VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

ace

AUTISM CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE (VCU-ACE)

Request for Applications from Virginia School Divisions

for

Divisionwide Technical Assistance:

Exemplary Services to Support Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

For additional information contact:

Carol Schall, Ph.D. at cmschall@vcu.edu
or
Staci Carr at secarr@vcu.edu

VCU

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Table of Contents

Cohort Two: September 2014 to June 2017

Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Commonwealth University
Autism Center for Excellence Request for Applications (2013)

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS	The Virginia Commonwealth University Autism Center for Excellence (VCU-ACE) is requesting applications from school divisions who wish to become exemplary sites in the provision of high quality educational services and supports for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). VCU-ACE will select four to six school divisions through a competitive review process. Successful applications will demonstrate a clearly defined strategy for long-term systemic changes across the entire school division with a clear understanding and plan for focused work in three key areas:

- Divisionwide Coaching,
- Administrative Knowledge and Support, and
- Fidelity of Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE	Nationally, the reported incidence of autism spectrum disorder has risen dramatically in the last 20 years. According to data collected yearly by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the measured occurrence of ASD, as the primary disability reported on the December 1 child count, continues to rise. The 2013 VDOE child count data for autism is 14,624 up from 13,141 in 2012. Students with ASD frequently require a higher intensity of structure and carefully designed systematic instruction to acquire the academic and functional skills necessary to become independent and successful adults. School divisions have requested assistance in meeting the educational needs of students with ASD at a higher rate than those with other disabilities. Thus, as the numbers have increased, school divisions have experienced increasing pressure to meet the needs of this growing group of students and to maintain high standards in the provision of educational services across the entire division.

In its inaugural year, VCU-ACE worked with 12 school divisions (nine projects) to address the implementation of a school divisionwide systems change process to result in improved services at every level of the school division for students with ASD and similar educational needs. VCU-ACE provided technical assistance to top-level directors and administrators to improve their understanding of the implementation of evidence-based practices for students with ASD across the age range. Results from this intervention include the following:

- Comprehensive pre and post testing to guide professional development and professional learning opportunities
- Divisionwide social skills instruction for students with ASD implemented in a variety of formats (after school clubs, dedicated class time, dedicated course elective for higher grades)
- Divisionwide training and coaching resulting in the increased classroom use of evidence-based practices when teaching students with autism
- Development of administrative training and understanding of educating students with autism
- Divisionwide development of procedures for students with autism to have functional means of communication
- Improved interactions with families through the provision of information and development of support groups
- Improved transition between grades, teachers, and schools for children and youth with ASD
- Improved transition from school to adulthood employment or postsecondary education for youth with ASD
- Improved professional development for educational professionals and paraprofessionals in evidence-based practices for children and youth with ASD through professional learning groups

- Improved classroom practices in self-contained and inclusive settings for children and youth with ASD
- Improved teacher assessment procedures for administrators supervising special education faculty

For Cohort Two, VCU-ACE will select four to six school divisions who are the best fit for a long-term commitment to systems change. VCU-ACE Technical Assistance Associates will assist selected school divisions in completing a self-assessment and facilitating a divisionwide Autism Services Improvement Team (ASIT) in the development of an Autism Services Improvement Plan (ASIP). These plans will provide additional data-based targets and define the exact technical assistance and training activities that will take place in the school division. While school divisions will self-define their own plans, VCU-ACE will guide the development of the plans to result in systems change across the entire age range and ASD spectrum. These plans will provide a coordinated approach to divisionwide systems change, professional development, coaching, mentoring, and services improvement. These plans will include goals to address all levels of professional and paraprofessional development, improvement in classroom implementation of evidence-based practices, implementation of interdisciplinary teaming, and improvement of family involvement and support. In addition to providing targeted technical assistance, VCU-ACE Technical Assistance Associates will also collect data on the success of technical assistance efforts, and revise those efforts based on ongoing data-based decision making. Finally, VCU-ACE will guide practice at all levels based on the implementation of technical assistance. This 'bottom-up/top-down' approach has been demonstrated as one of the most successful ways to ensure long-term implementation of evidence-based practice (Odom, 2008).

SERVICES AND MODEL

School divisions who are selected to participate will receive approximately 40 to 50 hours a month of embedded technical assistance from VCU-ACE Technical Assistance Associates. Our team of Technical Assistance Associates has extensive experience in the provision of evidence-based practices in public school and community settings. Technical assistance will include the following steps:

1. Complete divisionwide program assessment of ASD services during pre and post intervention periods

2. Facilitate divisionwide ASIT

3. Assist the divisionwide ASIT in developing a services improvement plan including:
   a. Identifying achievable goals
   b. Defining actions and developing action plans to achieve goals
   c. Identifying team members responsible for achieving goals
   d. Setting timelines to achieve goals
   e. Identifying data targets to assess progress toward achieving goals
   f. Developing a reporting and review schedule to review progress toward goals
   g. Revising plan as necessary based upon success of plan and information gathered through data collected

4. Provide the necessary direct technical assistance to the school division to achieve the goals identified in the ASIP, including:
   a. Mentoring and coaching principals, administrators, special and general education teachers, paraprofessionals, related services professionals, and other school division staff in evidence-based practices in ASD
   b. Facilitating teams to support the development, implementation, and review of the ASIP

    c. Providing staff development on various topics related to the use of evidence-based practices in public education and addressing the needs of students with ASD in classroom and community settings to school division staff
    d. Assisting divisions in including families in the development and implementation of their ASIP
    e. Reporting to divisionwide administration and stakeholders related to the progress of the school division toward meeting their goals
    f. Conducting ongoing fidelity checklists to address ASIT functioning, coaching model implementation, and classroom environment

  5. Develop a sustainability plan for the school division to continue efforts once the technical assistance period has ended, including:
    a. A program evaluation and report at the end of year three
    b. Gradual fade of direct in-division presence while maintaining ongoing communication, fidelity checks, and assistance with future planning and goal development

Our model is an embedded technical assistance model and our definition of evidence-based practice is congruent with the Virginia Department of Education document, Guidelines for Educating Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (VDOE, 2010).

This document can be viewed at: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/disabilities/autism/technical_asst_documents/autism_guidelines.pdf.

According to this document, evidence-based practice is defined as educational practice which has a body of scientific research to support its use (VDOE, 2010). A list of currently recognized evidence-based practice is included in Appendix C, pages 59 and 60 in this guidelines document.

ELIGIBILITY

School divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia that were not included in Cohort One are eligible to apply for Cohort Two. The school division must present evidence that demonstrates its capacity for participation as an exemplary autism site. It is expected that applicants will engage in meaningful planning with autism stakeholders in the preparation of the application. A school division must apply as a single entity; combined division applications will not be considered. Regional programs are encouraged to apply, however technical assistance will only address the regional program, not the practice of the cooperating divisions which the regional program serves.

DESCRIPTION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES

Participating school divisions will receive intensive technical assistance from VCU-ACE experts in a wide array of evidence-based practices. While specific school division goals will be determined collaboratively, areas of practice improvement will include:

- Implementing evidence-based practices to fidelity in public school and community-based settings
- Increasing the knowledge of principals, general education teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, speech therapists, related services professionals, school assessment and child study team members, and division administrators regarding evidence-based practices for students with ASD
- Improving Child Study and IEP teams' knowledge and skills in assessment and planning

- Improving transition planning so that all students with ASD leave the school division college and career ready with 21st century skills
- Improving the abilities of principals and school division administrators to provide supervision and coaching to educational staff
- Improving educational staff, community, and family collaboration

VCU-ACE will guide practice at all levels based on the implementation of technical assistance. VCU-ACE will provide a coordinated approach to divisionwide systems change, professional development, coaching, mentoring, and services improvement. Divisions will participate with VCU-ACE to develop goals to address all levels of professional and paraprofessional development, improvement in classroom implementation of evidence-based practice, implementation of interdisciplinary teaming, and improvement of family involvement and support. In addition to providing targeted technical assistance, VCU-ACE Technical Assistance Associates will collect data on the success of technical assistance and project outcomes. Technical assistance activities will be modified based on ongoing data-based decision making.

VCU-ACE will assist the selected divisions' ASIT in a thorough assessment using the following scales:

- Autism Program Environment Rating Scale
- Autism Program Environment Rating Scale-Middle/High School
- Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium Autism Project Program Evaluation Tool

(Odom, Cox, Brock, et al., 2010; Odom, Neitzel, Boyd, Rezka, & Hume, 2009; Conroy & Schall, 2009)

Additional assessments may be recommended based on the focus of the school division's priorities.

During this assessment, VCU-ACE Technical Assistance Associates will convene an Autism Excellence Academy for all identified school divisions. During the meeting, VCU-ACE will assist each school division's ASIT in developing a divisionwide ASIP. Included in the plans will be data-based targets, and the specific technical assistance and training activities that will take place in the division.

A major aspect of the Autism Excellence Academy will be to establish specific targets and outcomes with each exemplary school division that are customized to the unique needs of that division. Timelines and staffing plans will be developed for the three-year period. These timelines will be revisited quarterly for appropriateness and adjustments will be made as needed. It is our goal to assist school divisions to become exemplary providers of services to their students with ASD. Thus, we are dedicated to building the capacity of school divisions serving students with ASD.

VCU-ACE will provide:

- Facilitation of Professional Learning Communities around a division's areas of interest and needs as it relates to educating students with autism
- Baseline, ongoing, and follow-up assessment of division and classroom functioning
- Comprehensive training and coaching dedicated to the use of evidence-based practices
- Development of data-driven decision-making practices across the division

EXPECTATIONS FOR SELECTED DIVISIONS

Selected divisions will be expected to provide:

- A dedicated project coordinator, who has the ability to make connections with the rest of the ASIT and division leaders, to work collaboratively on an ongoing basis with a Technical Assistance Associate from VCU. This person will champion the ASIP and will provide coordination of efforts across the entire team. This person should plan on coordinating with VCU-ACE approximately 50 to 75 hours per month
- Quarterly meetings with the special education director or special education coordinator to discuss progress on school division goals
- Regular monthly meetings with the entire ASIT to review goals and activities, report on progress toward the goals, and complete regular strategic planning
- Identification of school division staff who will be coaches and will be empowered to implement a coaching model across the division

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

School divisions who are selected can expect improvements in services to students with ASD across the division. Specifically, VCU-ACE will work with school divisions to:

- Substantially increase the technical skills and knowledge of staff, including principals, teachers, school psychologists, speech therapists, related services personnel, and administrators
- Improve the quality of instructional practices used by special educators
- Increase child study teams' ability to accurately identify and assess students with ASD
- Increase knowledge and implementation of individual positive behavior support strategies
- Increase the quality of IEP development in terms of relevance, functionality, and measurability of goals and objectives
- Increase the ability of general education staff to implement required accommodations and modifications to meet the needs of students with ASD
- Increase the knowledge of school personnel, students, and parents in the use of assistive technology
- Increase parent participation and satisfaction with school division services
- Increase knowledge of transition planning, secondary intervention, social skills competence, and benefits counseling

SUBMISSION PROCESS

The submission process is described below:

- Application Available ....November 2013

  Online at: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/disabilities/ autism/index.shtml   and   www.vcuautismcenter.org

- Application Due...January 15, 2014
- Notice of Selection ....March 3, 2014
- Division Assessment ....March-April, 2014
- Autism Excellence Academy ....May 2014
- Year One Implementation ....August 2014-July 2015
- Year Two Implementation............................August 2015- July 2016
- Year Three Implementation.........................August 2016-July 2017

- Duration of Technical Assistance: Three years, as funding is available.

- **All proposals are due on January 15, 2014 by 5 pm**.

- Proposals should be no longer than **ten pages, double-spaced with one-inch margins on all pages in 12-point font.** Each page should be numbered and have a footer with the name of the school division.

- If there are documents, (e.g., self-evaluations, program improvement plans, or strategic plans) that further describe the school division's commitment to special education and educating students with ASD, please include those documents in an appendix with the proposal. This will not be included in the ten-page limit.

School divisions may provide an electronic submission of these elements at either of the following addresses: cmschall@vcu.edu or secarr@vcu.edu

School divisions may provide a hard copy of the proposal to: Bonnie McCarthy
Virginia Commonwealth University
Autism Center for Excellence
1314 West Main Street
P.O. Box 842011
Richmond, Virginia 23284-2011

CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions or to request an application in an alternative format, please contact:

Dr. Carol Schall
cmschall@vcu.edu

or

Staci Carr
secarr@vcu.edu

CONSIDERATION FOR SELECTION

Selection considerations for school divisions to receive intensive technical assistance from the VCU-ACE will include:

- Potential to benefit from technical assistance
- Demonstrated commitment to change
- Strength of existing supports
- Vision for systems change
- Explanation of plan to implement divisionwide coaching
- Explanation of current work taking place within the division

Please note: Consideration will also include the relative size of school divisions applying, geographic location, and number of students with ASD within the school division.

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA): is the application of the principles of behavior to human problems in applied settings. More specifically, ABA in the classroom and community setting involves the application of the behavioral paradigm (stimulus/antecedent > response/behavior > consequence) to everyday situations.

Autism Services Improvement Plan (ASIP or SIP): is the plan that the school division staff will develop after divisionwide assessment to finalize the goals and activities they will undertake during the system's change process with VCU-ACE.

Autism Services Improvement Team (ASIT): is the team of division staff who will meet at least monthly and oversee the implementation of the ASIP. This team will be composed of the relevant stakeholders in the division who have a direct interest in the outcomes of the systems change process. VCU-ACE does not prescribe the composition of this team. Rather the team should be composed of those administrative and classroom staff who have a role in the implementation of the school division goals. Team members may spend approximately 20 to 35 hours per month on the project.

Coaching: is a professional development process where two or more colleagues work together to reflect on current practices; expand, refine, and build new skills; share ideas; teach one another; conduct classroom research; or solve problems in the workplace. The VCU-ACE technical assistance process depends on coaching as a means to increase the implementation of evidence-based practices to fidelity.

Evidence-based Practices for ASD: Evidence-based practices are those practices that have been validated through research to provide substantial benefit for children and youth with ASD. To date, there have been 24 practices identified that meet a sufficient scientific criterion to qualify for this designation. The majority of these practices are based on the implementation of applied behavior analysis for children and youth with ASD.

Project Coordinator: This is the school division person who will lead the ASIT and be the major collaborator with the dedicated VCU-ACE Technical Assistance Associate. This person will spend approximately 50 to 75 hours per month on the project.

Technical Assistance Associate: This is the VCU-ACE staff member who has extensive expertise in ASD and evidence-based practices. Each division will have at least one dedicated Technical Assistance Associate from VCU-ACE. In addition, selected divisions will have access to the expertise of the entire VCU-ACE team.

Name of School Division: _____

School Division's Website: _____

Superintendent's Region: _____

Current Superintendent: _____

Director of Special Education: _____

Contact Person for follow-up: _____

Contact Person's E-mail: _____

Mailing Address: _____

_____

Telephone Number: _____

Fax number: _____

NAMES AND TITLES OF PERSON(S) COMPLETING THE APPLICATION

NAME	TITLE

A. Background Information on School Division (15 points)

Describe: a. The school division in terms of size, location (urban, suburban, rural), vision, and mission

b. Initiatives or other consultation agreements specific to autism and currently in place within the school division

List: c. Schools within the division including name, address, and current administrator

B. Present Level of Autism Educational Services (20 points)

Describe: a. Existing services provided to students with ASD. Services may include, but are not limited to, classroom environments, supports or programs specific to transition, early intervention, or social skills. This may also include a list of professional development activities or instructional methodologies specific to autism and available divisionwide.

b. Exemplary services within the school division (For example: If you have an inclusion program, a specialized transition process, or a social skills classroom that you feel is exemplary of your strengths and vision, please tell us about it.)

c. Number of students with ASD in the school division (If data is available, please specify number of students with ASD within early childhood, elementary, middle, high school, postsecondary education or training.)

C. Current Challenges (20 Points)

Describe: a. Main challenges the school division encounters serving students with ASD

b. Current unmet training needs

c. Resources currently accessed to address challenges

D. Division Resources and Processes to Support Autism Services Improvement Goals (30 points)

Describe: a. Potential divisionwide "ASD Services Improvement" team members, include names, titles, and contact information (If a divisionwide team currently exists to improve services for students with ASD, please list the composition of that team and describe their current projects and accomplishments.)

b. The way in which the school division currently provides or proposes to provide classroom-based coaching to improve the implementation of evidence-based practices (EBPs) in classroom settings. Include in this description:
- School division personnel (if any) who currently coach special education teachers in the division
- Training school division personnel have received regarding coaching

A. Background Information on School Division (15 points)

Describe: a. The school division in terms of size, location (urban, suburban, rural), vision, and mission

b. Initiatives or other consultation agreements specific to autism and currently in place within the school division

List: c. Schools within the division including name, address, and current administrator

B. Present Level of Autism Educational Services (20 points)

Describe: a. Existing services provided to students with ASD. Services may include, but are not limited to, classroom environments, supports or programs specific to transition, early intervention, or social skills. This may also include a list of professional development activities or instructional methodologies specific to autism and available divisionwide.

b. Exemplary services within the school division (For example: If you have an inclusion program, a specialized transition process, or a social skills classroom that you feel is exemplary of your strengths and vision, please tell us about it.)

c. Number of students with ASD in the school division (If data is available, please specify number of students with ASD within early childhood, elementary, middle, high school, post secondary education or training)

C. Current Challenges (20 Points)

Describe: a. Main challenges the school division encounters serving students with ASD

b. Current unmet training needs

c. Resources currently accessed to address challenges

D. Division Resources and Processes to Support Autism Services Improvement Goals (30 points)

Describe: a. Potential divisionwide "ASD Services Improvement" team members, include names, titles, and contact information (If a divisionwide team currently exists to improve services for students with ASD, please list the composition of that team and describe their current projects and accomplishments.)

b. The way in which the school division currently provides or proposes to provide classroom-based coaching to improve the implementation of evidence-based practices (EBPs) in classroom settings. Include in this description:
- School division personnel (if any) who currently coach special education teachers in the division
- Training school division personnel have received regarding coaching

Cohort Two: September 2014 to June 2017

9

Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Commonwealth University
Autism Center for Excellence Request for Applications (2013)

c. Divisionwide professional development procedures or processes that will support increased knowledge of ASD within the division

d. Potential goals that the division would like to address through the VCU-ACE Autism Services Improvement Process

E. Division Commitment (Please note, section E will not be counted in the 10 page limit) (15 Points)

Provide: a. Letters of commitment from the:
- Division Superintendent
- Director of Special Education
- Any other key division personnel who will participate in the development of an ASD Services Improvement Plan

Successful letters of commitment will include reference to the division's vision and goals, confirmation of the division's commitment to release relevant staff to attend various VCU-ACE Academies and training, and relevance of this project related to other current divisionwide initiatives.

b. Letters of support from key school division stakeholders and constituents (e.g., local businesses, community partners, parent groups, the special education advisory committee members)

Application Checklist: VCU-ACE School Division Technical Assistance

Please check to make sure that each of the packets from the division is complete.

Cover sheet with name of school division and all fields completed

Section A: (15 points)

Description of school division

Description of current initiatives or consultation agreements (if applicable)

List of schools within division (with name, address, and administrator)

Section B: (20 points)

Description of existing services provided to students with ASD at elementary, middle, and high school

Description of exemplary services within the school division

Number of students with ASD in the school division

Section C: (20 points)

Challenges that school division encounters serving students with ASD

Unmet training needs

Resources currently accessed to address challenges

Section D: (30 points)

Potential ASD Services Improvement Team Members

Divisionwide Coaching Model

Divisionwide Professional Development Process

Potential Goals

Section E: (15 points)

Letter of commitment from Superintendent

Letter of commitment from Director of Special Education

Letter(s) of commitment from those who will be involved with the ASD Services Improvement Plan

Other letters of commitment or support