

**A Study  
of Services  
for  
Students  
Diagnosed with  
Autism Spectrum Disorder  
SD 44 (North Vancouver)**

*Don Chapman*

*October 2006*

# Table of Contents

	Page
Preface	3
Introduction	5
Terms of Reference	5
Methodology	5
Numbers of Students Served	6
Evidence Based Practices	6
Definitions	6
Characteristics	6
Findings	8
Summary of the Survey Results: Parents	8
Summary of the Survey Results: Staff	11
Summary of the Focus Group Discussions	15
Discussion of the Data	22
Recommendations	23
Conclusion	25
Appendices	
A. Outline of focus group discussion	26
B. Questionnaire parents	27
C. Questionnaire to staff	30

# Preface

In 1999, the North Vancouver School District underwent a thorough review of special education services under the direction of an outside consultant. All stakeholders were involved and the project was steered by a joint NVTA/Board Committee (The Mainstreaming and Integration Committee).

The results of this review clearly supported the philosophy of special education and the goals for inclusion in place in North Vancouver. The review resulted in sixteen recommendations and the Mainstreaming and Integration Committee coordinated the implementation of these recommendations over the next school year. The results of this review included the following:

1. Re-organization of special education into a family of schools model in order to align services and provide consistency across the K-12 system.
2. Coordination of each family of schools group by a Department Head who would provide leadership and collaborative problem solving for the FOS group and school teams. These Department Heads each represent a specialty area (e.g. counseling, speech language pathology) in order to provide expertise and consultation to the larger group.
3. Development of an in-service plan for the District. This significant recommendation of the Special Education Review impacted all areas of special education and increased inservice opportunities across the District. Over the next few years we offered numerous opportunities for training and in-service in autism and sent teachers and SEA's to many outside workshops. This focus continues as a part of our overall efforts to keep staff current in this field.
4. Development of the North Vancouver Service Delivery Model for Special Education: "Addressing the Diverse Needs of Learners in the Classroom".
5. Development of a new web based IEP program.

Following the review and in consideration of the needs of the District, an additional Department Head position was created exclusively for Autism. That position was full time for a year, then part time for a variety of reasons over the next few years (medical leave, lack of suitable candidates, etc.). In the 2006-2007 school year we have returned to 1.0 staff for Autism support (.5 department Head, .5 teacher).

In addition to the above, in 2002, the North Vancouver School District, in co-operation with CUPE, created a new position called Autism Support Worker. This job classification allows us to carefully match students, as needed, with support workers who have significant training and experience in Applied Behavior Analysis techniques. We currently have 17 ASW's in the District including 2 itinerant staff who support other SEA's and staff in programming for students with autism.

Currently we continue to explore ways to effectively provide services to our students with autism in partnership with our parents, each of our schools and outside consultants. The attached review gives multiple examples of our efforts in this regard.

On behalf of the District, many thanks to Don Chapman and appreciation for his professional and thorough efforts in this review. The results will, once again, move us forward in our delivery of services to students with autism.

Sue Altman  
District Principal, Student Services  
North Vancouver School District

# Introduction

In the spring of 2006, School District 44 (North Vancouver) contracted with D. Chapman Consulting Ltd. (the Consultant) to participate in a study of programs and services for students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The Consultant takes full responsibility for the report and the recommendations contained therein. In the process of data collection, particularly in the focus group process, many recommendations were generated. The recommendations in the report are a synthesis of many of these recommendations. It is important to note that all recommendations are supported by evidence based practices as cited in this report. The recommendations are intended to address the major strengths and challenges identified in the study.

## Terms of Reference

The goals of the study were as follows:

1. to identify the key elements of effective programming and services for students in the elementary grades who have Autism and Autism spectrum Disorder
2. to make recommendations respecting program delivery that consistently involve all of the key elements, while addressing needs for flexibilities that are sensitive to the range of student learning profiles that fall within the Autism Spectrum.
3. to make other recommendations that the review identifies as pertinent , for example in-service training, school supports, program resources, facilities, communications, protocols, etc.

The context for the study included the *School Act, the Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines; Ministry of Education*, and North Vancouver District policies, Special Education Delivery Model, Strategic Directions Framework and the District Accountability Contract.

## Methodology for the Review

The Consultant in consultation with the District, determined that the study would be based on a strengths- based perspective. The data gathering process focused on the following:

1. a survey to all parents of students identified in the Autism Spectrum as well as all staff who may have worked with students having this diagnosis. This included all teachers, all specialist teachers, all autism support workers and special education assistants and all principals and vice principals. The survey questions addressed the major areas of “Program Quality Indicators for Students with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities” (PQI) by the Metro Chapter of BC CASE. The PQI was in turn adapted from a tool prepared by the University of the State of New York.
2. focus group discussions of all stakeholder groups. This included separate focus groups for parents, for teachers and specialist teachers, for autism support workers

and special education assistants and focus groups for principals and vice principals.

Each focus group addressed four general questions:

- a. In the area of provision of services for students diagnosed in the autism spectrum disorder, what is working well now?
  - b. What are the major challenges that the district faces in terms of provision of services diagnosed in the autism spectrum disorder?
  - c. What enhancements, improvements or changes could be implemented to both maintain the current strengths and to address challenges?
  - d. What might get in the way of implementing the recommendations?
3. individual interviews with selected students at the high school level

Prior to the commencement of the study, the Director of Student and Program Services and the Consultant met with a group of parents as well as principals and vice principals to gain their perspective on the study and to solicit areas which should be addressed during the course of the study.

### **Numbers of Students Served**

In the 2005 – 06 school year, 106 students were identified as having autism spectrum disorders. This included both high and low functioning students

## **Evidence Based Practices**

### **Definition**

For purposes of this study, the definition of students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders includes: Autistic Disorder, PDD-NOS, Asperger Syndrome, Rett Syndrome, and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (National Institute of Mental Health)

### **Characteristics/ Key Elements**

A review of evidence based practices is summarized below. In terms of intervention strategies, the literature indicates that no one intervention or strategy has proven effective with large numbers of children. At the same time it should be emphasized that this is a rapidly changing field and that many promising practices have been identified that are not yet fully recognized.

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) states:

*Since autism was first identified as a syndrome more than 50 years ago, a variety of intervention strategies have been suggested. These interventions and treatments have arisen from a range of theoretical positions, but most have not proven to be*

*effective with large numbers of children. This pattern continues today, with a large number of diverse treatment approaches being touted as uniquely effective in resolving patterns of autistic behavior. For the most part, such claims have not been substantiated in controlled research. The message for families, teachers and other consumers is to be cautious when considering new, grandiose testimonials, and to be very thoughtful and selective when constructing plans for intervention and support.*

*Even though autism has attracted an array of spurious treatments, a good deal of real progress has occurred, and some very credible approaches have been demonstrated repeatedly to be effective in improving the behaviors and adaptability of people with autism. Interventions that are derived from an educational and behavioral orientation have been shown to help children and adults affected by autism, primarily by teaching new skills that enable the person to function more successfully in the daily world of home, school, work and community interactions... The label of autism by itself is not prescriptive. It does not indicate what intervention should be provided or how the intervention should be provided. – ERIC EC Digest # E583, October 1999*

The Canadian Autism Intervention Research Network (CAIRN) has published summaries of key elements of effective programming. Relevant conclusions are:

- 1. There is little benefit in identifying narrow diagnoses ( e.g. classical autism, PDD-NOS, or Asperger's Syndrome) as it is not important to clinical or educational interventions*
- 2. Interventions should start when the diagnosis is made*
- 3. Interventions should be on a full year, minimum 5 days per week basis*
- 4. Interventions should be characterized by personalized instruction, small group instruction and a parent training component*
- 5. There should be a low student teacher ratio with a limit of 2 children with ASDs per adult in the classroom*
- 6. There should be periodic assessment of the child's progress with alternatives to programming as necessary*
- 7. There is a lack of sound theoretical basis for sensory training, and no good evidence that sensory training has any effects on the overall functioning of children with autism spectrum disorders*
- 8. There is better evidence for the effectiveness of behavioral programs than there is for programs that use developmental interventions for teaching social interaction*
- 9. There is some evidence that peer tutoring works with young children with autism*
- 10. There is very limited evidence that computer-assisted instruction can improve performance and sustain interest in academic tasks*
- 11. The ability to communicate is key to improving behaviour*
- 12. Core communication skills developed in natural settings are more useful to the child and family than "cue-dependent" responses*

- 13. Progress in language acquisition should be seen within 2 to 3 months, otherwise a new intervention should be tried*
- 14. Prevention of problem behaviours should be a priority of any program*
- 15. Interventions that manage the environment to reduce triggers for problem behavior work well (functional behaviour analysis should be used to discover what precedes and initiates aggression)*

In addition to the conclusions above, CAIRN has made several recommendations based on these conclusions. Relevant recommendations include:

- 1. That a multidisciplinary assessment should be carried out to characterize an individual child's strengths and weaknesses*
- 2. Play skills should be taught using interactions with typically developing peers*
- 3. Note should be made about the context in which problem behaviours occur and should address the behaviours using "functional assessment, functional communication training and reinforcement of alternate behaviours"*
- 4. Research is needed to find ways of individualizing treatment and education for children with ASDs because no one method works for all children*
- 5. It is important that all adaptive behaviour skills be generalizable across home, school, and community settings*

## **Findings**

### **Summary of the Survey Results**

Surveys were sent to the parents of all 106 students identified by the school district. A few parents received more than one questionnaire as more than one child in the family had been identified. Return addressed, stamped envelopes were provided to parents. In total, 50 parent surveys were returned to the district. In addition 2 parents wrote lengthy email responses, bringing the total number of responses to 52.

Surveys were sent electronically to each school principal with a request to ensure that each teacher, ASW and SEA received a copy in their mailbox. A total of 237 staff questionnaires were returned.

Respondents were asked to return questionnaires to the Leo Marshall Centre by June 12, 2006

### **Summary of the Parent Surveys**

Responses to each question on the survey are provided below.

### ***Demographic information***

Question 1. Indicate your child's diagnosis

- Autistic disorder - 15
- PDD-NOS - 6
- Asperger's syndrome - 2
- Rett's disorder - 9
- Childhood disintegrative disorder – 0
- Autistic spectrum disorder – 17

Question 2. Indicate when you received a diagnosis for your child

- Before age 2 - 0
- Age 2 – 4 - 25
- Grades K – 3 -12
- Grades 4 – 7 – 10
- Grades 8 – 12 – 2

Question 3. Indicate the grade level of your child

- Kindergarten – 9
- Grades 1 – 3 – 11
- Grades 4 – 7 - 13
- Grades 8 – 12 – 16

**Program/Service Information**

Question 1. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your child's placement

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
18%	57%	16%	4%	4%

Question 2. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your child's school program

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
13%	48%	25%	6%	8%

Question 3. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your involvement in the development of your child's IEP

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
27%	51%	17%	4%	0%

Question 4. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with communication between the home and the school

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
22%	43%	17%	12%	6%

Question 5. Indicate your current level of satisfaction regarding the school's communication with outside agencies

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
11%	23%	49%	11%	0%

Question 6. Indicate your current level of the school's awareness of your child's home program

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
13%	46%	31%	4%	6%

Question 7. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your child's behavioural or social goals and instruction

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
13%	37%	28%	11%	11%

Question 8. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your child's academic goals and instruction

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
22%	54%	6%	13%	6%

Question 9. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your child's transition from one grade or setting to another

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
15%	42%	27%	13%	4%

Question 10. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your child's level of support (staffing)

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
35%	31%	10%	19%	4%

Question 11. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with the review and monitoring of your child's progress and stated outcomes of education

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
6%	44%	27%	19%	4%

**Other**

Question 1. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with staff in-service opportunities available in the school district

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
4%	13%	63%	9%	11%

Question 2. If a range of placement opportunities were available for your child, indicate your preference for your top three choices.

**Neighborhood school with full inclusion** Fourteen (14) respondents rated this as their first choice. A total of 43 respondents rated this as one of their top three choices

**Neighborhood school with inclusion and opportunity for specialized instruction with pull-out for one to one or small group instruction** Nineteen (19) respondents rated this as their first choice and a total of 35 respondents rated this as one of their top three choices

**Placement in a specialized resource program within a family of schools with progressive opportunities for inclusion** Three (3) respondents rated this as their first choice and a total of 14 rated this as one of their top three choices

**Placement in a specialized self-contained class within a regular school** Three (3) respondents rated this as their first choice and a total of 8 rated this as one of their top three choices

**Placement in a special school** One respondent rated this as their first choice and a total of 6 rated this as one of their top three choices

**I am not so concerned with the 'place' as with an educational environment that is safe and has a program that builds on the student's strengths and which minimizes those factors that interfere with learning** Nine (9) respondents rated this as their top comment/choice and a total of 24 ranked this as one of their top three choices

**Summary of the Staff Surveys**

Responses to each question on the survey are provided below.

Demographic Information

Question 1. Indicate your staff position

- Primary -100
- Intermediate – 71
- Secondary – 42

- Classroom teacher – 109
- Specialty teacher – 25
- ASW or SEA - 64
- Other support staff – 14
- Principal or vice principal – 25
- TOTAL STAFF – 237

Question 2. indicate when you last worked with students with autism or autism spectrum disorder.

- This year – 129
- Last year – 50
- During the last 5 years – 55
- During the last 10 years – 26
- Never – 5

Question 3. Indicate which types of students you have worked with and at which grade levels.

- Autism – 136
- Autism spectrum disorders – 113
- Asperger’s syndrome – 112
  
- Kindergarten – 70
- Grades 1 to 3 – 112
- Grades 4 to 7 – 103
- Grades 8 to 12 – 49

Program/Service information

Question 1. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with the placement of these types of students.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
12%	38%	23%	19%	8%

Question 2. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with the programs being provided for these types of students.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
9%	32%	33%	22%	4%

Question 3. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your involvement in the development of IEPs for these types of students.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
16%	43%	21%	16%	3%

Question 4. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with communication between the home and the school regarding these types of students.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
19%	44%	23%	13%	1%

Question 5. Indicate your current level of satisfaction regarding the school's communication with outside agencies and/or consultants regarding these types of students.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
10%	24%	41%	21%	4%

Question 6. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with the school's awareness of home programs for these types of students.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
7%	18%	53%	18%	5%

Question 7. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with behavioural or social programs provided for these types of students.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
6%	24%	38%	28%	4%

Question 8. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with the academic programs provided for these types of students.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
9%	38%	29%	20%	5%

Question 9. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with transitions for these types of students from one grade or setting to another.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
8%	41%	34%	14%	3%

Question 10. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with levels of support provided for these types of students.

Very Satisfied;	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
16%	34%	13%	24%	13%

Question 11. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with the review and monitoring of progress for these types of students.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
9%	39%	34%	14%	5%

**Other**

Question 1. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with staff in-service opportunities available in the school district regarding these types of students.

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
6%	27%	28%	26%	13%

Question 2. If a wide range of placement opportunities were available for these types of students, indicate your preference for your top three choices.

***Neighborhood school with full inclusion*** Twenty-three (23) respondents rated this as their first choice. A total of 73 respondents rated this as one of their top three choices.

***Neighborhood school with inclusion and opportunity for specialized instruction with pull-out for one to one or small group instruction*** Eighty-six(86) respondents rated this as their first choice and a total of 168 respondents rated this as one of their top three choices.

***Placement in a specialized resource program within a family of schools with progressive opportunities for inclusion*** Forty-five (45) respondents rated this as their first choice and a total of 142 rated this as one of their top three choices.

***Placement in a specialized self-contained class within a regular school*** Nine (9) respondents rated this as their first choice and a total of 50 rated this as one of their top three choices.

***Placement in a special school*** Three (3) respondent rated this as their first choice and a total of 18 rated this as one of their top three choices.

***I am not so concerned with the ‘place’ as with an educational environment that is safe and has a program that builds on the student’s strengths and which minimizes those factors that interfere with learning*** Sixty-four (64) respondents rated this as their top comment/choice and a total of 121 ranked this as one of their top three choices.

## **Summary of the Focus Group Discussions**

Several themes emerged from the focus group discussions. The themes that were identified in terms of strength, usually had a corresponding challenge. The themes are named under the headings of: strengths, challenges, suggested enhancements or recommendations and barriers. Actual quotes from discussion groups are listed after each theme

### ***Strengths***

#### **Staffing**

- A supportive principal of both program as well as individual students
- A resource teacher who is open to outside expertise and parent involvement
- ASWs are well trained
- dedicated qualified aides
- experienced personnel help the inexperienced
- autistic department head and team – offers appropriate in-service
- greater number of trained SEAs
- ASWs can support a child from elementary to secondary
- grateful for quality of people who support kids with autism
- the learning resource team
- active involvement of learning support teachers
- open minded teachers
- flexible administration
- when teacher is supportive and understanding, programs generally work well
- well trained SEAs, BSWs, ASWs, LSTs, teachers and resource teachers
- additional support staff – school psychologists, OT, Physio, Dep't Heads, etc
- matching aide to student need – consistency over time

#### **In-service**

- good quality of staff training – lots of opportunities
- access to expertise
- better training; in-service is working well
- links to outside sources of in-service
- in-service for all sorts of staff in understanding autism
- workshops on what it feels like to be an autistic child

#### **IEPs**

- IEP development works well
- once IEP identified, course of programming done quickly
- to involve kids themselves with their IEP

- individualization of problem solving
- parent participation in IEP process has improved
- importance of feedback and response is acknowledged
- well established IEPs

### **Programs and Services**

- peer mediated learning – teaching typical students how to work with the autistic student
- Friendship program really good
- Friends to Friends program really good. PAC paid for it at one school
- Peers in class, aka buddy system
- Circle of friends
- access to OT, SLP and other specialized programs
- do a good job with academics for high functioning kids
- variety of approaches to intervention including different people and philosophies
- focus on self management
- there are more adapted programs being offered to students on the spectrum
- SET BC

### **Communication**

- communication and in-service training within student services
- various professionals are developing a shared vocabulary and set of references
- everyone knows the language and jargon – makes it easier to communicate
- communication with team members good

### **Identification**

- identification is good– pre-school program
- identification process becoming clearer – earlier identification process
- there is truly and early identification of kids – school based teams are good at referring kids

### **Transitions**

- transition to high school
- LST is effective in transitioning from pre-school
- Strong desire to transition children into district effectively

### **Early Intervention**

- early intervention is helpful
- early intervention is excellent – supported child care

### **Work with Outside Agencies/Specialists**

- co-operation with community agencies is a strength
- home therapy program working with school staff
- allowing outside agencies to come into the school and make recommendations. This is much better over time
- partnership between School District and ACT BC has been beneficial. ACT BC programs have been excellent
- outside consultants are respectful of the school and work well with the school
- co-ordination between home and school teams

### **Inclusion**

- a flexibility re: settings or spaces used
- students have opportunities for inclusion
- lower functioning students have full SEA support
- integration of special needs kids with typical kids
- inclusion in community programs (whole child philosophy), e.g. swimming, music, hiking, community programs, Snoezelen
- attitude/involvement of staff re: inclusion (flexibility)
- physical space e.g. small rooms when out of classroom
- one to one support in the classroom

### **Other**

- open mindedness of this school district is something to be encouraged
- attitude of other students - acceptance

## ***Challenges***

### **Staffing**

- difficulty matching SEA skill sets with the needs of students
- difficult to lose skilled SEA due to lack of seniority
- deployment of hours based on the individual student
- consistency of personnel – union bumping due to seniority
- recruitment and retention of staff
- staff burnout
- difficulty with SEA breaks and with consistency
- resource teacher not qualified
- not enough SLPs, OTs, PTs – we need more
- parents have little or no meaningful input/control over hiring decisions
- LSTs stretched too thin
- some teachers not taking responsibility for students
- no prep time support given to SEAs
- absence of behaviourally trained educated professionals meeting international certification standards

### **In-service**

- need to spread in-service opportunities among all SEAs and teachers
- providing in-service to SEAs on their own time
- access to teachers for in-service is difficult

### **IEPs**

- need to have individualized program to meet each child's needs – how does this fit in a regular classroom where one size fits all?
- IEPs all start to look alike and are not particularly informative
- IEPs are not being followed
- too long to see IEP and put into place
- getting a good IEP that actually reflects the child – have to have meaningful realistic goals
- classroom teachers not reading the IEP
- IEP timelines and accountability measures; lack of clarity for parents around IEP process
- Delay with changing goals/materials
- SEA must be relieved to attend IEP meetings

### **Programs and Services**

- speech and language therapy is lacking – sporadic
- school SLP not having knowledge about what works
- no behaviour consultant
- lack of structured social programs to teach peers how to interact
- not all schools utilize the Friends program
- not allowing those on the spectrum to interact with peers
- program and resources to develop social needs
- life skills teaching
- the necessity for direct teaching in the social skills area
- resources are not allocated fairly - vocal or demanding parents get more for their kids
- difficult for some students to maintain level of support for verbal behaviour program in school
- no time for SEA prep or data collection

### **Communication**

- getting everyone on board – particularly the principal
- lack of communication between stakeholders
- huge demand for communication – parents need for immediate answers
- time – how to find the time for understanding the needs for communication

### **Identification**

- differences in professionals who diagnose autism
- early identification of some subtypes, e.g. Asperger's

## **Transitions**

- transition pre-school to K can break down

## **Early Intervention**

### **Work with Outside Agencies/Specialists**

- consultants not allowed or permitted into the school
- inter-ministry contact and support

### **Inclusion**

- how does pull-out better potentiate the child for being in the classroom
- quality of learning should be the outcome in inclusion
- what do behaviours tell us about what we are doing re: the full environment?
- some schools run out of spaces
- not enough quiet spaces for these kids to work
- providing a predictable structure for the autistic child in the classroom
- illusion of inclusion
- classroom teacher may not have a role in some student's lives

### **Other**

- the label 'autism' might not capture the actual disability area and the student's need
- attitudes of some parents of typical children
- structure of autism support within NVSD is not clear
- unwillingness of the school district to talk to the union about bending the rules or negotiating to change the rules

## ***Enhancements or Recommendations***

### **Staffing**

- actualizing the unhooking of the one to one model for SEA activities
- prep time for support staff to modify or adapt
- reduce the caretaking role and enhance the educational role of support staff
- flex hours for SEAs in schools to manage coverage for breaks
- examine the roles of LSTs
- principal trained to understand autism
- more teacher training
- ongoing training for SEAs – this is not in-service – inservice does not constitute training

### **In-service**

- training for teachers – whole staff approach
- in-service in functional behaviour assessment
- functional assessment training for administrators

- adding lenses – deepening the knowledge of the learner
- involving parents in some of the training we do
- improved training for teachers, aides, administrators

### **IEPs**

- reduce the number of goals and objectives
- need to work with people to help them understand what are the most important goals and what is a reasonable number of goals and objectives
- IEPs – should be a tight time frame – should be a policy and procedure on how they should be done and the time frame requirements

### **Programs and Services**

- lunch hours and recess very important times of social interaction – need to have workers available to facilitate this
- recognize the need for advancing the ‘social side’ – engage the peers
- implement Friends program in every school
- peer mentors
- non categorical support room could run social groups
- have a transportation budget for kids with autism
- the role of the school in providing services needs to be clearly established
- encourage the use of Second Step program in the classroom
- social skills training
- typical children need to learn empathy and skills on a regular basis

### **Communication**

- open communication between all stakeholders
- more consultation with parents
- autism advisory committee
- autism council to establish policies
- sharing of more positive experiences among parents
- teacher mentorship – building capacity within schools
- better communication with the school should be built in and expected
- better information on services available by school and provincial government – especially for parents new to this school district and province
- established times for meetings for ongoing team communication
- clear guidelines for communication

### **Identification**

### **Transitions**

### **Early Intervention**

### **Work with Outside Agencies/Specialists**

- compile a list of agencies, contact numbers for social skills and services available
- recognize the parent as a member of the child's education team
- timely response from speech pathologists as a member of the education support team
- more flexibility to involve external providers who know the child well (including home programs)
- evaluate what's working well in community relationships and develop a template to use in other situations

### **Inclusion**

- need to make inclusion a reality
- develop a clearer definition of what inclusion is
- family of schools clustering for specific times of the week
- options, including resource rooms

### **Other**

- teaching NVTAs and CUPE their roles and responsibilities and assuring that both groups fulfill their responsibilities
- school within a school – autism specialized classroom within a family of schools
- need to recognize the need for flexibility and willingness to work with the union to solve problems

### ***Barriers***

- union barriers to hiring appropriate SEAs
- relationship with the union BCTF, CUPE
- ownership of hours by parents
- role of the classroom teacher
- all of these individuals are overworked
- teachers receive no pre-service education in special education issues
- communication
- administration not wanting to learn
- funding
- time space
- fear of change
- insufficient release time
- attitudes

### **Summary of the Student Interviews**

The Consultant and Director of Student and Program Services met with four students individually. These students had been designated on the autism spectrum and were in

various graders at the high school level. They were asked about their present courses, what was good about school and what would make school a better place for them. All four students seemed to enjoy school and their present courses. In terms of what would make school better, the students had only a few suggestions. They included:

- maybe social skills
- maybe group interaction
- maybe socially – experiential learning
- they could give me an aide if it was a really hard project
- one thing I notice about school is that there is a lot of bullying – teachers shrug it off. Nobody really does anything about it

### **Discussion of the data**

The data resulting from the surveys and the focus group discussions is remarkably consistent. The issues identified are virtually the same and even more remarkable is that issues named by participants are identified as both strengths and challenges. The interpretation given to this is that there may be a variation in practice in the district and that in one school or situation a given issue is a strength and that in another situation it is a challenge. It may also be the case that the issue is both a strength and a challenge in the same situation.

Given that there is a remarkable consistency in what all stakeholders identify as strengths and challenges, formulation of recommendations is much easier than if there was a wide discrepancy in what various stakeholders perceived as strengths and challenges in the district.

In terms of support for a delivery system within a philosophical framework of inclusion, there appears to be wide support as noted in the survey results. Parents particularly supported this approach with 67% choosing their neighborhood school as the number one placement option. A further 18% said they were not so concerned with place as with safety and an appropriate program. Only 8% chose a self contained class or special school as the first choice in terms of options. A further 6% chose a resource program as first choice. Staff was somewhat more divided in their opinion of best placement options. Slightly less than half or 47% chose the neighborhood school as the first choice and only 5% chose more restrictive placements such as a self contained class or a special school as first choice. A larger number of staff, 28% said they were not so concerned with place as with safety and an appropriate program. In terms of a resource program, more staff than parents chose this option. A total of 20% of staff chose this as a first choice. The same or a higher level of support for the current delivery system came through in the focus group discussions.

Survey results showed that both parents and staff were relatively satisfied with placement and program as well as their involvement in the development of IEPs and communication between the home and the school. Communication with outside agencies and outside consultants received a somewhat lower satisfaction level. It appears that staff are unsure about home programs for students, although a majority of parents felt satisfied about the school's awareness. A significant number of both staff and parents felt unsure or

dissatisfied regarding behavioural and social programs for students with autism spectrum disorders. Satisfaction with academic programming received a higher score. Review and monitoring of students' progress received almost identical scores from both parents and staff – approximately half were satisfied and the other 50% unsure or dissatisfied. Staff rated in-service opportunities negatively. A majority of parents were unsure about this question.

## **Recommendations**

Data suggests that participants in this process are appreciative of the programs and services provided by the district. Data also suggest that parents and staff support the inclusive philosophical base for the development of programs.

The neighborhood school is the unit of service delivery and specialist support is in the form of itinerant service to the school. This model is generally viewed with acceptance and support.

Recommendations are made in the context of support for the existing system. The intent of recommendations is to build on what is already in place and to strengthen the present program and service offerings. In other words, recommendations are about capacity building. The recommendations are intended to reflect best practice and are not intended to imply significant addition of resources. There may be some other areas identified by participants on which the district wishes to formulate its own recommendations; these are easily identified in the strengths, challenges and recommendations sections of the focus group discussions.

The recommendations are not listed in any priority order.

### **Recommendation 1.**

Part of the genesis of this study was to determine the extent of desire for change in terms of the inclusive approach to service delivery. Data suggests that this is not a wide spread wish among parents. There is also very little in the research to suggest that more segregated placement offerings are beneficial. There is however, some data to suggest that in terms of direct instruction pairing of students can be beneficial. Where it is feasible, therefore the district should consider pairing of students of similar need and age in order to facilitate instruction within a family of schools.

**IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE DISTRICT CONTINUE ITS APPROACH TO PROVISION OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM AND THAT WHERE FEASIBLE, STUDENTS BE PAIRED FOR DIRECT INSTRUCTION**

**Recommendation 2.**

Students on the autism spectrum require intensive service and support at home, in school and in the community. It is important that all service providers work collaboratively and in cooperation. It is important that communication be clear and that roles and responsibilities are clear and understood. The data suggests that the role of the school was not always clear and that misunderstandings arose due to lack of clarity about role and responsibility. Ideally, discussion of roles and responsibilities should be done in concert with parents and outside agencies.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE DISTRICT CLEARLY ENUNCIATE THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF STAFF IN TERMS OF PROVISION OF SERVICES TO THIS GROUP OF STUDENTS.

**Recommendation 3.**

Some parents felt that they were not equal partners in terms of the planning process and that their views and knowledge of their child was not as valued as it should be. Putting parents at the heart of the planning process is essential for successful programming and should be part of the system of doing business. The wraparound approach to planning emphasizes this partnership.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE DISTRICT ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT THE WRAPAROUND APPROACH TO PLANNING AND PROGRAM REVIEW FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS

**Recommendation 4.**

Research suggests that functional behaviour assessment is necessary in order to develop appropriate social, emotional and behavioural skills. The strength of this approach to assessment is that it should lead directly to evidence-based interventions.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE DISTRICT PROVIDE TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOUR ASSESSMENT

**Recommendation 5.**

In-service offerings were well received by some staff, but there was also dissatisfaction among a large number of participants. Comments on the surveys showed that staff were frequently unaware of in-service offerings as well.

It must be emphasized that in-service is not a panacea for improved service as it often doesn't go beyond the awareness and understanding stage to that of implementation. Some of the best in-service is delivered informally by specialist teachers when working with students and staff and this needs to be recognized and supported.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE DISTRICT EXAMINE THE NEEDS FOR IN-SERVICE IN THIS AREA AND ESTABLISH A PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIORITY TOPICS

**Recommendation 6**

There are some amazing stories of success in terms of working with students on the autism spectrum. For example some parents talked about the success of the Friends Program and how peer mediated learning had been so helpful with their child. These stories from both staff and parents are not well known. As we can learn as much or more from success stories, these should be shared.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE DISTRICT PUBLICIZE CURRENT EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE OF PROVISION OF SERVICES AND THAT THESE BE SHARED WITH ALL SCHOOLS AND PARENTS

**Recommendation 7.**

Comments from participants indicated that they were pleased to have this opportunity for involvement and that they valued a vehicle for giving feedback to the district. A feedback loop or consumer satisfaction strategy could be incorporated into the IEP process in order to give parents and staff a vehicle for suggesting change or a process for strengthening positive practice

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE DISTRICT ESTABLISH A METHOD FOR POST IEP CONSULTATION IN ORDER TO GIVE PARENTS AND STAFF AN ONGOING VEHICLE FOR EVALUATING AND IMPROVING THE IEP PROCESS

**Recommendation 8.**

There was some discussion from parents regarding a group to give feedback to the district on an ongoing basis and not have to wait for another study to take place. The Consultant is aware that there was a special education parent/community group in the district in the past and recommends that a similar group be established.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT A SPECIAL EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE GROUP BE ESTABLISHED IN THE DISTRICT

**Conclusion**

It has been a pleasure to work with the district in conducting this study into services for students on the autism spectrum. It is hoped that the recommendations contained in this report will assist the district to refine and improve its services for these students.

# Appendix A

## Services for Students Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders Grades K-7

### School District 44 (North Vancouver)

#### Questions for Stakeholder Groups

Participants in the Stakeholder Groups will be given an overview of the current review and will be asked to brainstorm responses to four questions. Table groups should consist of no more than 6 – 8 participants. Each group must appoint a chairperson/timekeeper and recorder. The chairperson's role is to ensure that no longer than 10 minutes is devoted to each question and that everyone participates. The recorder's role is to record each person's ideas verbatim. Groups should not debate any ideas just accept all ideas, record them and move on! The more ideas the better!

#### Questions:

1. In the area of provision of services for students diagnosed in the Autism Spectrum, what is working well now? In other words, what are the strengths of current programs and services as you perceive them? You may want to consider identification, early intervention, cooperation with community agencies, communication, in-service training opportunities, IEP development, etc.
2. What are the major challenges or issues that the district faces in terms of provision of services for students diagnosed in the Autism Spectrum? In other words what are the challenges? You may want to consider whether student needs are being met, whether programs are effective, and whether resources are allocated fairly.
3. What enhancements, improvements or changes could be implemented to both maintain the current strengths and to address the challenges?
4. What might get in the way of implementing the recommendations you made in Question 3? In other words what are the barriers?

Note: For purposes of this review, the definition of students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders include: Autistic Disorder, PDD NOS, Asperger Syndrome, Rett Syndrome and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder. (National Institute of Mental Health)

# Appendix B

## Services for Students Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders

### Parent Survey

North Vancouver School District is conducting a study of the services offered to students diagnosed with autism and autism spectrum disorders (including Asperger's Syndrome). The purpose of the study is to make recommendations regarding what should be preserved, what should be enhanced, and what flexibilities should be introduced into the services offered within the School District. If you wish, as a parent, to contribute to the study, please complete this questionnaire and **return it to Larry Johnson at the Leo Marshall Curriculum Centre, using the enclosed reply envelope, by June 12, 2006.**

### Demographic Information

1. If applicable, indicate your student's/child's diagnosis.  Autistic Disorder  PDD-NOS  Asperger's Syndrome  Rett's Disorder  Childhood Disintegrative Disorder  Autistic Spectrum Disorder  Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. If applicable, indicate when you received a diagnosis for your student/child.  
 before age 2  age 2 – 4  grades K – 3  grades 4 – 7  8-12

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Indicate the grade level of your student/child.  K  1 -3  4 – 7  8-12

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Program/Service Information

1. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your student's/child's placement.  
 very satisfied  satisfied  unsure  dissatisfied  very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your student's/child's school program.  
 very satisfied  satisfied  unsure  dissatisfied  very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your involvement in the development of your student's/child's IEP. \_\_\_\_ very satisfied \_\_\_\_ satisfied \_\_\_\_ unsure \_\_\_\_ dissatisfied \_\_\_\_ very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with communication between the home and the school. \_\_\_\_ very satisfied \_\_\_\_ satisfied \_\_\_\_ unsure \_\_\_\_ dissatisfied \_\_\_\_ very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Indicate your current level of satisfaction regarding the school's communication with outside agencies. \_\_\_\_ very satisfied \_\_\_\_ satisfied \_\_\_\_ unsure \_\_\_\_ dissatisfied \_\_\_\_ very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Indicate your current level of the school's awareness of your student's/child's home program. \_\_\_\_ very satisfied \_\_\_\_ satisfied \_\_\_\_ unsure \_\_\_\_ dissatisfied \_\_\_\_ very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your student's/child's behavioural or social goals and instruction. \_\_\_\_ very satisfied \_\_\_\_ satisfied \_\_\_\_ unsure \_\_\_\_ dissatisfied \_\_\_\_ very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your student's/child's academic goals and instruction. \_\_\_\_ very satisfied \_\_\_\_ satisfied \_\_\_\_ unsure \_\_\_\_ dissatisfied \_\_\_\_ very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your student's/child's transition from one grade or setting to another. \_\_\_\_ very satisfied \_\_\_\_ satisfied \_\_\_\_ unsure \_\_\_\_ dissatisfied \_\_\_\_ very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your student's/child's level of support (staffing). \_\_\_\_ very satisfied \_\_\_\_ satisfied \_\_\_\_ unsure \_\_\_\_ dissatisfied \_\_\_\_ very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

- 
11. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with the review and monitoring of your student's/child's progress and stated outcomes of education. \_\_\_\_\_very satisfied  
\_\_\_\_\_ satisfied \_\_\_\_\_ unsure \_\_\_\_\_ dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_ very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

**Other**

1. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with staff in-service opportunities available in the school district. \_\_\_\_\_very satisfied \_\_\_\_\_ satisfied \_\_\_\_\_ unsure \_\_\_\_\_ dissatisfied  
\_\_\_\_\_ very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

- 
2. If a wide range of placement opportunities were available for your student/child, indicate your preference for your top three choices. A number 1 indicates your first choice, a 2 indicates your second choice, and a 3 indicates your third choice.

\_\_\_\_\_ neighborhood school with full inclusion

\_\_\_\_\_ neighborhood school with inclusion and opportunity for specialized instruction with pull-out for one-to-one or small group instruction

\_\_\_\_\_ placement in a specialized resource program within the family of schools with progressive opportunities for integration

\_\_\_\_\_ placement in a specialized self contained class within a regular school

\_\_\_\_\_ placement in a special school

\_\_\_\_\_ I am not so concerned with the 'place' as with an educational environment that is safe and has a program that builds on the student's/child's strengths and which minimizes those factors that most interfere with learning.

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**Please feel free to use this space to make any further comments that are relevant.**

# Appendix C

## Services for Students Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders

### Staff Survey

The School District is conducting a study of the services offered to students diagnosed with autism and autism spectrum disorders (including Asperger's Syndrome). The purpose of the study is to help district administration make considerations as to what should be preserved, what should be enhanced, and what flexibilities should be introduced into the services offered for this population of students. If you wish, as a staff member, to contribute to the study, please complete this questionnaire and **return it to Larry Johnson at the Leo Marshall Curriculum Centre via the media bins (using the large reply envelope provided at each school) by Monday, June 12, 2006 or as soon as possible thereafter.**

### Demographic Information

4. Please indicate your staff position.  Primary  Intermediate  Secondary  
 Classroom Teacher  
 Specialty Teacher (specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Autism Support Worker  SEA  
 Other Support Staff (specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Principal  Vice-Principal
5. If applicable, indicate when you last worked with a student(s) with autism or autism spectrum disorder (including Asperger's Syndrome).  
 this year  last year  during the last 5 years  during the last 10 years

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Indicate which of these types of students you have worked with, and at which grade levels:  
 Autism  Autism Spectrum Disorder  Asperger's Syndrome  
 K  1-3  4-7  8-12

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please answer any of the following questions that you deem relevant to your situation. Remember, the abilities, behaviours, and educational needs of these types of students can vary widely. Please use the "Comments/clarifications" spaces provided under each question, if you should wish to qualify your answers or to draw distinctions.**

### Program/Service Information

12. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with the placement of these types of students.  
 very satisfied  satisfied  unsure  dissatisfied  very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

13. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with the programs being provided for these types of students. \_\_\_\_\_very satisfied \_\_\_\_\_satisfied \_\_\_\_\_unsure \_\_\_\_\_dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_very dissatisfied.

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

14. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with your involvement in the development of IEPs for these types of students. \_\_\_\_\_very satisfied \_\_\_\_\_satisfied \_\_\_\_\_unsure \_\_\_\_\_dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_very dissatisfied.

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

15. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with communication between the home and the school regarding these types of students. \_\_\_\_\_very satisfied \_\_\_\_\_satisfied \_\_\_\_\_unsure \_\_\_\_\_dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

16. Indicate your current level of satisfaction regarding the school's communication with outside agencies and/or consultants regarding these types of students. \_\_\_\_\_very satisfied \_\_\_\_\_satisfied \_\_\_\_\_unsure \_\_\_\_\_dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

17. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with the school's awareness of home programs for these types of students. \_\_\_\_\_very satisfied \_\_\_\_\_satisfied \_\_\_\_\_unsure \_\_\_\_\_dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

18. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with behavioural or social programs provided for these types of students. \_\_\_\_\_very satisfied \_\_\_\_\_satisfied \_\_\_\_\_unsure \_\_\_\_\_dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

19. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with the academic programs provided for these types of students. \_\_\_\_\_very satisfied \_\_\_\_\_satisfied \_\_\_\_\_unsure \_\_\_\_\_dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

20. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with transitions for these types of students from one grade or setting to another. \_\_\_\_\_very satisfied \_\_\_\_\_satisfied \_\_\_\_\_unsure \_\_\_\_\_dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

21. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with levels of support staffing provided for these types of students. \_\_\_\_\_ very satisfied \_\_\_\_\_ satisfied \_\_\_\_\_ unsure \_\_\_\_\_ dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_ very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

22. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with the review and monitoring of progress for these types of students. \_\_\_\_\_ very satisfied \_\_\_\_\_ satisfied \_\_\_\_\_ unsure \_\_\_\_\_ dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_ very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

**Other**

3. Indicate your current level of satisfaction with staff in-service opportunities available in the school district regarding these types of students. \_\_\_\_\_ very satisfied \_\_\_\_\_ satisfied \_\_\_\_\_ unsure \_\_\_\_\_ dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_ very dissatisfied

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

4. If a wide range of placement opportunities were available for these types of students, indicate your preference for your top three choices. A number 1 indicates your first choice, a 2 indicates your second choice, and a 3 indicates your third choice.

\_\_\_\_\_ neighborhood school with full inclusion

\_\_\_\_\_ neighborhood school with inclusion and opportunity for specialized instruction with pull-out for one-to-one or small group instruction

\_\_\_\_\_ placement in a specialized resource program within the family of schools with progressive opportunities for integration

\_\_\_\_\_ placement in a specialized self contained class within a regular school

\_\_\_\_\_ placement in a special school

\_\_\_\_\_ I am not so concerned with the 'place' as with an educational environment that is safe and has a program that builds on the student's/child's strengths and which minimizes those factors that most interfere with learning.

Comments/clarifications: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please feel free to use this space to make any further comments that are relevant.**