autism. The APQI are a compilation of research-based components that have been linked to high quality and effective educational programs for students with autism. The items on the APQI were derived from a variety of sources including a review of the scientific literature, professional experience and input and review by national experts in the field of autism. The APQI were also reviewed by representatives from the regional advisory groups to the New York Autism Network, including parents of students with autism, advocacy groups and school personnel.

I encourage schools to use the APQI to conduct periodic self-reviews of the programs and services provided to children with autism and to address quality improvement as needed. I also encourage parents of children with autism to use the APQI as benchmarks of quality programs for their children. The APQI will help parents to identify those features of educational supports and services that combine to result in effective programs, regardless of specific educational methodologies used.

If you have specific questions regarding the APQI, please direct your inquiries to the Special Education Policy Unit at 518-473-2878. If you would like to receive notification of our publications via e-mail, register at web.nysed.gov/vesid/register.htm. This publication is also available on the web at web.nysed.gov/vesid/sped/Autism/Autism.htm.

Sincerely,

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Education Department. For further information, contact the Special Education Policy Unit at the State Education Department at (518) 473-2878 or write to VESID, Special Education Policy Unit, Room 1624 One Commerce Plaza, Albany, New York 12234

AUTISM PROGRAM QUALITY INDICATORS

The Autism Program Quality Indicators (APQI) are a compilation of the best practices in educating students with autism, which were developed to serve as a means of guiding quality improvement activities for schools and programs serving children with autism in New York State.

Structure and Content of the APQI

The APQI are organized into the following 14 areas with the seven categories in the left-hand column relating to the specific aspects of the educational process for students, and the seven categories in the right-hand column referring more broadly to program characteristics and supports.

- [Individual Evaluation](#)
- [Development of the Individualized Education Program \(IEP\)](#)
- [Curriculum](#)
- [Instructional Activities](#)
- [Instructional Methods](#)
- [Instructional Environments](#)
- [Review and Monitoring of Progress and Outcomes](#)
- [Family Involvement and Support](#)
- [Inclusion](#)
- [Planning the Move from One Setting to Another](#)
- [Challenging Behavior](#)
- [Community Collaboration](#)
- [Personnel](#)
- [Program Evaluation](#)

Each of the 14 areas is described by a single summary sentence, followed by more specific "quality indicators." The items contained within the APQI do not reflect specific instructional strategies or theoretical approaches. Instead, they reflect methods that have consistently been found to be effective in improving learning in children with autism. Additionally, where items reflect practices that are broadly appropriate to educating all children (e.g., involving and supporting families in the educational process), the APQI focus on those aspects most important for educating students with autism. (1)

How should the APQI be used?

The APQI were developed to apply to programs that serve children between the ages of 3 and 21, on the full range of the autism spectrum (including Asperger syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder–Not Otherwise Specified {PDD-NOS}) and ability levels, and in all educational settings. Some items may, therefore, not apply to every program. The purpose of the APQI is to provide a tool for schools or programs to self-evaluate educational services as a whole rather than an evaluation of services provided to any specific child. A program would rate itself on the degree to which there is evidence supporting that a particular item or practice is in place. In this way, the APQI may serve as a quality improvement tool in which programs note relative strengths and weaknesses. Given the indicators cover such a wide range of educational practices, it is highly unlikely that any program would have clear evidence of every quality indicator.

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Development of the APQI

The APQI were developed over a one-year period by the New York Autism Network (NYAN) at the request of the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) of the New York State Education Department. NYAN is a consortium of four regional centers with a shared focus of promoting effective educational approaches for students with autism. NYAN is funded by the New York State Education Department.

The items on the APQI were derived from a variety of sources including federal and State law and regulations, scientific evidence, and professional experience. The APQI were developed first by examining the professional literature to identify likely dimensions for the scale. The next step was to identify key quality components specific to autism in each of these areas. A preliminary draft of the APQI was field tested with the NYAN regional advisory groups. Information from the advisory groups was compiled into a working draft of the APQI (dated 11/6/00) that was shared with national experts and VESID representatives for their comments. These comments led to a significant re-focusing of the APQI on making it as autism specific as possible. A number of interim versions were shared with NYAN staff, representatives from programs and advocacy groups, national experts, and VESID staff. The resulting document (6/15/01) has been strengthened considerably by the input of these many people.

Scoring the APQI

The APQI uses a four-point rating system, plus a Not Applicable rating, as follows:

Score	Description
NA	Not applicable. The program is not responsible for this area.
0	There is no evidence of this indicator.
1	There is minimal to no evidence of this indicator, but clear evidence exists that the program is in the process of planning for implementation and/or staff development in this area.
2	There is some evidence of this indicator <i>or</i> there is clear evidence of the indicator for only a portion of students with autism.
3	This quality indicator is clearly evident for all students with autism.

These ratings can be applied to each of the items and a summary rating can be given to each area. A summary table at the end of the scale allows programs to identify areas of relative strength and weakness.

AUTISM PROGRAM QUALITY INDICATORS

Score	Description
NA	Not applicable. The program is not responsible for this area.
0	There is no evidence of this indicator.
1	There is minimal evidence of this indicator, but clear evidence exists that the program is in the process of planning for implementation and/or staff development.
2	There is some evidence of this indicator <i>or</i> there is clear evidence of the indicator for only a portion of students with autism.
3	This quality indicator is clearly evident for all students with autism.

INDIVIDUAL EVALUATION: Thorough diagnostic, developmental, and educational assessments using a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach are used to identify students' strengths and needs.		Score	Comments
1)	Evaluations are conducted by multidisciplinary teams made up of qualified personnel who are familiar with the characteristics and response patterns of students with autism.		
2)	The medical and developmental history review factors specific to autism.		
3)	Evaluations include the examination of the individual skills and strengths of students with autism, as well as their needs.		

4)	Evaluations use a variety of measures and sources of information, including: a) appropriate standardized, developmental, and observational methods, b) autism-specific measures, c) parent and family input, d) review of recent progress and functional level.		
5)	For both verbal and nonverbal students, speech and language evaluations use standardized measures, parental report, observation, and spontaneous language samples to assess: a) receptive language, b) expressive language, c) speech production, d) communicative intent, e) pragmatics.		
6)	Evaluation reports integrate results from all areas in ways that lead directly to programmatic recommendations for instruction.		
7)	Evaluation reports are written in a meaningful, understandable manner.		
8)	Evaluation reports are shared with the student (if appropriate), parents, educators, and other professionals who work collaboratively with the family.		
Summary Rating for Individual Evaluation			

DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM: The Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) and the Committee on Special Education (CSE) use evaluation results, parent and family concerns, and present levels of performance in developing individualized education programs (IEPs) to meet students' needs.		Score	Comments
1)	The IEP identifies developmental, health, social-emotional, and behavioral needs.		
2)	While the IEP addresses a broad range of developmental and educational needs, it specifically includes the areas of: a) communication, b) social interaction, c) behavior and emotional development, d) play and use of leisure time.		
3)	Goals and objectives: a) relate directly to the student's present level of performance and identified needs, b) reflect parental input and family concerns, c) are observable and measurable, relate to long-term outcomes, d) are selected to achieve long-term outcomes.		
4)	The IEP identifies program modifications, including environmental and instructional adaptations and accommodations, that are needed to support the student.		
5)	"Parent counseling and training" is indicated as a related service as appropriate.		
6)	Augmentative and alternative communication systems are considered for students with limited verbal abilities.		
7)	Opportunities for interaction with nondisabled peers are provided as appropriate.		

Summary Rating for Development of the IEP		
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CURRICULUM: The program uses a curriculum that addresses the significant skill deficits of students with autism and relates to the New York State Learning Standards.		Score	Comments
1)	The curriculum contains a written statement of goals and philosophy from which instructional objectives, methods, and activities proceed.		
2)	The curriculum focuses on maximizing independent functioning in home, school, vocational, and community settings.		
3)	The curriculum is adapted to the different ages, abilities, and learning styles of students with autism.		
4)	The curriculum emphasizes the development of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) attention to social stimuli, b) imitation skills, c) communication and language, d) social relationships, e) symbolic play, imagination, and creativity, f) self-regulation, g) skills to meet the learning standards, h) vocational skills. 		
5)	With respect to communication, the curriculum emphasizes the development of a functional communication system for both verbal and nonverbal students with autism.		
6)	With respect to social relationships, the curriculum emphasizes the development of social interaction skills with adults and peers for a range of occasions and environments.		
7)	The curriculum focuses on the maintenance and generalization of learned skills to more complex environments.		
Summary Rating for Curriculum			

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES: The program provides a variety of developmentally and functionally appropriate activities, experiences, and materials that engage students in meaningful learning.		Score	Comments
1)	Instructional activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) enhance response opportunities, 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b) are appealing and interesting, c) promote active engagement of the student, d) focus on basic skills before more complex skills, e) provide multiple opportunities for practicing skills identified on the IEP, f) are (whenever possible) embedded within ongoing and natural routines of home, school, vocational, and community settings. 		
2)	Activities use a variety of instructional formats—one-to-one instruction, small group instruction, student-initiated interactions, teacher-directed interactions, play, peer-mediated instruction—based upon the skill to be taught and the individual needs of the student.		
3)	IEP goals and instructional methods are compatible and complementary when the program uses components of different intervention approaches.		
4)	Instructional activities are adapted to the range of ages, abilities, and learning styles of students with autism.		
5)	Daily instruction is provided to meet the individual communication needs of students with autism.		
Summary Rating for Instructional Activities			

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS: Teaching methods reflect the unique needs of students with autism and are varied depending on developmental appropriateness and individual strengths and needs.		Score	Comments
1)	Instructional methods are adapted to the range of ages, abilities, and learning styles of students with autism.		
2)	Instructional methods reflect empirically validated practices or solid evidence that demonstrates effectiveness over time.		
	The degree of structure and intensity of teaching are geared to the functional abilities of the student.		
4)	Instructional methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) emphasize the use of naturally occurring reinforcers, b) promote high rates of successful performance, c) encourage communication and social interaction, d) encourage the spontaneous use of learned skills in different settings. 		
5)	As instruction proceeds, an effort is made to teach students to cope with the distractions and disruptions that are an inevitable part of daily living.		
6)	There is a clear plan showing methods for systematically promoting the maintenance and generalization of learned skills to new and different environments.		
Summary Rating for Instructional Methods			

INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENTS: Educational environments provide a structure that builds on a student's strengths while minimizing those factors that most interfere with learning.		Score	Comments
1)	Environments are initially simplified to help students recognize relevant information.		
2)	When needed (particularly for younger students), classrooms have defined areas that provide clear visual boundaries for specific activities.		
3)	Environmental supports (e.g., the use of visual schedules) are available that facilitate the student's ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) predict events and activities, b) anticipate change, c) understand expectations. 		
4)	Communication toward and with students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) is geared to their language abilities, b) is clear and relevant, c) encourages dialogue (when appropriate), rather than being largely directive. 		
Summary Rating for Instructional Environments			

REVIEW AND MONITORING OF PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES: The program uses a collaborative, ongoing, systematic process for assessing student progress.		Score	Comments
1)	The program provides regular and ongoing assessment of each student's progress on his/her specific IEP goals and objectives.		
2)	Student progress is summarized and reviewed by an educational team.		
3)	Students are assessed and the instructional program is refined when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) target objectives have been achieved, b) progress is not observed after an appropriate trial period, c) target objectives have not been achieved after an appropriate trial period, d) there is an unexpected change in a student's behavior or health status, e) significant changes occur in the home, school, vocational, or community setting. 		
4)	The program routinely reports to the CPSE or CSE when there is a need to consider modifications to the IEP.		
Summary Rating for Review and Monitoring of Progress			

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT: Parents are recognized and valued as full partners in the development and implementation of their children's IEPs.		Score	Comments

1)	Parents and family members are supported as active participants in all aspects of their child's ongoing evaluation and education to the extent of their interests, resources, and abilities.		
2)	Parents are informed about the range of educational and service options.		
3)	The program demonstrates an awareness and respect for the culture, language, values, and parenting styles of the families they serve.		
4)	The program makes available "parent counseling and training" services, which: a) provide parents with information about child development, b) assist parents to understand the needs of their child, c) foster coordination of efforts between school and home, d) support the family in behavior management, e) enable parents to acquire skills to support the implementation of their child's IEP.		
5)	Parents are provided with opportunities to meet regularly with other parents and professionals in support groups.		
6)	Parents receive regular communication from the program regarding their child's progress.		
7)	Parents are assisted in accessing services from other agencies (when available and as appropriate) such as respite, in-home behavior support, home health care, transportation, etc.		
Summary Rating for Family Involvement and Support			

INCLUSION: Opportunities for interaction with nondisabled peers are incorporated into the program.		Score	Comments
1)	The program offers opportunities for interaction with nondisabled peers in both informal and planned interactions.		
2)	In their contact with nondisabled peers, students are provided with instruction and support to maximize successful interactions.		
3)	The program provides nondisabled peers with knowledge and support (e.g., peer training) to facilitate and encourage spontaneous and meaningful interactions.		
4)	Training and ongoing support are provided to the general education teachers and staff.		
Summary Rating for Inclusion			

PLANNING THE MOVE FROM ONE SETTING TO ANOTHER: Parents and professionals work collaboratively in planning transitions from one classroom, program, or service delivery system to another.		Score	Comments
1)	All aspects of planning include the student (whenever appropriate), parents and other family members, current and receiving professionals, and other relevant individuals.		
2)	Transitional support services are provided by a special education teacher with a background in teaching students with autism.		
3)	Transition planning: a) begins while the student is in the current placement, b) provides the student and family with the opportunity to visit the new setting (i.e., meet teachers, view classrooms).		
4)	Planning integrates considerations of future placements (i.e., skills needed in the next classroom or school setting) with the student's current program.		
5)	Planning includes teacher preparation and other supports to ensure success of the student in the new classroom, school, or work site.		
Summary Rating for Planning the Move from One Setting to Another			

CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR: Positive behavior supports, based on a functional behavioral assessment (FBA), are used to address challenging behavior.		Score	Comments
1)	The program has a school-wide behavioral system that: a) defines expectations for appropriate behavior in all instructional settings, b) uses proactive approaches to managing behavior, c) has established strategies for crisis intervention, d) provides training for staff in recommended behavioral strategies.		
2)	A FBA is used to direct intervention planning for persistent challenging behaviors.		
3)	Multiple methods (e.g., direct observations, functional analysis, rating scales, and interviews) are used in conducting the FBA.		
4)	The FBA identifies both immediate (e.g., request to perform a task) and more distant (e.g., poor sleeping habits) factors that increase challenging behaviors.		
5)	The FBA identifies one or more functions for the challenging behaviors.		
6)	Environmental accommodations and adaptations are used to prevent or minimize occurrences of the problem behavior.		
7)	Instruction in alternative, appropriate skills (e.g., communication, social, or self-regulatory skills) is routinely incorporated into behavior intervention plans.		
8)	Behavioral interventions are based on positive supports and strategies.		
9)	Behavior intervention plans focus on long-term outcomes (e.g., making new friends, participating in extracurricular activities).		

Summary Rating for Challenging Behavior		
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COMMUNITY COLLABORATION: The program links with community agencies to assist families in accessing supports and services needed by students with autism.		Score	Comments
1)	The program develops links with different community agencies that provide the comprehensive services often needed by students with autism.		
2)	The program assists parents in defining their child's outside-of-school needs, such as respite, in-home behavior support, home health care, transportation, etc.		
3)	Parents are assisted in accessing services from community agencies.		
Summary Rating for Community Collaboration			

PERSONNEL: Teachers, teacher aides and assistants, related service providers, school psychologists, administrators, and support staff are knowledgeable and skilled related to the education of students with autism.		Score	Comments
1)	Staff are knowledgeable and skilled in the areas of expertise specific to autism, including: a) characteristics of autism, b) familiarity with assessment methods, c) developing IEPs to meet the unique needs of each student, d) curriculum, environmental adaptations and accommodations, and instructional methods, e) strategies to improve communication and social interaction skills, f) classroom and individual behavior management techniques.		
2)	Staff participate in continuing professional development (e.g., consultation, workshops, conferences) designed to further develop their knowledge and skills.		
3)	Staff are available in a ratio sufficient to provide the support necessary to accomplish IEP goals.		
4)	Teachers and related service providers have access to students' IEPs and are informed of their responsibilities for implementation.		<>
5)	Paraprofessionals receive specific and direct instruction and supervision regarding their IEP responsibilities to the student.		<>
6)	Ongoing support and technical assistance are available to resolve concerns related to learning and behavior.		<>

Summary Rating for Personnel		<>
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PROGRAM EVALUATION: Systematic examination of program implementation and impact is conducted, including the aggregation of individual student outcomes and consumer satisfaction.		Score	Comments
1)	The program incorporates evaluation systems that assess program-wide effectiveness in the areas of: a)students' progress toward mastery of IEP goals, b)student performance on State and districtwide tests (including, as appropriate, student performance on the State Alternate Assessment) c)students' generalization of skills, d)student progress toward long-term outcomes.		
2)	The program evaluates short-term (e.g., weekly or bi-weekly), intermediate (e.g., quarterly), and long-term (e.g., yearly) changes in student progress.		
3)	Parents regularly receive feedback on their child's progress toward meeting IEP goals and objectives.		
4)	Program evaluation includes measures of consumer satisfaction with services.		
5)	Information obtained from program evaluation is used for program improvement.		
Summary Rating for Program Evaluation			

	Summary Rating
Individual Evaluation	
Development of the Individualized Education Program	
Curriculum	
Instructional Activities	
Instructional Methods	
Instructional Environments	
Review and Monitoring of Progress and Outcomes	
Family Involvement and Support	
Inclusion	
Community Collaboration	
Planning the Move from One Setting to Another	

Challenging Behavior	
Personnel	
Program Evaluation	

(1) For a list of quality indicators on other topics such as Individual Evaluations, Pre-referral Processes, and Individualized Education Programs (IEP), contact VESID at 518-473-2878.