IEP Considerations for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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The 11 IEP Considerations for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder are designed to help IEP teams consider some essential issues when developing an individualized education program for students with ASD. These considerations were originally developed through Texas Project FIRST to address parent concerns that schools were not providing adequate services to students with ASD. Initially introduced as guidelines by the New Mexico Public Education Department Director of Special Education, the 11 Considerations were adopted into New Mexico law in July, 2011.

Not all students with ASD require implementation of all eleven considerations and the law does not mandate specific programs or services. The law does require that the IEP team discuss the considerations, and document why each will or will not be implemented.

What you need to know

The 11 Considerations apply to all students with an educational eligibility of Autism Spectrum Disorder, regardless of needed level of support or academic abilities. Although some students with ASD may, on the surface, appear to require fewer supports than others, it is important to address critical skills in social, behavioral and organizational skills for all students with ASD. Implementing the 11 considerations do not require specific credentials; it does however, require general training about autism and access to information about research based practices. Many of the considerations may already be included in the IEP; the checklist serves as a tool to make sure all areas of concern are addressed.

IEP Considerations for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Below you will find a summary of the 11 Considerations along with questions for the IEP team to consider as they discuss student needs and how best to meet them.

1. Extended educational programming

Extended School Year (ESY) services or programs offered when school is not in session and/or the extension of the school day.

- *During scheduled school breaks, does review of the data show that the student experiences significant regression of skills?*

- *Does the student require a large amount of time to regain lost skills?*

2. Daily schedules

Developing a schedule that reflects **minimal unstructured time** and **active engagement in learning activities** is essential. Schedules are dependent on the student's individual needs. They may include short blocks of time and/or the use of more organized arrangements during unstructured times.

- *Does the student need assistance to adapt to daily schedule changes such as transitioning from one environment to another?*
- *Does the student need adult supervision for routine events such as school drills?*
- *Does the student need support for independent functioning?*

3. In-home & community based training

Teaching in natural environments where social/behavioral skills are needed.

- *Does the family have access to resources to implement strategies for appropriate social/behavioral skills?*
- *Does the family need assistance with transitions from home to school/school to home?*
- *Does the child need specific schedules and cues to adjust at home with family members?*

Implications for schools

- Does not mean that teachers/school staff are expected to work in the home/community.
- Does not mean that the school district must pay if resources are suggested.
- Does mean that the IEP team needs to know community based resources (any referrals will be documented in the IEP under interagency links).
- Does mean that the teacher/school staff can suggest/explain helpful strategies (social stories, video modeling, etc.

4. Positive behavior support strategies

What supports are needed to help students learn new, appropriate behaviors and prevent problem behaviors?

- *Is the student unable to follow classroom rules, and the school-wide rules and discipline plan?*
- *Does the student show a pattern of socially inappropriate behaviors?*
- *Does the student need reinforcement strategies to achieve appropriate social behaviors?*
- *Is a Functional Behavior Assessment/ Behavior Intervention Plan needed to address problem behaviors?*

5. Futures (transition) planning

What are the end of school goals and, in **each grade level,** what skills must be built to reach those long-term goals?

- *What supports are needed to transition to new school settings?*
- *Does the student need assistance to transition to post secondary environments and/or daily living skills within the community?*
- *Does the family have access to resources regarding transition from daily home life to daily life within the community (specific resources and links to be documented in the IEP).*

6. Parent/Family training and support

Families may need/request help with home life and a variety of resources/strategies to improve social and behavioral skills and transitions between environments.

- *Does the family have access to qualified assistance for the acquisition of needed social/behavior skills*
- *Are there training and resources to provide consistency between environments (social stories, mini-schedules, communication notebook, etc.)*

7. Staff-to-student ratio

What is the ratio of students to staff members needed to enable the student to function in, and benefit from, school activities/environments.

- *Is there a research based program with intensive interventions (e.g. discrete trial training)?*
- *Does the student need help in transitioning?*
- *Does the student need adult supervision in drills, different environments, etc.?*
- *Does the student need visual or physical cues initiated by adults to adjust to changes?*

8. Communication interventions

Which language forms and functions, will enhance effective communication across settings? The most important question is "Does the student have a functional (used for communicating wants and needs) communication system?"

- *Does the student require assistive technology?*
- *Has the student tried a picture-based system?*
- *What speech/language services does the student require as a core characteristic of autism is social-communication difficulties?*

9. Social skills supports

Providing strategies based on social skills assessment/curriculum and provided across settings is essential as a core characteristic of ASD is **social**-communication.

- *Does the student have difficulty interacting with peers or joining a play group or game?*
- *Does the student have trouble working with peers in a group?*
- *Does the student have difficulty using appropriate social skills in a variety of contexts?*
- *What social skills training, intervention or*

curriculum would be most effective?

10. Professional educator/staff support

Staff must have adequate training about autism and strategies to implement an IEP for students with ASD.

- *Does the staff have training and access to evidence based practices to implement the student's IEP?*
- *What additional training does the staff need to adequately/appropriately work with the student?*

11. Teaching strategies based on peer-reviewed and/or research based practices

Considering **evidence based** teaching strategies including Applied Behavior Analysis, visual supports, functional communication, adaptive skill building, etc.

- *Does the staff have access to assistive technologies to implement the student's IEP?*
- *Does the school site have access to teaching strategies to support positive behavioral systems/social skills training?*

In Summary:

The 11 Considerations were developed to help IEP teams create and implement and effective plan for addressing the needs of students with ASD. In general, the considerations may be viewed as minimum standards for support. The most powerful tool is

1. *Knowledge about the characteristics of in-*

  dividuals with ASD
2. *Knowledge about necessary supports for individuals with ASD*
   - *communication supports*
   - *visual supports*
   - *social supports*
   - *family supports*
   - *transition supports*
3. *Knowledge about Evidence Based Practices (EBPs) in the education and treatment of ASD*
   - *what are Evidence Based Practices*
   - *resources for the implementation of EBPs*
   - *fidelity in the implementation of EBPs*
4. *Knowledge about staff/family training*
   - *Recognition that the field is so new that no one knows it all*

Tips for Success

1. **<u>Become familiar with the IEP Considerations:</u>** Familiarize yourself with the 11 Considerations before the IEP team meeting and be sure to ask questions if there is anything you don't understand. Remember that each consideration needs to be addressed in the IEP, but every strategy will not necessarily need to be implemented. Discussion regarding each consideration must be documented.

2. **<u>Remember the checklist is a guideline:</u>** The checklist serves as a guideline to insure that the IEP is truly customized to fit the specific needs of the student. Many of the practices on the checklist may already included in the IEP; check with the IEP team if you are unsure.

3. **<u>Advocate for the student:</u>** Be prepared to advocate for what you think is important for the student while listening carefully to the viewpoints of the rest of the team. **You** are an important member of the student's IEP team!

Resources:

- Autism Speaks Individualized Education Program (IEP) Guide and Other Resources
  https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/iep-guide
- New Mexico Public Education Department
  https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/
- Autism Spectrum Disorders IEP Considerations Definitions
  https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Autism-Spectrum-Disorders-Considerations-Definitions.pdf
- IEP Checklist Considerations—Autism Spectrum Disorder
  https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/IEP-Checklist-Considerations-%E2%80%93-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder.pdf
- Memo: Best Practices to Consider When Developing Individualized Education Programs For Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
  https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Memo-Best-Practices-to-Consider-When-Developing-Individualized-Education-Programs-for-Students-with-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder.pdf

  School Consultation Team, Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities Program Center for Development and Disability, University of New Mexico
  https://cdd.health.unm.edu/autismportal/school-based-services/

  Texas Project FIRST: Strategies for Consideration for Students with Autism
  http://www.texasprojectfirst.org/AutismStrategies.html

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For more information about this resource or to inquire about the Autism Programs call
(505) 272-1852 or **1-800-270-1861**   https://cdd.health.unm.edu/autismportal/