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# Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Nebraska State Plan

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Presented by the  
Nebraska Special Education Advisory Council  
through the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Autism



February 2000

**Revised January 2013**

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## ASD NETWORK COMMITTEES

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### **Acknowledgments**

The Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Special Education, and the Nebraska Special Education Advisory Council extend appreciation to the ASD State Plan ad hoc committee members and to the agencies that provided the release time for these individuals during the development of this plan. This plan became a reality because of the dedicated committee members and individual efforts of the following:

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# Nebraska Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) State Plan for Education Services

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This plan was written to provide special education personnel, administrators, parents, educators, and other professionals with information on services provided by the Nebraska Autism Spectrum Disorders Network.

The Nebraska Department of Education developed the ASD network to provide training and technical assistance to local school districts, educational service units and parents of children with autism spectrum disorders. The ASD Network works to build school district capacity in providing quality, individualized programming for students with autism; however does not provide direct services. It is the responsibility of Nebraska school districts to assure that all children with ASD have a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) which includes special education and related services that meets their unique needs.

## **ABOUT THE NEBRASKA ASD NETWORK**

In 2002, five (5) ASD Regions were established across Nebraska to provide support for Nebraska schools and families impacted by autism spectrum disorders. In addition to the five ASD Regional Coordinators, an ASD Network State Coordinator is housed at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln to coordinate the services of the ASD Network. The Nebraska ASD Network is funded by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Office of Special Education through Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) funds.

School districts may contact their Regional Coordinator for: consultation and/or training in the assessment and verification of students with ASDs; identifying appropriate goals for an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) and selecting and implementing appropriate strategies and interventions.



## **State Definition of Autism**

Rule 51 (92 NAC 51.006)

### **Autism**

To qualify for special education services in the category of autism the child must have a developmental disability which significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, is generally evident before age three, and must adversely affect 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 response to sensory experiences.

Characteristics are observed, to varying degrees, in social relationships, communicative competence and pattern and range of interests. Although ASDs are defined by a certain set of behaviors, children may exhibit any combination of the behaviors in any degree of severity. These characteristics are generally evident during the child's first three years of life.

### **Some of the Terms You Might Hear associated with Autism**

Autism is a general term used to describe a group of complex developmental brain disorders known as Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD). The other pervasive developmental disorders include:

- PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified)
- Asperger's Syndrome
- Rett Syndrome
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder

Many professionals refer to this group as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). The medical community uses the above mentioned terminology to provide families with a specific diagnosis.

### **Educational Verification vs Medical Diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum**

**Disorder:** An educational verification is a process conducted by a school district to determine if a child has a disability and to plan appropriate, individualized services. Schools use the verification category of autism when determining if a child is eligible for special education services. School teams do not diagnose students with ASDs. Verification of autism requires indication of an adverse educational impact.

A medical diagnosis is not required in order for the child to be verified under the Autism disability category for special education services however, medical reports and information should be considered by the multidisciplinary team.

## **Guiding Principles for the Development of Educational Services for Children with ASDs.**

The ASD Network State Plan Committee recommend the following guiding principles for the development of educational services for children on the autism spectrum:

- Collaboration between families and educational systems for the benefit of each child
- Individualization of Services and Supports for each child
- Services and supports are implemented based on professional and parent expertise in conjunction with evidence based practices in the field of ASDs
- Instruction for each child is age, individually, and culturally appropriate

### **Access to Services**

Children who have an educational verification of autism in Nebraska shall have access to a free appropriate public education via one of the following options:

- Local school district program
- Neighboring school district or cooperative through contract or option enrollment

### **Collaboration between the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and The University of Nebraska (UNL)**

The Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Special Education (NDE-SPED), and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) work collaboratively to ensure that the state plan for children with ASD is carried out effectively and efficiently. The NDE-SPED Office is responsible for the infrastructure, collaboration with the ASD Network, and funding. UNL's primary role is the provision of training, in-service and staff development on state, regional and local levels, facilitate the ASD Standing Committee, and serve as a resource to regional programs and provide program support at the state level.

The Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Special Education and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln jointly support the State Coordinator Position for the ASD Network.

### **Responsibilities of the ASD Network State Coordinator:**

- Plan, coordinate and deliver regional and statewide training and/or staff development for educators, assessment teams, para educators, parents, and community professionals
- Develop appropriate training materials
- Maintain information on ASD resources (people, web sites, programs, methodologies, etc.)
- Assist school districts with training and support regarding appropriate ASD assessments
- Organize outreach activities involving dissemination of information on Nebraska ASD Network to families, schools, and communities

- Chair/facilitate the Special Education Advisory Council Standing Committee on ASD (Standing Committee)
- Develop and maintain the ASD Network website
- Maintain information about ASD regional programs and available library materials
- Act as liaison for parent and professional ASD organizations

### **Guidelines for the ASD Network**

The ASD Network is funded by the Nebraska Department of Education Office of Special Education. ASD Network services include technical assistance, educational consultation, training on ASD related topics, comprehensive resource libraries, and various materials to support schools and families.

The ASD Network is viewed as an integral part of the statewide system and a means for ensuring quality educational opportunities for children with ASD in Nebraska. The ASD Network facilitates and provides consultation in the areas of assessment as well as individualized program development and evaluation. Training for educators, ASD service providers, community agencies, and family members is also provided through the network.

Network services follow the Guiding Principles for Services for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, and will include, but not be limited to.

- Regular reports and feedback from the Special Education Advisory Council
- ASD standing committee meetings
- Regional services

The ASD Network continually makes efforts to ensure that all school districts and families of children with ASD aware of available services and supports. The public is informed about the needs of and services available for children with ASD. The ASD Network supports the provision of appropriate assessment services to children at risk for ASD by providing consultation services to school districts and on-going staff development in area of assessment practices for autism spectrum disorders.

The ASD Network helps facilitate collaboration among parents, school districts, regional/statewide programs, service providers and other agencies to assure all children with ASD have a free appropriate public education and that an array of appropriate services are available.

### **Regional Services for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)**

Five ASD Regions have been established to effectively meet the needs of schools and families across the state who are impacted by ASDs. Each region consists of a coordinator, a director, ASD Team and Advisory Committee.

**Regional Coordinators** provide the following services:

- Regional training and/or staff development for educators, community professionals, and family members
- Consultative support to local school districts and families of students with ASD
- Maintain up to date resource lending libraries, regional websites, and information on ASD
- Promote ASD Awareness and ChildFind information

Note: The ASD Network does not provide direct services to children. We do however consult to school teams about specific children and other ASD needs through a referral system. Regional ASD coordinators provide support as requested through the referral system to all students, not only students with a primary or secondary educational verification of autism.

Regional Directors are Special Education Administrators/Directors at the ESUs who are the fiscal agents for the ASD Grants. The Regional Directors are responsible for supporting the ASD Regional Coordinator by:

- Ongoing communicating with Regional Coordinators to ensure seamless support to school districts and families
- Allowing leave for necessary professional development, training, collaboration, and school district support
- Providing financial guidance for management of the regional grant dollars
- Clarification of special education laws and requirements
- Assistance in the development of collaborative partnerships with other agencies

In addition to the Regional ASD Coordinator and Director, each region has a team comprised of a variety of individuals who are knowledgeable and interested in ASDs. Team members participate in ongoing training to keep up-to-date on current research and practice.

Regional ASD teams include (but are not limited to the following):

- School Administrators
- School Psychologists
- Occupational Therapists
- Physical Therapists
- Speech/language Pathologists
- Early Childhood Special Educators
- Special Education Teachers
- Vocational/Transition Specialists
- Representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services
- Parent Advocates
- Parents of children with ASD

Additionally, an advisory committee is established in each region. The committee supports, promotes and make recommendations regarding the development of regional training and resources in the area of ASD. Members include representation from at least, but not limited to the following:

- Educators
- Therapists
- Parents or Parent Groups
- Advocates or Persons with ASD

### **Family Involvement**

The success of any child's participation in his or her community is dependent on collaboration among family, the school and community. The ASD Network supports school and family collaboration and communication. The ASD Network supports the following family involvement practices. Families should be provided comprehensive information and support related to family-identified needs, educational options, legal rights and community services, as soon as a child with ASD is identified. Families serve a key role and must be involved from the very beginning and throughout the provision of services.

### **Local School District Roles**

The school district role is as follows:

- School districts will ensure that all children with ASD have access to a free appropriate public education which includes special education and related services in order to meet their unique needs
- School districts may provide education and related services by contracting with another school district, approved cooperative or with a service provider approved by the Nebraska Department of Education
- School districts may develop partnership agreements with other school districts, educational service units, cooperatives and the Department of Education to meet the needs of children with ASD
- School districts shall meet the standards 92 NAC 51, and 92 NAC 52 Nebraska Department of Education Regulations and Standards for Special Education Programs (Rule 51 and Rule 52)
- School districts should offer information about parent education services that are available
- All school districts and approved cooperatives will continue to be eligible for special education reimbursement payment if they meet the standards of 92 NAC 51 and 92 NAC 52

### **SEAC and ASD Standing Committee**

The Nebraska Department of Education and the State Board of Education seek advice regarding programs for children with ASDs from the Nebraska Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC). SEAC seeks advice from the ASD Standing Committee, a standing committee of SEAC, concerning the education of children with ASDs. At least one member from SEAC serves on the ASD Standing Committee as a liaison between the two groups.

## **Rationale**

Selecting and providing appropriate services and evaluations for a child with ASD is a difficult, and on-going task. It is challenging for professionals and parents to keep up-to date on current methodologies and services. Nebraska's ASD population is best served using a regional network.

## **Responsibilities**

The ASD standing committee provides advice for NDE, the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) and the University of Nebraska, (UNL) on the following:

- The delivery of appropriate services for children with ASD
- The review of current pertinent research and information regarding methodologies and delivery systems for ASD
- The review of all due process trends associated with children with ASD
- Recommendations for ASD training of educators, parents and community providers

## **Meetings**

The ASD Standing Committee will continue to meet at least two times each year. A quorum (simple majority) of members must be present for all matters of official business matters.

## **Membership**

The Commissioner of Education will approve membership of the ASD Standing Committee on the recommendation of the ASD Network State Coordinator, NDE Specialist, and/or SEAC. Approved members are eligible for expenses as per NDE-SPED guidelines and include one or more representatives from each of the following:

- NDE-SPED Consultant (non-voting)
- Director, Severe Disabilities Program, UNL (non-voting)
- Nebraska's State Coordinator for the ASD Network (non-Voting)
- Representative(s) from SEAC (Special Education Advisory Council)
- Parents and parent groups
- Representatives from college or universities
- Local directors of SPED
- Educators and therapists of children with ASD
- Representatives from the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council
- Advocates or persons with ASD
- Representatives from other state agencies involved in the financing or delivery of related services to children with disabilities
- Representatives of a vocational, community or business organization providing transition service to children with disabilities

## **Meeting Procedures**

The committee will first attempt to reach consensus on issues. If consensus is not reached, a formal vote will be taken.

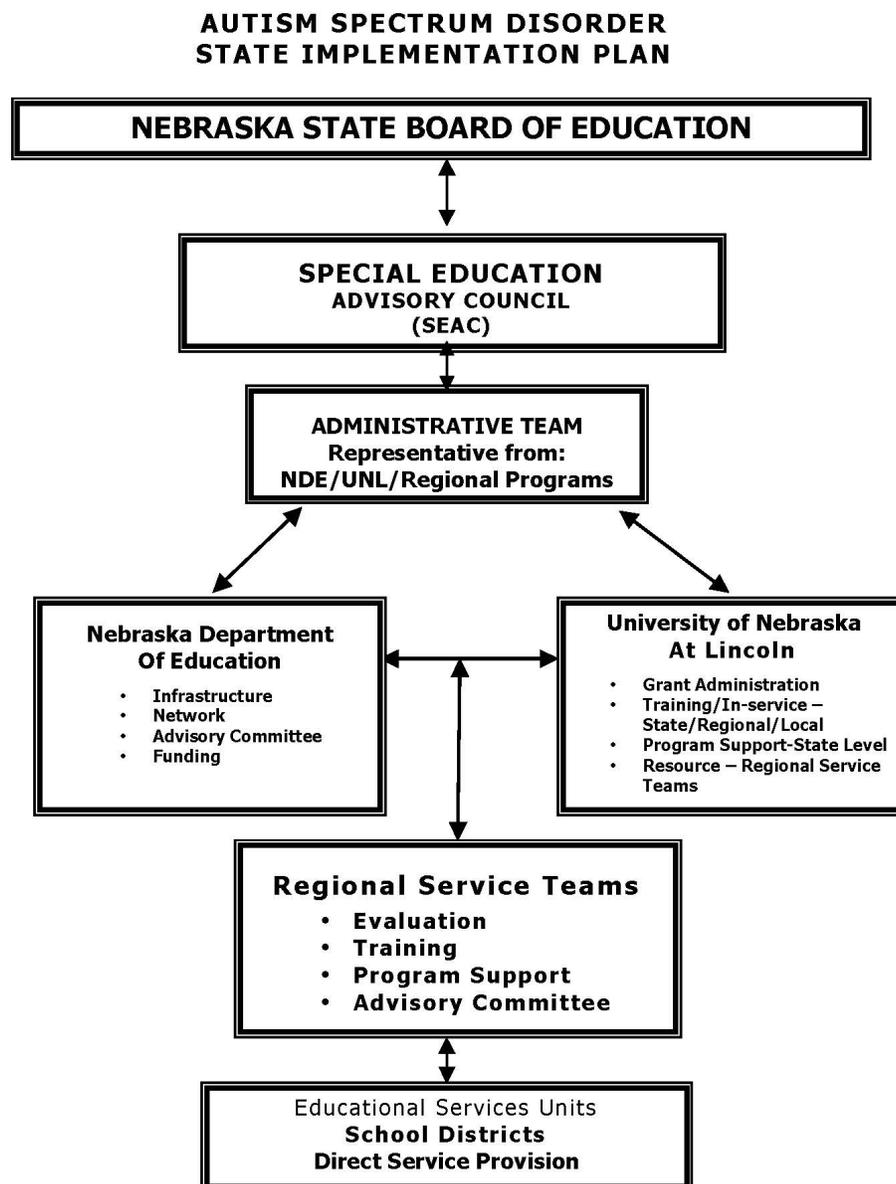
## Terms of Membership

Appointments to the committee is for four years beginning in September of the first year and ending in August of the fourth year. If any member misses two scheduled meetings in a given year the Chair/Facilitator will forward a recommendation to the ASD Network State Coordinator that the member be replaced.

## Report

The ASD Network State Coordinator will report all meeting proceedings to the Special Education Advisory Council.

## Flowchart of the ASD Network



## **Teacher Competencies and Qualifications of Service Providers**

In 2009, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) released the Professional Competencies for Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. These professional competencies outline the knowledge and skill base that educational professionals entering practice or assuming advanced roles should possess to practice safely and effectively. These competencies are based on evidence-based autism research and will be part of the CEC and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education process that universities go through in designing special education curricula.

The competencies can be found on the CEC website in "The Red Book" What Every Special Educator Must Know, Sixth Edition. It is available for free download at: [http://www.cec.sped.org/Standards?sc\\_lang=en](http://www.cec.sped.org/Standards?sc_lang=en). The ASD Network will continue to assist higher education programs in Nebraska in incorporating these competencies into special education pre-service and graduate level programs across the state.

## **Areas and Topics for Training**

Statewide training provided by the ASD Network will be based on evidence-based practices in the field of autism spectrum disorders. An emphasis on evidence-based practices is important because while many interventions for autism exist, only a limited number have been shown to be effective through scientific research. All identified practices are not necessarily appropriate for every learner an emphasis on carefully matching interventions to a learner's specific needs and characteristics will be made throughout training material. Training will emphasize the importance of implementing interventions that match a learners specific needs and characteristics.

The Nebraska ASD Network is committed to providing up-to-date information and training on autism spectrum disorders. Workshops are scheduled throughout the state on a variety of topics relevant to ASD. Additionally the ASD Network hosts an annual state conference where educators, family members, and community providers come together to learn and network.

Upon request, the ASD Network Coordinators are available to provide training and support to school districts to help ensure the development of appropriate, individualized programs for students with autism.

Visit the ASD Network website to learn more about autism spectrum disorders, access state and national resources and learn more about services provided by the NE ASD Network: [www.unl.edu/asdnetwork](http://www.unl.edu/asdnetwork).