

## **Grounding Assumptions**

of a Community of Practice focused on Autism Spectrum Disorders

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA '04) ensures that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living. [34 CFR 300.1(a)] [20 U.S.C. 1400(d)(1)(A)]

IDEA '04 defines Autism as a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. Autism does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance, as also defined by IDEA '04. A child who manifests the characteristics of autism after age three could be identified as having autism if the criteria are satisfied.

[34 CFR 300.8(c)(1)(i)-(iii)] [20 U.S.C. 1401 (a)(i-ii)]

As a Community of Practice, we believe:

- 1) All individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) learn.
- 2) Each individual with ASD is unique, and thus needs an individually-designed program. Interventions must be linked to an individual's characteristics and identified strengths and continually assessed and revised based on data. There is no single intervention that works for every child on the spectrum.
- 3) Effective autism practices and implementation are critically dependent on:
  - a) development of self-advocacy and self-determination skills by individuals and family members;
  - b) shared engagement and collaboration among all stakeholders leading to consensus and shared understanding;
  - c) consideration of the predicted and unexpected effects the implementation of evidence-based research will bring to context in which it will be used and into the future; and
  - d) understanding and acceptance by all stakeholders of their roles and responsibilities in serving all learners.
- 4) Early identification, followed by early intervention, can improve outcomes; even so, it is never too late for individuals with ASD to be identified and guided to learn new skills across all domains.
- 5) All people with ASD and their families deserve guided access to seamless systems of interdisciplinary supports across the lifespan; with necessary sensory and social accommodations; and an interdisciplinary approach that enhances individual learning and well being

- 6) Access to core curriculum and interaction with non-disabled peers is critical to positive outcomes.
- 7) Person centered planning should be available to all individuals on the spectrum. Everyone has the right to dream, have nightmares, and move toward their dreams despite the systems. Don't limit potential; maturity can and does continue. Contact with the employment world is critical and requires opportunity/exposure to employment options.
- 8) Programs are more effectively designed and delivered when families, schools and other providers are working well together and achieving consensus. Programs must be individualized, comprehensive and systemically implemented across environments with fidelity.
- 9) Educate individuals with ASD to develop individual talents, personal independence, social responsibility, and emotional well-being.
- 10) The spectrum of autism is quite broad and stretches to include those that ultimately will function independent of any specialized supports..... to those that will require ongoing 24 hr. supervision. As a youth nears adulthood, these implications will heavily impact secondary educational programs, transition plans and needs to prepare for adulthood. At this point, the educational programs for students with ASD become even more diverse between those that are college bound, to those with vocational school goals to those that will go directly to work to those that need intense supervision and those that have the challenges of dual diagnoses. Effective educational programming becomes more complex and thus the diversity in preparation programs and education become more diverse than in previous years of education. Thus educational institutions that have used "autism classrooms" or "autism programs" to support students with a diagnosis of ASD often find some students with ASD are not well served in this model as they age into the last 3-5 years of their educational careers.
- 11) Professional development in autism must incorporate principles of effective adult learning styles and incorporate universal design for learning.

The following stakeholders worked together within the IDEA Partnership to create these grounding assumptions to the Autism Spectrum Disorders Collection:

Role: Regional Technical Assistance  
Provider  
Location: Arizona

Role: Technical Assistance Provider  
Location: Canada

Role: State Parent Technical Assistance  
Provider  
Location: California

Role: Related Service Personnel  
Location: Connecticut



Role: General Education Administrator  
Location: Illinois

Role: National Organization  
Representative  
Location: Illinois

Role: State Technical Assistance  
Provider  
Location: Illinois

Role: State Technical Assistance  
Provider  
Location: Kansas

Role: National Technical Assistance  
Provider  
Location: Maryland

Role: State Department of Education  
Location: Minnesota

Role: National Organization  
Representative  
Location: Maryland

Role: Special Education Administrator  
Location: New Jersey

Role: Teacher  
Location: New Mexico  
Role: Parent/Professional Development  
Specialist  
New York

Role: Related Service Provider/Higher  
Education  
Location: Ohio

Role: State Technical Assistance  
Provider  
Location: Ohio

Role: State Technical Assistance  
Provider  
Location: Ohio

Role: State Technical Assistance  
Provider  
Location: Ohio

Role: Parent  
Location: Oregon

Role: Regional Technical Assistance  
Provider/Parent  
Location: Pennsylvania

Role: Special Education Administrator  
Location: Tennessee

Role: Higher Education/Vocational  
Administrator  
Location: Virginia

Role: National Technical Assistance  
Provider  
Location: Washington, DC

Role: State Technical Assistance  
Provider  
Location: West Virginia

Role: Person on the Spectrum/  
Parent/Related Service Personnel  
Location: Wisconsin

Role: Special Education Administrator  
Location: Wisconsin