

**GUIDELINES FOR UNIFORM TRAINING STANDARDS FOR
PARAPROFESSIONALS WHO PROVIDE PRIMARY OVERSIGHT TO
STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER**

February 2014
Guidelines Developed in Response to
The Amended *Code of Virginia* through House Bill No. 325
Virginia Code § 22.1-298.3

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Publication Information

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Acknowledgments

Personnel in the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) acknowledge with appreciation the contributions of paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators in developing the *Training Standards for Paraprofessionals in Behavior Management of Students with Autism* and the *Guidelines for Uniform Training Standards for Paraprofessionals who Provide Primary Oversight to Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder*. The VDOE specifically acknowledges the exemplary work of the Virginia Commonwealth University Autism Center for Excellence. Appreciation is also extended to those who provided input and offered expertise throughout the development process.

Introduction

In 2012, the Virginia General Assembly amended the *Code of Virginia* through House Bill 325, now codified at Virginia Code § 22.1-298.3. This amendment mandates that paraprofessionals assigned to work with a teacher who has primary oversight of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) receive training in behavior management.

As a response to this bill, *Training Standards for Paraprofessionals Assigned to Work with a Teacher Who Has Primary Oversight of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder* were approved by the Virginia Board of Education. These *Training Standards* include the competencies that fulfill Virginia Code § 22.1-298.3.

To assist local educational agencies (LEAs) in providing professional development to paraprofessionals and to meet the requirements of Virginia Code § 22.1-298.3, the *Guidelines for Uniform Training Standards for Paraprofessionals who Provide Primary Oversight to Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder* were developed. This guidance document is intended to offer recommendations for preparing and supporting paraprofessionals as they provide behavior support to students with ASD.

State Legislation – Virginia Code § 22.1-298.3

Virginia Code § 22.1-298.3 is listed below in its entirety:

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted by adding a section numbered 22.1-298.3 as follows:

§ 22.1-298.3. Students with autism spectrum disorders; training required of personnel.

By September 1, 2014, each school board shall ensure that aides assigned to work with a teacher who has primary oversight of students with autism spectrum disorder receive training in student behavior management within 60 days of assignment to such responsibility. School boards may provide such training to other employees, including transportation employees.

The Board of Education shall provide training standards that school divisions may use to fulfill the requirements of this section.

2. That the Board of Education, in consultation with Virginia Commonwealth University, shall develop online training that school divisions may use to fulfill the requirements of § 22.1-298.3 of the Code of Virginia. Such training shall be made available to local school divisions free of charge.

The *Training Standards* approved by the Virginia Board of Education on January 10, 2013, can be found in Appendix A.

The *Training Standards* Supervisor Checklist can be found in Appendix B.

The VDOE training referenced in Virginia Code § 22.1-298.3 is available through VCU Autism Center for Excellence (VCU-ACE) at <http://vcuautismcenter.org/>.

Paraprofessionals Impacted by Virginia Code § 22.1-298.3

A paraprofessional is a school employee who works under the supervision of a licensed staff member to *assist* in providing instruction, behavior support, and other services as directed by specific job requirements. Paraprofessionals who are assigned to work with a teacher who has primary oversight of students with ASD and must receive training are identified by the following job descriptors:

- An individual aide or paraprofessional with the primary job responsibility as support provider for a student(s) identified with ASD,
- A person whose job performance is evaluated by a teacher who has primary oversight of students with ASD, and
- A person who is assigned as a classroom, community-based, after school extracurricular activity, or summer program paraprofessional in a special education setting as direct support provider for a student(s) identified with ASD.

Paraprofessional Training Standards in Behavior Management

Virginia Code § 22.1-298.3 requires paraprofessionals who are assigned to work with a teacher who has primary oversight of students with autism spectrum disorder to receive training in student behavior management. Effective behavior management requires professionals to have knowledge about interrelated competencies. *Training Standards* that encompass competencies related to behavior management were approved by the Board of Education January 10, 2013.

Paraprofessionals in Virginia schools work under the supervision of a licensed professional to support students. Thus, it is assumed that all of the standards are practiced under the supervision of a licensed professional such as the special or general education teacher. Further, the paraprofessional and teacher should be communicating on a regular basis regarding the plan for the student as well as the student's progress.

Strategies for Professional Development

LEAs may develop original professional development activities or seek support from outside agencies and community resources to provide training in behavior management to paraprofessionals who support students with ASD. These guidelines are designed to assist LEAs in providing training required to build the knowledge and skill base needed to effectively support students with ASD. This section provides guidance and resources for designing, implementing,

and evaluating professional development systems for paraprofessionals that focus on enhancing student success.

Professional Development Framework

1. Identification of Personnel for Oversight

LEAs should designate personnel to oversee training. Designee(s) are to identify the paraprofessionals required to receive training. A designee may be a central office administrator, building administrator, department chair, or lead autism teacher. The personnel to be involved in training activities should include identified paraprofessionals, a licensed teacher, and trainer. The licensed teacher's role may vary greatly from providing input and oversight to serving as both teacher and trainer. The designee will also provide information about training requirements, oversee training activities and keep a record of completion.

2. Scope of Training

Once personnel are identified, the *Training Standards* are to be reviewed. Designees are to determine the breadth and scope of training needs based on the *Training Standards* and the paraprofessionals' job responsibilities. Paraprofessionals, licensed teachers, and trainers should be apprised of the requirements of Virginia Code § 22.1-298.3, the LEAs requirements for training, and the method for monitoring and tracking of training, as well as any measures used to evaluate effectiveness of training. This information should be provided in the introductory period of training activities.

3. Professional Development Phase

LEAs have the autonomy to choose and implement the training strategies that will be effective in addressing individual needs and that will be appropriate for the paraprofessional based on role, length of employment, as well as past trainings and current skills. LEAs should consider the following suggestions when developing training materials or selecting training materials from outside sources.

- Trainings should include research-based activities such as discussion, demonstration, or role playing that leads to skill enhancement.
- Needs of training and development programs for paraprofessionals should be based upon the *Training Standards* and the job responsibilities of the individual trainee.
- After assessing needs, training should be identified and a training program(s) developed.
- LEAs should combine any training with a variety of opportunities for observation, practice, real-time feedback and coaching.
- Training activities may be delivered by administrators, specialists, or the special education classroom teacher in collaboration with the paraprofessional trainee.

Professional development activities will vary based upon the needs of each LEA. Training may include the following approaches, any combination thereof, or based upon unique methodologies determined by the LEA:

- *Cohorts*: LEAs may coordinate administrative leave for paraprofessionals who require training at a specified time during the school year. These individuals may attend regularly scheduled training activities in a designated location, as members of a learning community or cohort. Cohorts may complete computer-based modules with trainer support or participate in specialist-led live training activities.
- *Individualized Training*: Paraprofessionals may independently complete professional development activities that meet LEA requirements. Paraprofessionals must submit evidence that all the required training components have been addressed. It is also the responsibility of the paraprofessional to provide proof of completion to the LEA. These activities may include, but are not limited to, multi-day presentations, online courses, and LEA-approved trainings provided internally or by outside organizations or institutes.
- *Train the trainer*: Specialists from outside organizations, within an LEA, or LEAs working collaboratively may train licensed professionals to deliver paraprofessional training. Train-the-trainer materials may be developed by autism specialists within a division or LEAs may utilize outside resources after obtaining permissions and agreeing to possible terms and conditions.

4. Accountability

It is the responsibility of the LEA to identify the paraprofessionals who require training in behavior management, determine how and when such training will be conducted, and track completion of activities. It is recommended that each LEA create a documentation system for this purpose.

When the paraprofessional has received training, it is recommended that the LEA require documentation of completion. Certificates of completion from live or online training activities, coaching logs, classroom evaluation forms, or other appropriate items are suitable mechanisms for accountability documentation. Appendix B provides a sample checklist to assist with accountability tracking.

Tracking is an essential element of accountability. The LEA has flexibility in the design of its tracking systems. All schools will benefit from having clear documentation of the roles, responsibilities, and professional development needs of all their paraprofessionals.

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

To help LEAs meet the mandate provided in this bill, an enactment section of the bill resulting in Virginia Code Section § 22.1-298.3 stated:

That the Board of Education, in consultation with Virginia Commonwealth University, shall develop online training that school divisions may use to fulfill the requirements of § 22.1-298.3 of the Code of Virginia. Such training shall be made available to local school divisions free of charge.

Therefore, VCU-ACE, a university-based technical assistance, professional development, and educational research center for Autism Spectrum Disorders in the Commonwealth of Virginia, provides training for school divisions that meet the *Training Standards* set forth by VDOE. The VDOE provides support to VCU-ACE for the purpose of delivering such training. Training is delivered free of charge through online learning activities to paraprofessionals in LEAs throughout the Commonwealth. Upon successful completion of training, a certificate is provided to the participant. For more information on training through VCU-ACE, please visit the Web site at www.vcuautismcenter.org.

Resources

U. S. Department of Education (2002). No Child Left Behind Act. Washington, DC. Retrieved August 1, 2013 <http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>

U. S. Department of Education (2004). Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. Washington, DC. Retrieved August 1, 2013
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html>

Virginia Autism Council. (2010). *Skill Competencies for Professionals and Paraprofessionals in Virginia Supporting Individuals with Autism Across the Lifespan*. Richmond, VA: Author. Retrieved August 1, 2013 <http://www.autismtrainingva.org/competencies>

Virginia Department of Education (2005). *The Virginia Paraprofessional Guide to Supervision and Collaboration with Paraprofessionals: A Partnership*. Richmond, VA. Retrieved August 1, 2013 http://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching/regulations/paraprofessional_guide.pdf

Appendix A

Training Standards for Paraprofessionals Assigned to Work with a Teacher Who Has Primary Oversight of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Adopted by the Board of Education, January 10, 2013)

General Autism Standards	
1.	Lists and explains the defining characteristics of autism (communication, patterns of stereotypical behavior, socialization, and social skill development) and the impact on the individual as defined by the Virginia Department of Education.
2.	Lists and explains the associated characteristics commonly present in autism (e.g., difficulties in sensory processing, motor skills, theory of mind, and imitation) and the impact on the individual.
3.	Lists and explains the associated cognitive characteristics and learning styles commonly present in autism (e.g., difficulties in executive functioning, attending, planning, abstract thinking, problem solving) and the impact on the individual.
4.	Describes the continuum of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and the range of characteristics, abilities and learning needs that may be present.

Behavior Standards	
5.	Defines the term interfering behavior and identifies when interfering behavior is / is not present and when intervention is warranted.
6.	Explains the components of the behavior chain (setting event, antecedents, behavior, and consequences) and the impact on interfering behavior and identifies examples with students with ASD.
7.	Describes the relationship between communication and interfering behaviors and identifies examples with students with ASD.
8.	Lists the potential functions of interfering behaviors and identifies examples with students with ASD.

9.	Lists and describes the components of a positive behavior support plan and explains how each component can reduce interfering behavior while promoting the dignity and respect of the student.
10.	Implements proactive strategies designed to prevent the occurrence of interfering behaviors.
11.	Provides individualized positive reinforcement for demonstration of new skills designed to replace interfering behavior as well as the absence of interfering behaviors.
12.	Implements all components of a positive behavior support plan with consistency across all environments.
13.	Implements strategies to de-escalate a crisis situation to keep the student, self, and others safe as outlined by the student's intervention plan and division policies.
14.	Communicates any instances of crisis level interfering behaviors with the educational team immediately and reports the incident according to school and division policies.
15.	Provides the educational team with information regarding any areas of concern or changes in behavior.
16.	Observes behaviors and records data using objective measures and criteria to decrease the interfering behavior and increase the alternative and positive behaviors.

Communication Standards

17.	Implements evidence-based practices to teach receptive and expressive communication outlined in the student's goals and objectives.
18.	Provides numerous communication opportunities throughout the day to enable students to achieve communication goals through environmental arrangement, routines, peer interactions and motivational activities.
19.	Implements programs designed to enhance communication skills across all daily activities and with multiple communication partners to ensure generalization of skills.

20.	Implements evidence-based practices to teach and promote choice-making skills.
21.	Implements evidence-based practices to teach receptive communication skills which will enable a student to expand knowledge of vocabulary follow directions and increase comprehension.
22.	Implements evidence-based practices to teach expressive communication skills which will enable a student to communicate effectively in his or her environment and increase positive interactions.
23.	Implements evidence-based practices to develop pragmatic communication skills.
24.	Implements appropriate augmentative communication interventions such as object or picture exchange systems, voice output communication devices, gestures, signs, and text, among others, to promote or enhance communication based on the student's goals and objectives.

Social Skills Standards

25.	Uses evidence-based practices to teach social skills and to foster social interest and interactions outlined in the student's goals and objectives.
26.	Provides numerous opportunities throughout the day to work on social skills that enable students to achieve social goals.
27.	Implements programs designed to enhance social skills across all daily activities and with multiple social partners to ensure generalization of skills.
28.	Implements evidence-based practices to teach and promote the understanding and following of common social rules and norms.
29.	Implements evidence-based practices to teach and promote emotional development and emotional regulation as it relates to self as well as others.
30.	Supports interactions between peers and students with ASD providing relevant information and guidance to peers that will foster interactions and provide opportunities to learn social goals and objectives.

Comprehensive Instructional Programming Standards	
31.	Provides intervention through a full range of instructional formats (e.g., one-to-one, small group, school/community interactions, and peer-mediated instruction).
32.	Implements a wide variety of evidence-based practices that effectively address the individual's goals and objectives.
33.	Implements prompting strategies and hierarchies that promote high rates of successful performance.
34.	Identifies individualized reinforcement preferences using indirect and direct measures on an ongoing basis.
35.	Provides appropriate reinforcement contingent on behavior, emphasizes the use of naturally occurring reinforcement, and fades systematically to support student independence.
36.	Delivers instruction that is clear, concise and appropriate for the student and ensures student understanding.
37.	Implements task analysis by breaking skills into small teachable parts and chaining steps of a task for skill acquisition.
38.	Implements instruction that promotes active engagement and maximizes opportunities for learning.
39.	Implements evidence-based practices with fidelity across all settings to foster generalization and maintenance of skills.
40.	Implements accommodations and/or modifications of tasks that effectively address the individual's goals and objectives.
41.	Utilizes adaptive equipment and assistive technology options that effectively address the individual's goals and objectives.

42.	Respects the needs, desires, and interests of the individual and families when implementing evidence-based practices and providing support to the individual.
43.	Collaborates with the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team as evidenced by regular communication and participation in scheduled team meetings and informs the team of any areas of concern or changes in behavior.
44.	Implements and follows-up on team decisions and communicates results to the team.
45.	Observes behaviors and records data using objective measures and criteria.

Environmental Structure and Visual Supports Standards

46.	Assists in implementing safe environments that are free of hazards.
47.	Assists in implementing a positive climate that promotes respect for the individual.
48.	Implements a variety of visual supports and strategies to communicate information and expectations and increase independence of the student (e.g., break cards, rule cards, narratives, and scripts).
49.	Implements a daily schedule of activities that is individualized by length (e.g., full day, part day) and type (e.g., objects, photos, icons, words).
50.	Implements mini-schedules to help the individual participate in the environment and complete activities and routines independently.
51.	Uses visual supports and strategies to help the individual prepare for and complete transitions.
52.	Uses evidence-based practices to teach the individual the purpose of visual supports and how to use the visual supports independently.

Sensory Motor Development Standards

53.	Describes the basic function of the sensory system, impact that sensory processing has on learning and the potential differences for students with ASD.
54.	Implements sensory motor intervention plan with fidelity across all environments determined by the student's goals and the educational team.

Independence and Aptitude Standards

55.	Implements a variety of evidence-based practices to increase an individual's short-term and long-term independence in functional and daily living skills as outlined in his/her goals and objectives.
56.	Implements a variety of evidence-based practices to increase an individual's cognitive and learning abilities outlined in his/her goals and objectives.
57.	Implements a variety of evidence-based practices to increase an individual's academic skills outlined in his/her goals and objectives.
58.	Provides numerous opportunities throughout the day to work on independence and aptitude skills to enable students to achieve goals and foster generalization and maintenance of skills.

Appendix B

Autism Spectrum Disorder Training Standards for Paraprofessionals Supervisor Checklist

Trainee Name: _____

Division/School Assignment(s): _____

Trainer Name/Title/Organization: _____

Training at a Glance		
Domain:	Completed (Y/N):	Date:
General Autism Standards		
Behavior Standards		
Communication Standards		
Social Skills Standards		
Comprehensive Instructional Programming Standards		
Environmental Structure and Visual Supports Standards		
Sensory Motor Development Standards		
Independence and Aptitude Standards		

General Autism Standards		
Level of Competency:	Trainee Initial	Trainer Initial
I - Instruction		
O - Observation of Model or Role Play		
D - Demonstrated with students		

Behavior Standards		
Level of Competency:	Trainee Initial	Trainer Initial
I - Instruction		
O - Observation of Model or Role Play		
D - Demonstrated with students		

Communication Standards		
Level of Competency:	Trainee Initial	Trainer Initial
I - Instruction		
O - Observation of Model or Role Play		
D - Demonstrated with students		

Social Skills Standards		
Level of Competency:	Trainee Initial	Trainer Initial
I - Instruction		
O - Observation of Model or Role Play		
D - Demonstrated with students		

Comprehensive Instructional Programming Standards		
Level of Competency:	Trainee Initial	Trainer Initial
I - Instruction		
O - Observation of Model or Role Play		
D - Demonstrated with students		

Environmental Structure and Visual Supports Standards		
Level of Competency:	Trainee Initial	Trainer Initial
I - Instruction		
O - Observation of Model or Role Play		
D - Demonstrated with students		

Sensory Motor Development Standards		
Level of Competency:	Trainee Initial	Trainer Initial
I - Instruction		
O - Observation of Model or Role Play		
D - Demonstrated with students		

Independence and Aptitude Standards		
Level of Competency:	Trainee Initial	Trainer Initial
I - Instruction		
O - Observation of Model or Role Play		
D - Demonstrated with students		