

Teacher Toolbox



Teacher Toolbox – April 2024

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Creating Quality Individualized Education Plans: *IEP Considerations for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*



An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a program tailored to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities and is written in collaboration with a variety of critical team members, which include, but are not limited to, the parent/guardian, general and special education teachers, ancillary staff (e.g., speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, social worker, etc.), and sometimes the student. IEPs are part of public education that is provided, by law, to eligible students, ages 3 years and older, who attend public school (including charter schools). To be eligible for an IEP, a student must have one or more of the 13 conditions that are covered under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), AND the student must demonstrate a need for special education services. The purpose of an IEP is to lay out the special education instruction, supports, and services a student needs to thrive in school.

A group of concerned parents in Texas raised concerns that schools were not providing adequate services to students with ASD, which prompted Texas Project First to develop considerations of evidence-based practices to help IEP teams discuss and consider the most essential needs for this population of students. The New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) Director of Special Education initially introduced these considerations as guidelines, which were then adopted into law in July 2011 and are known as "*The 11 IEP Considerations for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder*".

According to the memorandum published by NMPED on January 18, 2011:

- Not all students with ASD require implementation of all eleven considerations.
- Although some students with ASD may appear to require less support than others, it is important to address critical skills in social, behavioral, and organizational skills for all students with ASD.
- The law does not mandate specific programs or services.
- The law does require that the IEP team **discuss** the considerations, and document why each will or will not be implemented.

"The 11 Considerations" apply to all students with an educational eligibility of autism spectrum disorder, regardless of the student's level of support or academic abilities. Implementing the 11 considerations does not require specific credentials. However, general training about autism and access to information about research-based practices are critical. Many of the considerations may already be included in the IEP, so this checklist

is designed to serve as a tool to make sure all areas of potential needs are systematically addressed by the IEP team members. This checklist also guides IEP teams through identifying **when** to consider/discuss specific issues during the meeting and **where** to document this information within the IEP paperwork.

NMPED Definitions of IEP Considerations for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

1. **Extended Educational Programming** - Extended School Year (ESY) services or programs offered when school is not in session and/or the extension of the school day.
2. **Daily Schedules reflecting minimal unstructured time and active engagement in learning activities** - Developing a schedule dependent on the students individual functioning including short blocks of time or the use of more organized arrangements during unstructured times.
3. **In-home and Community-Based Training or viable alternatives that assist the student with acquisition of social/behavioral skills** - Teaching in "real world" environment where social/behavioral skills are needed.
4. **Positive Behavior Support Strategies** - Modifying environments to help students learn new and appropriate behaviors and the prevention of problem behaviors through Behavior Intervention Plan.
5. **Futures Planning (beginning at any age)** - Having an end goal in mind and in each grade level build skills to reach long-term goals.
6. **Parent/Family Training and Support** - Providing training and support by personnel with experience in ASD.
7. **Staff-to-Student Ratio** - Providing the number of staff members needed in classroom and out of the classroom to provide appropriate identified activities that are needed to achieve social/behavioral progress at the student's developmental and learning level.
8. **Communication Interventions** - Including language forms and functions that enhance effective communication across settings such as assistive technology.
9. **Social Skills Supports** - Providing strategies based on social skills assessment/curriculum and provided across settings.
10. **Professional Educator/Staff Support** - Ensuring staff have general training about autism and strategies to implement an IEP for students with ASD.
11. **Teaching Strategies based on peer-reviewed, and/or research-based practices** - Considering various teaching strategies, visual supports, augmentative communication, or social skills training.

Takeaway Tips:

- ❖ Familiarize yourself with the 11 Considerations before you participate in the IEP team meeting and ask questions if there is anything you don't understand.
- ❖ The checklist serves as a guideline to ensure that the IEP is truly customized to fit the specific needs of the student.
- ❖ Each consideration needs to be addressed in the IEP, but every strategy will not necessarily need to be implemented. Discussion regarding each consideration must be documented.
- ❖ Educator/staff support and trainings are a crucial chunk of the 11 considerations, so **REMEMBER:** The **Technical Assistance Program (TAP)** through Cooperative Educational Services (CES) provides many professional development workshop opportunities via live virtual and pre-recorded webinars to support New Mexico educators and families. Be sure to take advantage of these complimentary trainings to learn a wide variety of teaching strategies, visual tools, and social skills supports that will fill your toolbox with what you need to support your students with autism spectrum disorders.
- ❖ Be prepared to advocate for what you think is important for the student while listening carefully to the viewpoints of the rest of the team. You are an important member of the student's IEP team!

Although the creation of truly "Individualized" Education Programs (IEPs) requires significant time and energy, they are a worthy investment! IEPs play a vital role in enhancing educational and personal development for students with autism and other disabilities. When implemented with fidelity, the 11 Considerations for Students with ASD will aid in the creation of this critical roadmap for parents, teachers, support staff, therapists, and other professionals to support each student's unique needs, supporting their learning and success in school and throughout their lives.

References

<https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/special-education/asd/>

<https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Autism-Spectrum-Disorders-Considerations-Definitions.pdf>

<https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/IEP-Checklist-Considerations-%E2%80%93-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder.pdf>

<file:///C:/Users/marni/Documents/1-21-23%20Backup%20before%20coffee%20spill%20repair/TAP/UNM%20article%2011-Considerations.pdf>

For more helpful strategies to support your students with autism and other needs, access the complementary Technical Assistance Program (TAP), Hot Topic On Demand Library Pre-recorded Webinars at www.cestap.org or register for the last live-virtual Autism Toolbox Series workshop of this school year on 4/18/24: EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS: The brain's "Air Traffic Controller" - Tools for your students and YOU! at www.ces.org.

