



STATE USE OF AUTISM COORDINATORS

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A state department of education (SDE) served by the Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) at SEDL requested information for the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Tennessee regarding the following questions:

1. Are the SDEs using autism-specific state program coordinators?
2. If so, what are the roles and responsibilities for this position?

According to the Autism Fact Sheet from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), National Institutes of Health (NINDS, 2013), "autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a range of complex neurodevelopment disorders, characterized by social impairments, communication difficulties, and restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior."

In some states, autism coordinators are used to coordinate services and programming that are targeted to serve students with autism. For example, Arlington Public Schools, in the state of Virginia, is one of a number of school districts using autism coordinators to serve this group of diverse learners (Arlington Public Schools, 2011). Specific information on the use of autism-specific state program coordinators in the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Tennessee is provided in Table 1.

A discussion follows of the procedures for resource review and selection, limitations of this report, and information that pertains to the topic.

PROCEDURE

Due to the nature of this request, SECC staff did not employ the conventional search processes of using research databases and search engines, such as EBSCO, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), Bing, Google, and Google Scholar to locate literature on the topic. Instead, they conducted a basic online search using the terms "autism" and "autism coordinators." They also searched the SDE websites for Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Tennessee and contacted individuals within these SDEs to obtain state-specific information.

SECC staff selected material for use in developing this report based on the following criteria: (a) publication or effective date within the past 10 years; (b) information can be scaled up to a statewide approach to using autism program coordinators; and/or (c) content is relevant to the client's request.

GENERAL LIMITATIONS

Currently, the education field lacks a strong research base around the use of autism coordinators to address the academic needs of diverse learners. Consequently, resources used for this report consist of a fact sheet, web pages, and information provided through personal communication with individuals at the state departments of education for Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Tennessee.

SECC staff provide the above comments to assist SDE staff and other stakeholders in making informed decisions with respect to the information presented. SECC does not endorse any policies or guidance featured in this report.

A summary of the information obtained on the topic is provided in Table 1., Use of Autism-Specific State Program Coordinators by State Departments of Education. In accordance with the client’s request, this information focuses on the above named states.

REFERENCES

Arlington Public Schools. (2011). *Arlington Public Schools. Autism services*. Retrieved from <http://www.apsva.us/page/1740>

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, National Institutes of Health. (2013, May). *Autism fact sheet*. Retrieved from http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail_autism.htm

Information Requests are customized reports that are prepared to fulfill requests for information by the departments of education of the states served by the Southeast Comprehensive Center at SEDL. The requests address topics on current education issues related to the requirements and implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). For additional information, visit the SECC website at secc.sedl.org

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APPENDIX

**Table 1. USE OF AUTISM-SPECIFIC STATE PROGRAM COORDINATORS
BY STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION**

TABLE 1. USE OF AUTISM-SPECIFIC STATE PROGRAM COORDINATORS BY STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION				
State	Sole Responsibility	Role and Responsibilities	Supplemental Information	Source
AL	No	N/A	<p>The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) has an autism contact person who answers questions regarding autism but who has multiple special education (SPED) responsibilities.</p> <p>C. Robinson (personal communication, June 18, 2013)</p>	<p>Cindy Robinson Education Specialist Alabama State Department of Education crobinson@alsde.edu</p>
AR	No	N/A	<p>Currently, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) contracts with a group of consultants who specialize in behaviors, including autism, requiring intervention. This group is employed by the Education Services Cooperatives and paid by ADE. Upon receipt of questions regarding autism, ADE submits such questions to the behavior interventionist group. In the future, an ADE staff member will coordinate the behavior interventionist group. This assignment will be one of multiple SPED responsibilities.</p> <p>L. Haley (personal communication, June 19, 2013)</p>	<p>Lisa Haley Administrator of Monitoring and Program Effectiveness Arkansas Department of Education Lisa.haley@arkansas.gov</p>
LA	No (as of June 2013)	<p><u>Former job description:</u> This position is responsible for managing all aspects of statewide programs for students with autism. This includes, but is not limited to, providing leadership in the areas of federal and state laws, policies, and regulations; curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation; training of professionals and families throughout the state; instructional issues; technical assistance; interagency collaboration; and federal and state grant management. This individual maintains professional knowledge of current best practices and programmatic developments as well as assistive technology concerns for students with disabilities.</p> <p>40% – PROGRAM</p>	<p>Due to budgetary restrictions, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) no longer employs a full-time state autism coordinator, as of June 2013. There are no plans to hire someone to fill that position. As the LDOE receives autism-related questions, the appropriate staff person will respond accordingly. This assignment will be one of multiple SPED responsibilities.</p> <p>N. Hicks (personal communication, June 19, 2013)</p>	<p>Nancy Hicks Special Education Coordinator Louisiana Department of Education nancy.hicks@la.gov</p>

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		<p>ADMINISTRATION Serves as the statewide leader for developing, implementing, and evaluating statewide programs for students with autism. Keeps abreast of new developments in the field of autism, especially behavioral and communication issues for students with autism, such as augmentative/alternative communication and positive behavior support strategies. Establishes initiatives to promote inclusive education for students with autism. Fosters interagency coordination as needed to support services for students with autism. Analyzes the program's current impact and determines new methodologies and techniques needed to meet the program needs of the state. Interprets federal laws, regulations, and policies; assists in the revision and interpretation of Louisiana education bulletins (e.g., 1706, 1530, 1508) as these special education standards and regulations apply to students with autism. Assists in the preparation of reports and presentations to the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Louisiana legislature, and the U.S. Department of Education.</p> <p>40% – TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE Plans, conducts, and evaluates statewide, regional and local training for agency personnel, college and university personnel, civic and professional associations, parents, and special interest groups in the areas of education for students with autism (e.g., curriculum, communication needs, instruction, behavioral supports, inclusive education, assistive technology regulations, administrative issues). Provides technical assistance to the areas of autism-related issues (e.g., assistive technology, positive behavioral support strategies</p>		

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		<p>for challenging behaviors). Develops initiatives through collaboration with outside agencies to advance services statewide for students with autism through membership in various organizations.</p> <p>10% – GRANT DEVELOPMENT Provides leadership in the application and implementation of federal grants and manages state and federally funded grants. Assists in writing of proposals for state grants.</p> <p>10% – OTHER Performs all other duties as directed by the supervisor or division director.</p> <hr/> <p>100%</p>		
TN	No	N/A	<p>The Tennessee Department of Education (TDE) employs a behavior and autism services coordinator whose major responsibilities are behavior, autism, and low-incidence disorders. Even though all autism questions received by the state are channeled to this staff member, autism is only one of multiple SPED responsibilities.</p> <p>L. Copas (personal communication, June 20, 2013)</p>	<p>Linda Copas Behavior and Autism Services Coordinator Tennessee Department of Education linda.copas@tn.gov</p>