

Autism Training for General Education Staff

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Autism Advisory Council

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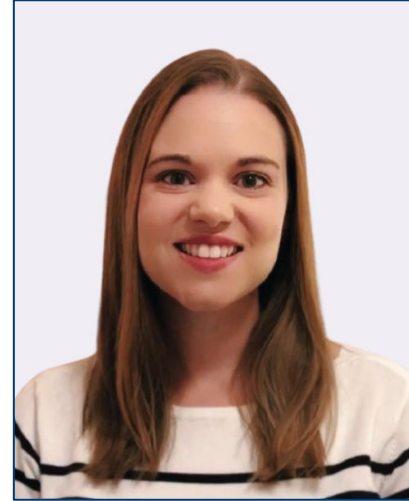


Who We Are



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2024-2025 SY

General Education and Autism Data

- Virginia December 1 Child Count data show:
 - 31,476 Virginia students ages 5–21 were identified as eligible for special education under the autism disability category.
 - Approximately 66% received instruction in general education for at least 40% of the school day.
 - By comparison, approximately 87% of all students with disabilities received instruction in general education for at least 40% of the day.
- Students with an IEP who exited special education by graduating with an advanced, regular, or alternate (Applied Studies) diploma:
 - Approximately 65% of autistic students received a regular or advanced diploma.
 - By comparison, approximately 83% of all students with disabilities received a regular or advanced diploma.

General Education Matters for Autism

- Autistic students spend much of their day in general education settings.
 - Classroom instruction, routines, lunch and recess, school-wide events, clubs, sports, hallway transitions, and everyday social interactions.
- General education teachers bring essential expertise in grade-level content, curriculum, routines, and the learning environment.
- Their role is central to helping autistic students access and learn the general curriculum in their least restrictive environment.
- Autism-specific professional development strengthens this work, equipping general educators to support students effectively within general education settings.

The Central Question

What training is available for general education teachers working with students with autism?

Code of Virginia §22.1-253.13.5

- Effective July 2025, Virginia law requires school divisions to provide **annual, high-quality professional development** on communicating with and supporting students with autism spectrum disorder for instructional personnel and school board employees whose duties include regular contact with students.
- Participation is **optional** under the statute's current wording, but local school divisions may choose to require it.
- Instructional personnel and school board employees who complete the PD must be eligible to receive professional development points toward license renewal.

VDOE Guidance, March 2026

- Pursuant to this statute, guidance was developed to support school divisions in planning and delivering high-quality professional development (HQPD) on communicating with and supporting students with autism spectrum disorder.
- The guidance emphasizes characteristics of HQPD and includes an Indicators of HQPD Checklist to guide development and evaluation and ensure training leads to meaningful changes in educator practice and student outcomes.

GUIDANCE FOR HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER



Required Content Expectations

Minimum content areas named in the statute include:

1

Characteristics and behavior recognitions

Overview of autism characteristics and behaviors associated with autism

2

Communication and interaction supports

Strategies for communicating with and supporting autistic students

3

Response and de-escalation

Best practices for responding and de-escalating certain behavior challenges and situations

Interpretation for General Education Staff

- General education teachers fall within the intended audience when their duties include regular contact with students.
- The law requires school divisions to provide access to this training; the law does not make completion mandatory for every general education teacher.

Audience	Frequency	Duration	Completion Requirement
All personnel whose duties include regular contact with students.	Annually	Not Specified in Code	Optional under §22.1-253.13:5

Additional Autism-Specific Requirements

Paraeducators/Aides

- Assigned to work with a teacher who has primary oversight of students with ASD
- § 22.1-298.3 Training in behavior management within 60 days
- “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.”

Transportation Staff

- § 22.1-298.3 of the Code of Virginia and 8VAC20-70-350, public school transportation staff—including bus drivers and aides assisting students with autism—are required to participate in specialized training regarding autism spectrum disorders, characteristics, interaction strategies, and collaboration.
- Required training program participation

Autism-Specific Supports Benefit All

- **Structured Predictability:** Visual schedules and clear transitions assist students with autism while simultaneously reducing cognitive load and anxiety for all learners.
- **Explicit Communication:** Breaking complex verbal directions into visual steps supports students with autism, English language learners, and students with working memory challenges.
- **Proactive Behavior Analysis:** Viewing behavior as communication helps educators address the root cause of disruption before it occurs, maintaining a stable learning environment for the entire class.
- **Capacity & Stability:** When general education educators are equipped with foundational autism strategies, fewer low-level academic or behavioral challenges escalate into restrictive placements.
- **System Continuity:** Shared understanding between general educators and special educators fosters consistency across grade levels and settings.

Autism-Specific Training Is Only One Part

- Autism-specific professional learning helps educators understand:
 - how autism may influence communication, interaction, regulation, behavior, sensory access, and learning;
 - why a student may respond differently to an activity or environment; and
 - which evidence-based practices are most effective in addressing autism-related needs.
- Broader professional learning helps educators know how to:
 - teach grade-level content effectively;
 - create accessible and supportive learning environments;
 - explicitly teach academic, behavioral, communication, and functional skills;
 - collaborate with the student, family, and IEP team;
 - implement accommodations, assistive technology, and supplementary aids;
 - deliver student-specific adaptations and SDI; and
 - monitor progress and adjust instruction.

Additional General Educator Requirements

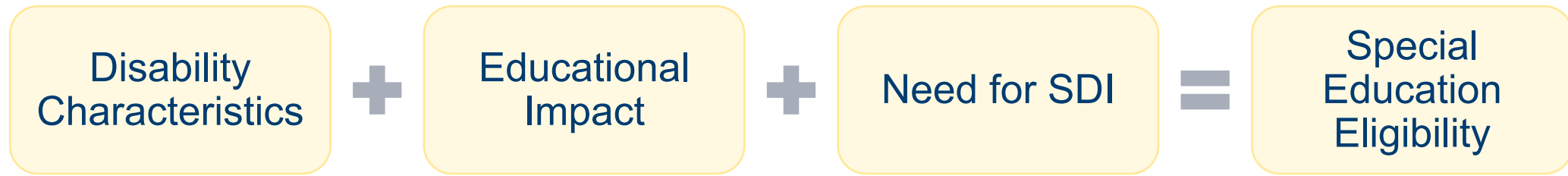
- Virginia Licensure Renewal

- Training in the instruction of students with disabilities that includes understanding the role of general education teachers on the individualized education program (IEP) team and understanding the goals and benefits of inclusive education for all students.
 - VDOE has developed two free online modules that together meet all required competencies.

- IEP Development

- IEP Teams must consider and provide any required supports for school personnel to enable the child be educated and progress in the general curriculum and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities with other children with and without disabilities.

General Education Students First and Always



- Every student receiving special education requires specially designed instruction (SDI).
- SDI means adapting the **content**, **methodology**, or **delivery of instruction**:
 - a) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and
 - b) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum,so the child can **meet the educational standards that apply to all children** within the LEA.

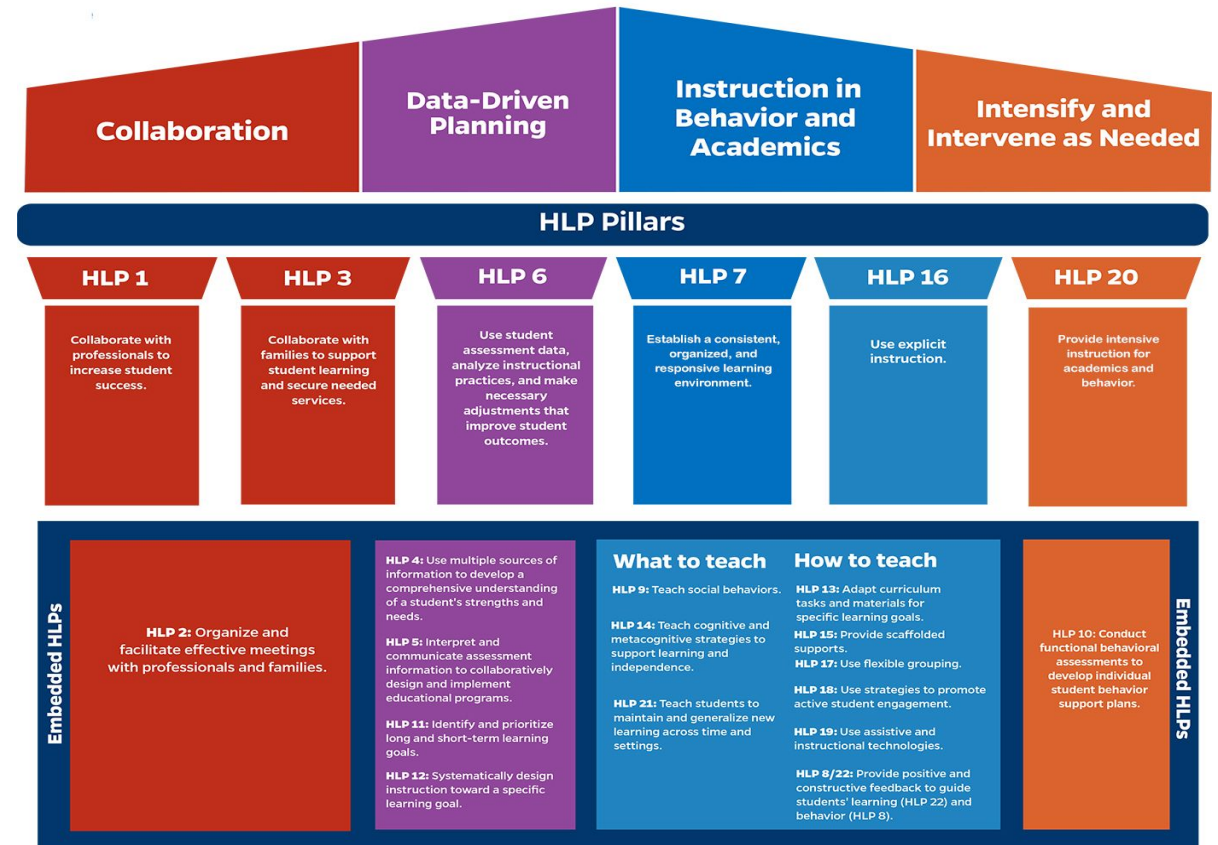
IEP Implementation in General Education

- Many IEP-driven supports are implemented in general education settings, including academic and behavior-related instruction, communication, assistive technology, and supplementary aids and services.
- Depending on the student's IEP and instructional needs, the general education teacher may deliver or support components of SDI in collaboration with the special educator.
- General education teachers need more than awareness of autism or familiarity with a list of accommodations.
 - Understand the student's IEP, recognize how disability-related needs affect access to instruction, implement their assigned supports consistently, and collaborate in the delivery and monitoring of individualized instruction.

Work Grounded in High-Leverage Practices

High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) give general and special educators shared practices for implementing and strengthening SDI in inclusive classrooms.

- **Collaboration:** Align expertise, responsibilities, and supports of educators, related service providers, support staff, and families.
- **Instruction:** Explicit instruction, feedback, opportunities to respond, and support for generalization help students access the curriculum.
- **Behavior and environment:** Predictable routines, clear expectations, prevention, and positive supports reduce barriers to learning.
- **Data use:** Teams monitor progress and adjust instruction and supports based on student need.



What is Offered Statewide?

- Connected system of autism-specific and broader professional learning including [inclusive practices](#), High Leverage Practices, and Specially Designed Instruction to equip educators to understand Autism and related characteristics, deliver effective instruction, and implement individualized supports.
 - [Index of Required Teacher Training](#)
 - [VCU Autism Center for Education](#)
 - [VDOE's Training and Technical Assistance Centers](#)
 - [TTAC Online](#)
 - VDOE Content Teaching Academy
 - ...and more!

Note: Availability of professional development does not always mean educator engagement or completion. Participation may depend on the statutory requirement, the employee's role, and local professional-learning decisions.

Contact Us!

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