

# **V.O.I.C.E Parent Sub-Group – Parents of students on the Autism Spectrum**

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**Results of our review of the NYS – VESID  
(Office of Vocational and Educational  
Service of Individuals with Disabilities)–  
APQI(Autism Program Quality Indicators)  
from our meetings June – October 2007**

# INDIVIDUAL EVALUATION - 1.4

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- ❑ 1 & 2) Information not visible to parents
  - ❑ 3 & 4) Need appropriate assessment tools – what are the basic building level evaluation tools that the school uses? Often parent must get own appropriate evaluations done at own expense. Seems to be a wide variance based on what particular school psychologist involved.
  - ❑ 5) Particularly weak in d & e – standardized pragmatic language skill evaluation does not appear to be a common tool
  - ❑ 8) Even with permissions – documents, e-mails, status updates not automatically shared with other professionals that work with the family
  - ❑ GENERAL NOTE: Discussion about coding – some parents discouraged to use the Autism code on IEP when medical diagnosis is Autism – is there a Medical Autism and an Educational Autism? Was told if left as other health impaired there would be more flexibility – for who the school in delivering needed services for Autism coded children?
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# DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM - 1.6

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- ❑ 2) Many various parent responses – wide variation on how their child’s IEP addresses these four areas.
  - ❑ 3) Goals and objectives often poor due to lack of correct evaluation results at CSE meetings – often requires multiple meetings. Our experience is that Long Term outcomes not usually part of these goals and objectives
  - ❑ 4) Instructional Adaptations often seem weak with wide variation on the knowledge level of the educators about Autism Spectrum Disorders and appropriate instructional methods to use.
  - ❑ 5) Only put on IEP if parent requested -- then Support with consultant – most of us experienced that as a school support vs. a family support. Highly dependent on quality of consultant. IEP does not make reference to any parent groups or other community support that is available.
  - ❑ 6) Mixed response from our parent group – like many of these areas effective use of communication systems depends on parents knowledge level of what is out there to use and ability to advocate strongly for the use of these tools in the classroom.
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# CURRICULUM - 1.4

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- ❑ 2) Not visible to parent group – the curriculum links to home and community settings.
  - ❑ 3) “modified curriculum” is used as a phrase in the IEP but is not visible to parents if this is a particular researched based modified curriculum to meet NYS standards for the subject at hand or left up to each educator to modify as they go along based on their individual judgment.
  - ❑ 4 & 5) Seems to vary widely based on what type of program the child is in, 6:1:1, 12:1:1, Gen. Ed with support and who the educator is for that particular school year.
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# INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES - 1.9

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- Note for all items: Totally based on the teacher and their style – no experience of integration of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) or Developmental Individual- Difference Relationship Based (DIR) -- to our knowledge there is no Autism Spectrum learning based classrooms at the Victor, such that any specific Autism based instructional interventions can be delivered, as it is our children receive instruction along with children of a wide variety of needs or gen. ed. Students – therefore difficult to apply and researched based programs for this population.
  - **KEY FOCUS ITEM:** Communication process between home and school – there is no best practice that is used across the district – communication is hit and miss and our children generally are not able to express the day’s activities to us. Some parents have developed their own checklist form with note area for the classroom teacher and support personnel – again this is a parent initiated process. We strongly support a best practice communication tool across the district and where the educator is required by the district to use when a child with this classification is in their classroom.
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# INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS - 1.0

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- 2) No evidence of using researched based instructional methods. Options for assistive technology not offered – again parent needs to “discover” and advocate for use.
  - 3 & 5) extensive use of one-to-one aides to assist with variation of the instructional methods for individual children and to minimize the disruption for the child and their classroom. Not sure how coping skills are taught by the classroom aide.
  - 4) depends on goals on IEP – (b) promote high rates of successful performance not seen by parents
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# INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENTS - 2.5

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- ❑ 1) Varies by educator and type of classroom
  - ❑ 4) Through our general discussion – seems hit and miss for communication that encourages dialog – without a best practices home/school communication process we are largely unaware of these communication opportunities.
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# REVIEW AND MONITORING OF PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES - 2.5

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- 2) General consensus is that parents must stay on top of this for the IEP to be refined when needed – not automatic. Often, parents have gone out for own evaluations and will bring this into the school for the data that will support the modification to the program/ IEP.
  - 3) Assessment process - little use of data-based assessment methods to measure progress seen, other refinements largely dependent on school personnel and the initiatives they take when they observe changes. What training exists for teachers and aides to appropriately collect data, and track progress for our children on the Autism spectrum?
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# FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT - 1.6

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- 2) Many discrepancies as to what one parent is told by school personnel vs. another (consultant services, music therapy, coding, social skills training/therapy, out of district placements, home-school communication process, options for assistive technology). Parents are not provided with a menu (or sample of what's been offered in the past by what qualified instructors they have) of offerings for students with a disability by the district – kind of a cat and mouse game as the parent must ask for what is available or what they think the child needs and based on parent advocacy skills there ends up being a wide variety of programming that perhaps one child received and another doesn't simply do to the parent education of the topic and their influence. Need to see list of best practices for and how they are integrated into the school for kids on the Autism Spectrum vs. we'll give to the family if they ask.
  - 3) Seems to be not much time or money available in the district for specific educators/administrators to train on specific cultural, language and/or parenting styles - respectful – yes, ability to spend the time in order to make a larger contribution to the child's education – often not.
  - 4) Limited resources to parent counseling and training – use of consultant teacher in some cases, no lead role is taken by the district to make available items a – e.
  - 5) Accommodation of and attendance at VOICE meetings. Why aren't parents made aware of VOICE at the CPSE, CSE meetings – brochures could be handed out here.
  - 6) **KEY FOCUS ITEM:** Communication process between home and school – there is no best practice that is used across the district – communication is hit and miss and our children generally are not able to express the day's activities to us. Some parents have developed their own checklist form with note area for the classroom teacher and support personnel – again this is a parent initiated process. We strongly support a best practice communication tool across the district and where the educator is required by the district to use when a child with this classification is in their classroom.
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# INCLUSION - 1.5

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- 1) The program does not allow for sharing with the parents what all the possible settings/options for classrooms (in and out of district) are for these kids, along with the pros & cons and teacher education if children with Autism or Autism spectrum. An area that needs attention – “Planned” and facilitated interaction with non disabled peers – i.e. social skills group.
  - 2) Some times too much reliance on non-disabled peers – may explain why the parents of non-disabled peers are showing concern when there is a disabled child in the classroom – need to find correct balance between use of different classroom, aides, non-disabled peers and special ed. & general ed. Teachers
  - 3) The “program” is staff/teacher dependent.
  - 4) Would like to discuss full staff training and new requirement by NYS Dept. of Education for coursework in the area of Autism. - No visibility to training level of educators and support staff – transportation dept, cafeteria staff, classroom aides, If there is a child on the Autism spectrum in a building are all the staff trained with a basic understanding “Autism 101” type of training? If a child on the Autism Spectrum is in Special and or general ed. Classroom, as well as the “specials – Art, PE, Music) are the educators trained in specific Autism training or does it happen concurrently through the consultant that may or may not be listed on the IEP – I.e. They’ll learn on our child through the time allotted on the IEP or they have experiential learning as in “I had a autistic child in a class room before” so they are all set.
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# PLANNING THE MOVE FROM ONE SETTING TO ANOTHER – 1.6

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- 1) We think that there are many aspects of planning that may not include the parents and other relevant professionals – behind the scene planning takes place and then is presented to the parent. I.E. As a parent you have to know how to include your self and any sub-committee meetings that occur on your child and even then may be left out of key conversations.
  - 2) Not clear what the background and training is of the special education teachers that work with our children – no visibility
  - 3) Visitation to next setting not offered – school claims they cannot tell us who the child may be assigned to for next school year. Although at times it “leaks” out behind the official communication process. Depends on specific parent/school relationship.
  - 5) Teacher preparation to accept our child to ensure their success in their classroom is not visible to the parents.
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# CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR - 1.6

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- ❑ General Note – only one parent had familiarity with working under an “FBA”
  - ❑ As a parent group we are not aware of staff training in recommended behavior strategies. Behavior intervention in general seems to deal with the immediate situation and seems to be reaction based (i.e. “to get through the day”). Not based on focus of long term outcomes.
  - ❑ Heavy reliance on one to one aide, which may or may not be trained to use best practices in challenging behavior for Autistic Spectrum children.
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# COMMUNITY COLLABORATION -0

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- No evidence in this area for our kids and families. Little mention in district wide communications, no link to community programs, heavy reliance on VOICE parent group to disseminate this information to parents through their own parent list – at a minimum it would be ideal to have access to the school parent list by being able to submit information to the school to be sent out to all parents with children that have 504 plans or IEPs.
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# PERSONNEL - Not Rated

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- This information is not available to parents – we are unable to rate.
  - Comments – there seems to be a very wide variation of knowledge and experience from all teachers/administrators/staff we have been exposed to for our kids on the Autism Spectrum. Parents expect significant training in this area prior to arrival of the child in the building and in the classroom. Specifically special and general ed. teachers that are responsible for that child's education in any subject. Classroom Aides seem to spend the most time with our children therefore they should have the significant training. Parents would like Aide to have access to IEP vs. just get direction from the classroom teacher – it would be important to read IEP first hand for the person that spends the most time with this child.
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# PROGRAM EVALUATION - 1.2

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- PROGRAM EVALUATION 1.21) d) long term outcomes generally not seen on IEP 2) Ties back to home/school communication. Very few of us had weekly or bi-weekly communication on goals which would be very helpful. 4) No formal measurement system for consumer satisfaction with service being delivered. Often nicely written IEPs and questionable delivery and no effective way to communicate back in the effort for continuous improvement to the educational programming for these kids. 5) No parent awareness of if or how program information is used for program improvement. Does school use the APQI internally? If not, what other performance measures are used to evaluate programs?
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# Next Steps – Collaboration

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- Extract 2 or 3 recommendations from this document. We could offer the recommendations and a method to implement.
  - Our Three main points:
    - The need for best practice 'school to home to school' communication by building.
    - The need to publish best practice programs, therapies, tools, tests used, staff training and credentials for teaching kids with Autism. This 'menu' should be available to parents. It should be something the district is proud of!
    - The need for a best practice Behavior Management plan. Though it wouldn't work in every situation, a standard would be helpful.
  - Establish a joint committee to review this every 2-3 years.
  - We should strive to become 'a school to watch' with our special education programs!!!
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