

Virginia Commonwealth University Autism Center for Excellence



**Request for Applications from
Virginia School Divisions**

for

**Divisionwide Exemplary Services
to Support Students with
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**

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Technical Assistance Application Package

Virginia Commonwealth University -- Autism Center for Excellence (VCU-ACE)

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

The Virginia Commonwealth University Autism Center for Excellence (VCU-ACE) is requesting applications from school divisions who wish to become exemplary sites in the provision of high quality educational services and supports for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). VCU-ACE will select four to eight school divisions through a competitive review process. Successful applications will demonstrate a clearly defined strategy for long-term systemic changes across the entire school division.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Nationally, the reported incidence of Autism Spectrum Disorders has risen dramatically in the last 20 years. According to data collected yearly by the Virginia Department of Education, the measured occurrence of ASD as the primary disability listed on a student's IEP rose approximately 30% between 2007 and 2009. Students with ASD frequently require a higher intensity of structure and carefully designed systematic instruction to acquire the academic and functional skills necessary to become independent and successful adults. School divisions have requested assistance in meeting the educational needs of students with ASD at a higher rate than those with other disabilities. Thus, as the numbers have increased, school divisions have experienced increasing pressure to meet the needs of this growing group of students and to maintain high standards in the provision of educational services across the entire division.

In 2009, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) published its report titled, *Assessment of Services for Virginians with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. JLARC studied the current state of services to persons with ASD in Virginia by reviewing the research literature on ASD and by interviewing and collecting data from families and service providers of individuals with ASD at every age and across many public and private service delivery agencies. They concluded the following:

- Several treatment approaches provide substantial improvement in outcomes for individuals with ASD.
- Many public and private agencies provide some diagnostic, treatment and management

services, but do not form a comprehensive system of care in Virginia.

- Programs that do provide services are poorly coordinated.
- Despite recommendations and tools to provide diagnosis between 2 to 3 years old, Virginia children are diagnosed later, resulting in delays in the provision of early intervention.
- Virginia schools lack guidance, training, and tools to meet the needs of students with ASD and to prepare them for an independent future.
- Adults with ASD require services and supports to live independently, but these services are frequently not available in Virginia.
- Limited training opportunities are available to public safety personnel to prepare them to help individuals with ASD in emergency situations.
- Attempts to fill gaps in service delivery should focus on efficient and effective methods.

It is in the context of these recommendations that VCU-ACE proposes the implementation of a school divisionwide systems change process to result in improved services at every level of the school division for students with ASD and similar educational needs. VCU-ACE will provide technical assistance to four to eight school divisions *which* are directors and administrators to improve their understanding of the implementation of evidence-based practices for students with ASD across the age range. This will increase the likelihood that new staff in the division will demonstrate fidelity of implementation of evidence-based practice.

VCU-ACE will select four to eight school divisions who are the prepared for a long-term commitment to systems change. VCU-ACE Technical Assistance Associates will assist selected school divisions in completing a self-assessment and facilitating a divisionwide Autism Services Improvement Team to develop an Autism Services Improvement Plan. These plans will provide additional data-based targets and define the exact technical assistance and training activities that will take place in the division. While school divisions will self define their own plans, VCU-ACE

will also guide the development of the plans to result in systems change across the entire age range and ASD spectrum. These plans will provide a coordinated approach to divisionwide systems change, professional development, coaching, mentoring, and services improvement. These plans will include goals to address all levels of professional and paraprofessional development, improvement in classroom implementation of evidence-based practice, implementation of interdisciplinary teaming, and improvement of family involvement and support. In addition to providing targeted technical assistance, VCU-ACE Technical Assistance Associates will also collect data on the success of technical assistance effort, and revise those efforts based on ongoing data based decision-making. Finally, VCU-ACE will guide practice at all levels based on the implementation of technical assistance. This ‘bottom-up/top-down’ approach has been demonstrated as one of the most successful ways to ensure long-term implementation of evidence-based practice (Odom, 2008).

SERVICES AND MODEL

School divisions who are selected to participate will receive two to three days a week of embedded technical assistance from VCU-ACE technical assistance associates. Our team of Technical Assistance Associates has extensive experience in the provision of applied behavior analysis and other evidence-based practices in public school settings. Technical assistance will include the following steps:

1. Complete divisionwide program assessment of ASD services.
2. Facilitate Divisionwide Autism Services Improvement Team.
3. Assist the Divisionwide Autism Services Improvement Team in developing a Services Improvement Plan including:
 - a. identifying achievable goals,
 - b. defining actions and developing action plans to achieve goals,
 - c. identifying team members responsible for achieving goals,
 - d. setting timelines to achieve goals,
 - e. identifying data targets to assess progress toward achieving goals,
 - f. developing a reporting and review schedule to review progress toward goals, and
 - g. revising the plan as necessary based upon success of the plan and information gathered through data collected.

4. Provide the necessary direct technical assistance to the school division to achieve the goals identified in the Divisionwide Autism Services Improvement Plan including:
 - a. Mentoring and coaching principals, administrators, special and general education teachers, paraprofessionals, related services professionals, and other division staff in evidence-based practices in ASD;
 - b. Facilitating teams to support the development, implementation and review of the Divisionwide Services Improvement Plan;
 - c. Providing staff development on various topics to school division staff related to the use of applied behavior analysis in public education and addressing the needs of students with ASD in classroom settings;
 - d. Assisting divisions in including families in the development and implementation of their Divisionwide Autism Services Improvement Plans; and
 - e. Reporting to divisionwide administration and stakeholders related to the progress of the division toward meeting their goals.
5. Develop a transition plan for the division to continue efforts once the technical assistance period is closed.

Our model is an embedded technical assistance model and our definition of evidence-based practice is congruent with the Virginia Department of Education Document, *Guidelines for Educating Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (VDOE, 2010). This document can be viewed at http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/disabilities/autism/autism_guidelines.pdf. According to this document, evidence-based practice is defined as educational practice that has a body of scientific research to support its use (VDOE, 2010). A list of currently recognized evidence-based practices is included in Appendix C, pages 59 and 60.

At the classroom level of intervention, we will use and expand the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders model classroom project. In this model, classroom teams complete the following steps:

1. complete and evaluate the online introductory course on ASD
2. identify three target students and families to participate and obtain consent to receive monthly technical assistance.
3. implement a range of evidence-based practices that are appropriate for the priority IEP goals of target students

4. participate in monthly communication with staff from National Professional Development Center, the Autism Center for Excellence and state technical assistance consultants to improve implementation of Evidence-Based Practices.

Additionally, participating school divisions must commit to attend the Autism Excellence Academy in Spring 2011 and the Summer Institute in Summer 2011.

ELIGIBILITY

Any school division in the Commonwealth of Virginia is eligible to apply. The school division must present evidence that demonstrates their capacity for participation as an Exemplary Autism site. It is expected that applicants will engage in meaningful planning with autism stakeholders in the preparation of the application.

DESCRIPTION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES

Participating school divisions will receive intensive technical assistance from VCU-ACE experts in a wide array of evidence-based practices. While specific school division goals will be determined collaboratively, areas of practice improvement include the following:

- Implementing consistent applied behavior analysis in public school settings;
- Increasing the knowledge of principals, general education teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, speech therapists, related services professionals, school assessment and school-based team members, and division administrators regarding evidence-based practice for students with ASD;
- Improving school-based and IEP teams knowledge and skills in assessment and planning;
- Improving the abilities of principals and school division administrators to provide supervision and coaching to educational staff; and
- Improving educational staff, community, and family collaboration.

VCU-ACE will guide practice at all levels based on the implementation of technical assistance. VCU-ACE will

provide a coordinated approach to divisionwide systems change, professional development, coaching, mentoring, and services improvement. Divisions will participate with VCU-ACE to develop goals to address all levels of professional and paraprofessional development, improvement in classroom implementation of evidence-based practice, implementation of interdisciplinary teaming, and improvement of family involvement and support. In addition to providing targeted technical assistance, VCU-ACE Technical Assistance Associates will collect data on the success of technical assistance and project outcomes. Technical assistance activities will be modified based on ongoing data-based decision-making.

VCU-ACE will assist the selected divisions' Autism Services Improvement Team (ASIT) in a thorough self-assessment. The following scales will be used for the assessment (Odom, Cox, Brock, et al., 2010; Odom, Neitzel, Boyd, Rezka, & Hume, 2009; Conroy & Schall, 2009):

- Autism Program Environment Rating Scale,
- Autism Program Environment Rating Scale-Middle/High School, and
- Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium Autism Project Program Evaluation Tool.

Upon completion of this self-assessment, VCU-ACE Technical Assistance Associates will convene an Autism Excellence Academy for all identified school divisions. During the meeting, VCU-ACE will assist each school division's ASIT in developing a divisionwide Autism Services Improvement Plan. Included in the plans will be data-based targets and the specific technical assistance and training activities that will take place in the division.

A major aspect of the Autism Excellence Academy will be to establish specific targets and outcomes with each exemplary school division that are customized to the unique needs of that division. Timelines and staffing plans will be developed for the three-year period.

It is our goal to assist school divisions to become exemplary providers of services to their students with ASD. Thus, we are dedicated to building the capacity of school divisions serving students with ASD.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

School divisions who are selected can expect improvements in services to students with ASD across the division. Specifically, VCU-ACE will work with divisions to:

- Substantially increase the technical skills and knowledge of staff, including principals, teachers, school psychologists, speech therapists, related services personnel, and administrators.
- Improve the quality of instructional practices used by special educators.
- Increase school-based teams' ability to accurately identify and assess students with ASD.
- Increase knowledge and implementation of Individual Positive Behavior Support Strategies.
- Increase the quality of IEP development in terms of relevance, functionality and measurability of goals and objectives.
- Increase the ability of general education staff to implement federally required accommodations and modifications to meet the needs of students with ASD.
- Increase the knowledge of school personnel, students, and parents in the use of handheld assistive technology.
- Increase parent participation and satisfaction with school division services.
- Increase administrators knowledge and skills in guiding special and general education teachers who teach students with ASD.
- Increase knowledge of transition planning, secondary intervention, social skills competence and benefits counseling.

SUBMISSION PROCESS

Application Available	January 21, 2011
Application due	February 25, 2011
Notice of Selection	March 4, 2011
Autism Excellence Academy	March 28 to April 1, 2011
Summer Institute	July 11 to 14, 2011
<u>Duration of Technical Assistance 3 Years</u>	

ALL PROPOSALS ARE DUE ON FEBRUARY 25, 2011, BY 5 PM.

Proposals should be no longer than 10 pages, double-spaced with 1-inch margins on all pages in 12-point font. Each page should be numbered and have a footer with the name of the school division.

If there are documents, (e.g., self-evaluations, program improvement plans, or strategic plans) that would further describe the school division's commitment to special education and educating students with ASD, please include those documents in an appendix with the proposal. This will not be included in the 10-page limit.

Schools may provide an electronic submission of these elements at the following address:

cmschall@vcu.edu

or

Schools may provide a hard copy of the proposal to:

**Jan Hensel-Smith
Virginia Commonwealth University
Autism Center of Excellence
1314 West Main Street
P.O. Box 842011
Richmond, Virginia 23284-2011**

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Applicants can contact the VCU-ACE by contacting Dr. Carol Schall at 804-828-4523 or cmschall@vcu.edu for help in preparing their proposals or if you need the proposal in an alternative format. Project staff providing technical assistance will NOT participate in the application review or selection process.

CONSIDERATION FOR SELECTION

Selection considerations for school divisions to receive intensive technical assistance from the VCU-ACE will include:

- Potential to benefit from technical assistance,
- Demonstrated commitment to change,
- Strength of existing supports,
- Vision for systems change,
- Geographic distribution, and
- Commitment to attend the Autism Excellence Academy and the Summer Institute.

Technical Assistance to School Divisions Application

Virginia Commonwealth University -- Autism Center for Excellence (VCU-ACE)

Name of School Division: _____

School Division's Web Site: _____

Superintendents' Region: _____

Current Superintendent: _____

Director of Special Education: _____

Contact Person for Follow-up: _____

Contact Person's E-mail: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Fax number: _____

Names and Titles of individuals completing the application:

Name	Title

I. NARRATIVE: COMPONENTS OF PROPOSAL

a) Background Information on School Division (10 points)

- Describe:
- The school division's student population from preschool to high school in detail.
 - Current initiatives or other consultation agreements currently in place within the school division.

List and Identify: ■ Schools within the division including name, address, and current administrator.

b) Present Level of Autism Educational Services (20 points)

- Describe:
- The existing level and nature of services provided to students with ASD at every level of the system. [Please list all of the types of services provided to students with ASD within the division and highlight some examples of these services at various schools within the division. (For example: if you have an inclusion program, a specialized transition process, or a social skills classroom that you feel is exemplary of your strengths and vision, please tell us about it.) If possible, please also include a tally of students with ASD across grade levels (preschool, elementary, middle, high school, postsecondary education or training).
 - The personnel and physical resources available in the school division to support students with ASD.
 - List potential divisionwide "ASD Services Improvement" team members with names, titles and contact information. If a divisionwide team currently exists to improve services for students with ASD, please list the composition of that team and describe their current projects and accomplishments.

c) Current Challenges (20 points)

- Describe:
- Main challenges the school division encounters serving students with ASD.
 - Current unmet training needs.
 - Resources currently accessed to address challenges.

d) Outcomes the School Division Hopes to Accomplish Through Technical Assistance (30 POINTS)

- Describe:
- Major outcomes you hope to accomplish through technical assistance from VCU-ACE.
 - Data that you currently have that would assist you in assessing the current state of the outcomes you wish to accomplish.
 - Data that you would need to collect to assess your progress in achieving desired outcomes.

e) Plans for Continuing Activities and Division Commitment (20 POINTS)

- Provide:
- Letters of commitment from the
 - Division Superintendent,
 - Director of Special Education,
 - Any other key division personnel who will participate in the development of an ASD Services Improvement Plan.
 - Successful letters of commitment should include reference to the division's vision and goals, confirmation of the division's commitment to release relevant staff to attend the Spring Academy and relevance of this project related to other current divisionwide initiatives.
 - Letters of support from key school division stakeholders and constituents (such as local businesses, community partners, parent groups, the special education advisory board members, school board members, etc.)