

THE FRAMEWORK FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS PROGRAM ENDORSEMENT GUIDELINES

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**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
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DEFINITION OF AN ENDORSEMENT CERTIFICATE

Following approval by the Department, baccalaureate or graduate degree granting institutions, alone or in cooperation with other institutions, community colleges or school entities, may offer short programs (12 credits) that lead to the Program Endorsement. The Program Endorsement documents knowledge in new and emerging areas where formal certification does not exist. The Program Endorsement is intended to improve a teacher's skills in dealing with complex classroom settings. These endorsements are added to existing Level I or Level II certificates but are not required to perform service in these areas.

INTRODUCTION TO AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS (ASD) ENDORSEMENT GUIDELINES

This document describes the professional knowledge, skills, and competencies that candidates will learn by completing a prescribed sequence of courses (including field experiences). In addition to specific requirements and competencies, these guidelines discuss the Autism Spectrum Disorders Endorsement program design, candidate competencies, field experiences, and any prerequisite certificates needed by the candidate.

Prerequisite for Autism Spectrum Disorders Endorsement Program:

Level I and Level II certificates (including but not limited to regular and special education, school psychologist, principal, guidance counselor, speech and language clinician, occupational and physical therapist, reading specialist, and home and school visitor).

Consistent with Chapter 354, all endorsement programs must include some components of field experiences. (See 22 PA Code §354.25(d)). Field experiences are defined as a range of formal, required school and community activities participated in by candidates who are enrolled in educator preparation programs. These activities generally include supervision and mentorship of a teacher with expertise in the endorsement area. Effective field experiences provide candidates with increasing exposure to learning situations and school settings under the guidance of program faculty and trained mentors throughout the preparation program.

Institutions must demonstrate:

1. How they implement field experiences.
2. The duration of candidate field experiences.
3. How these experiences are closely integrated with coursework, assessment practices, and program goals.

OVERVIEW OF AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS ENDORSEMENT

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are a group of complex neurological developmental disabilities that are characterized by impaired social interaction, problems with nonverbal and verbal communication, and unusual or severely limited activities, interests, or behaviors. Other commonly occurring difficulties include unusual responses to everyday sensations such as sounds, touch, or visual stimuli, etc., often accompanied by marked difficulty learning how to regulate and control behavioral responses. There are innumerable combinations of how the core deficits manifest themselves, and there is no single characteristic or behavior that is common to all students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (see [PaTTAN](#) for further information). As the Commonwealth experiences a considerable increase in the proportion of students eligible for services under the Pennsylvania State Board of Education Regulations Chapter 14 definition of Autism (see [Pennsylvania Autism Census Project Final Report, 2009](#)), a significant need exists for well-trained professionals holding various Level I and Level II certificates of professional competence (including but not limited to regular and special education teachers, school psychologists, principals, guidance counselors, speech and language clinicians, occupational and physical therapists, reading specialists and home and school visitors) to serve students with Autism and related Autism Spectrum Disorders. The ASD endorsement is designed to demonstrate that candidates have completed a competency-based sequence of courses totaling **12 credit hours** at a baccalaureate degree level or higher, and successfully completed an endorsement program.

This endorsement provides an additional level of skills of specific training and experiences for professionals who provide educational services for the population of students presenting with various pervasive developmental disorders and functioning on the autism spectrum. It will allow professional educators holding this endorsement to address the complex needs of students with ASD in various classroom and school settings. Education professionals achieving this endorsement will have demonstrated competencies related to research-based assessment, intervention, instruction, and program management for students with ASD. The ASD endorsement will be applicable for those professionals serving students across age/grade levels (preschool through completion of high school) and various ranges of functioning.

The ASD Endorsement Guidelines are created in congruence with Title 22 of the Pennsylvania School Code, Chapter §49.62B¹ and follow the General Standards required for all certificates for State Approval of Professional Educator Programs. The guideline competencies are aligned with the Pennsylvania Academic and Alternative Standards, the guidelines of various professional organizations, including the Council for Exceptional Children and the Behavior Analyst Certification Board, state assessments, and the specific language and conditions of the state's professional education community. This endorsement is to be in addition to existing Level I and Level II certificates, but is not a requirement for performing services related to the instruction of eligible students under the definition of autism or other autism spectrum disorders.

Educators who hold the ASD endorsement will demonstrate responsibility for perpetuating high standards of professional conduct and ethical behavior. This conduct includes demonstrating competency in communicating essential information regarding the nature of ASD and effective autism spectrum disorder treatments to a broad range of people, both within and outside of educational settings, e.g., families, medical providers, mental health workers, people in community settings, emergency responders, and others. Professionals who have obtained this endorsement will be able to advocate for students with ASD and as a resource to their fellow educators regarding this population, especially in regard to educational programming. Individuals holding this endorsement are expected to maintain ongoing efforts to remain informed regarding the reliability, validity, and changes and refinements in the empiric literature supporting various ASD interventions and accommodations. The ASD endorsement also suggests that endorsed professional will uphold and demonstrate ethical conduct as established by both regulatory and professional standards related to their primary professional certification.

¹ **§49.62b. Program Endorsement Certificate.** Following approval by the Department, baccalaureate or graduate degree granting institutions, along or in cooperation with other institutions, community colleges or school entities, may offer short programs (12 credits) that lead to the Program Endorsement Certificate. The Program Endorsement Certificate documents knowledge in new and emerging areas where formal certification does not exist. The Program Endorsement Certificate is intended to improve a teacher's skills in dealing with complex classroom settings, including teaching gifted students or diverse learners in areas such as assistive technology curriculum modification, autism spectrum disorders, assessment, gifted education, classroom management, classroom technology and disruptive youth. These endorsements would be added to existing Level I or Level II certificates but are not required to perform service in these areas.

PROGRAM DESIGN

The professional core courses, competencies, and experiences for the Autism Spectrum Disorders Endorsement Program must be designed to address the specific set of issues, knowledge, and competencies that are relevant to teaching and learning. The program must prepare educators who will be able to support students' mastery of academic standards and the content assessment anchors.

The program consists of required competencies and includes field experiences.

The program design must describe clearly how the relevant set of knowledge, skills, and competencies inform the program design, and the application must also indicate how the institution will assess whether candidates have acquired the required knowledge, skills, and competencies.

All courses (12 credits) must be grounded in theories of cognitive, emotional, and social development and demonstrate research based practices which enable candidates to gain the knowledge and experience needed to work successfully with family members with ASD and the broader community.

The ASD endorsement establishes that eligible individuals will demonstrate competency related to the following key domains:

- I. Characteristics and Etiology of Autism
- II. Assessment for Instructional Planning
- III. Instructional Interventions and Methods Across Settings and Grade Levels
- IV. Family, Interagency, and Community Collaboration

Field Experiences

Effective educational services require professionals to acquire a wide range of instructional and clinical skills related to student with ASD. It is imperative that candidates seeking an ASD endorsement have experience in interacting with and guiding instruction for students with ASD (McGee & Morrier, 2005; National Research Council, 2001).

Candidates for the ASD endorsement will be required to complete field experiences that involve educational and behavioral programming for students with ASD. It is recommended that students have access to a range of age and functional levels of students with ASD; however, depth of experience rather than breadth is of utmost importance.

In order to assure the consistency of field experiences with course content and the 12-credit requirement, field experiences will be integrated into course content. Field

experiences will include direct interactions with professionals serving students with ASD and direct experiences interacting with students with ASD. Field experiences will provide candidates exposure to formulating and providing individualized interventions and instruction for students with ASD in both regular and specialized settings with opportunities to observe and participate in assessment processes. Special education certification competencies do not require specific experiences with ASD students. Standards for this endorsement include field experiences that directly involve students with ASD. Competencies related to the unique characteristics of ASD and the complexity of instructional assessment, design and delivery for students with ASD are unlikely to be acquired without direct field experience (McGee & Morrier, 2005).

CANDIDATE COMPETENCIES

Similar to the requirements in Chapter 354 of Title 22 of the Pennsylvania School Code, this section outlines the competencies required for endorsements, which ensure that candidates complete a well-planned sequence of courses and field experiences to develop an understanding of the structure, skills, core concepts, facts, methods of inquiry, and application of technology related to the endorsement area. See 22 Pa. Code §354.25(a)(3).

The competencies of the ASD endorsement are derived from standards established through evidence-based professional literature and are consistent with professional guidelines proposed by various organizations such as:

- National Autism Center’s National Standards Project (2009),
- Behavior Analysts Certification Board’s task list for working with persons with autism (2004),
- Council for Exceptional Children’s statement on Ethics, Standards, and Guidelines related to special education teachers (2009).

Aligned resources and tools to support the acquisition of these competencies can be found on the [Standards Aligned System \(SAS\)](#) portal.

I. Characteristics and Etiology of ASD

Candidates will demonstrate their ability to:

- A. Describe the defining characteristics of and diagnostic criteria for the various Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) and other associated disorders, including common manifestations within communication and verbal behavior, social skills and social adaptations, repetitive and stereotypical behaviors, and patterns of responses to various sensory stimuli.

- B. Discuss key theoretical, actuarial and scientific hypothesis regarding the etiology of ASD.
- C. Explain the relevant history of the changing definitions, interventions, and cultural attitudes regarding ASD and their relationship to educational services.
- D. Identify and describe various diagnostic instruments and procedures, including their strengths and limitations.

II. Assessment for Instructional Planning

Candidates will demonstrate their ability to:

- A. Identify the range of assessment domains (Comprehensive Autism Assessment Planning Tool, 2008) that may be relevant for planning instructional programs for students with ASD.
- B. Plan, structure, and conduct assessment for students with ASD.
- C. Identify and demonstrate acceptable accommodations and appropriate adaptations to state- and district-wide (local) assessments for students with ASD.
- D. Describe, interpret, utilize, and evaluate data from ongoing progress monitoring and formative assessment methods to design and adapt programming for students with ASD.
- E. Plan, organize, and lead multidisciplinary team members through the functional behavior assessment process to identify function of problematic behavior(s) and associated skill deficits.
- F. Identify when intensity or danger of problem behaviors requires a functional assessment and make appropriate referrals.

III. Instructional Interventions and Methods across Settings and Grade Levels

Candidate will demonstrate their ability to:

- A. Discuss characteristics, strengths, and limitations of various models of intervention commonly implemented for students with ASD.
- B. Evaluate the evidence base for educational interventions for students with ASD.
- C. Describe, interpret, utilize, and evaluate instructional strategies based on the principles of applied behavior analysis.
- D. Define and demonstrate skills related to verified evidence-based interventions and instruction established for students with ASD (National Standards Project, 2009).
- E. Assess and structure the environmental supports to enable students with ASD to participate and progress in all environments.
- F. Accommodate and/or modify specific instructional programs and materials to meet the needs of students and ASD in all environments.

- G. Describe the relative strengths and limitations of various augmentative communication systems as applicable to students' needs and the environment's requirements.
- H. Organize classroom teams to provide effective intervention and instruction by developing and managing a daily schedule for students and multiple staff that specifies appropriate levels of instructional engagement for students with ASD.
- I. Provide appropriate training, consultation, and instructional coaching to other professional and nonprofessional staff having contact with students with ASD.
- J. Describe and demonstrate procedures for crisis management, including procedures to reduce intensity of problem behavior, minimize danger, and ensure the safety of students with ASD and other individuals in crisis situations.
- K. Proactively apply methods to reduce student motivation to engage in problem behavior, assess its effectiveness, and teach functionally equivalent replacement behaviors.

IV. Collaboration with Families, Agencies, and the Community

Candidates will demonstrate their abilities in and understanding of:

- A. Facilitating family and school collaboration with sensitivity to the range of the impact that ASD may have on the family system.
- B. Identifying various agencies and community systems that support students with ASD in the home, community, and work settings.
- C. Assessing family preference for level of support in advocating for their children and provide appropriate assistance.
- D. Communicating and advocating for the needs of students with ASD to police, emergency responders, and other individuals and groups in the community.
- E. Leading cross-system planning and collaboration efforts.
- F. Designing instructional programs with attentiveness to legal mandates and family considerations.

FACULTY

Endorsement certificate programs submitted for review to the Department must include a review of qualifications of faculty assigned to teach each course within the endorsement program. Faculty who teach in the program must have demonstrated expertise in education methods appropriate to teaching in the program. Evidence of qualification includes related academic degrees, public school certifications(s), professional experience in basic (PreK-12) and/or higher education, and professional development pertaining to the competencies assigned to a course (similar to 22 Pa. Code §354.25 and 354.26).

APPLICATION PROCESS

The institution's certification officer will recommend the candidate for the endorsement after successful completion of the Autism Spectrum Disorders Endorsement Program. The candidate must complete the required PDE application for endorsement and pay the appropriate fee to add the endorsement to their instructional certificate. The application process may be found under [Certifications](#) on the PDE website.

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