

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Programs in NYCDOE community schools may be appropriate for some students with ASD. As a specialized program, ASD Programs are only available in some community schools, and it is important to understand that a classification (or medical diagnosis) of ASD does not necessarily mean that your child needs a specialized program. This guide provides information about ASD Programs in community schools.

## **AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) PROGRAMS**

The ASD Nest Program and the ASD Horizon Program are two different special education programs in community (neighborhood) schools that serve some students with ASD who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).<sup>1</sup> Each program is designed to strengthen academic and social skills, but has different service delivery models and eligibility criteria. However, the same application process applies to both ASD Nest and ASD Horizon Programs.

### **ASD NEST – OVERVIEW**

The ASD Nest Program is a partnership between the NYCDOE and New York University’s (NYU) ASD Nest Support Project.<sup>2</sup> This program serves students with ASD and typically developing students in a reduced class-size Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) model. There are two teachers (one special education teacher and one general education teacher) in each class.

- **Class structure:** class size and ratio in the ASD Nest Program varies by grade. As students get older, the class size increases as does the ratio of students with ASD to typically developing students. Paraprofessionals for the classroom are not part of this model.
- **School-based staff:** receive training in specialized teaching strategies for students with ASD, including Social Development Intervention (SDI) developed by NYU. SDI is an evidence-based program that supports social/emotional development of ASD Nest students.
- **Curriculum and instruction:** as in all NYCDOE schools, ASD Nest Program classes use the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). ASD Nest Program classes combine CCLS and SDI to improve social understanding while also supporting academic success. SDI is taught in small groups and reinforced throughout the day.
- **Social/emotional supports:** related service providers use SDI to help children develop relationships and social functioning. This pragmatic (social) language curriculum is taught in small groups of ASD Nest students and reinforced by classroom teachers.

### **ASD HORIZON – OVERVIEW**

The ASD Horizon Program was developed by the NYCDOE in collaboration with the New England Center for Children (NECC). This program serves students with ASD in a Special Class (SC), with one special education teacher and one classroom paraprofessional for every eight students (8:1:1).

- **Class structure:** the special class ratio in the ASD Horizon Program is eight students with ASD, one special education teacher and one classroom paraprofessional (8:1:1).
- **School-based staff:** receive training in specialized teaching strategies for students with ASD, including the [Autism Curriculum Encyclopedia](#) (ACE), developed by NECC.<sup>3</sup> ACE is an evidence-based program based on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), which supports academic and social/emotional development in students with ASD.
- **Curriculum and instruction:** as in all NYCDOE schools, ASD Horizon Program classes use the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). ASD Horizon Program classes provide a supportive classroom, combining CCLS and ACE instruction delivered individually, based on student need for academic and social support.
- **Social/emotional supports:** related service providers work collaboratively with classroom teachers using individually customized ACE lessons to address specific communication and socialization challenges faced by students with ASD.

<sup>1</sup> More intensive support for students with ASD is provided in District 75 schools: <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/District75>

<sup>2</sup> <http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/asdnest/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.acenecc.org/>

<b>ASD NEST STUDENT PROFILE</b> Students accepted to the ASD Nest Program must meet the following criteria:	<b>ASD HORIZON STUDENT PROFILE</b> Students accepted to the ASD Horizon Program must meet the following criteria:
<p><b>Classification:</b> students must be eligible for an educational disability classification of autism on their IEP.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cognition / Intelligence:</b> average to above average intellectual functioning with consistent development across all cognitive areas including, but not limited to, verbal and nonverbal reasoning abilities, working memory, language, and attention.</li> <li>• <b>Achievement:</b> academic skills on or above grade level. Students are able to work independently and in small groups, with minimal redirection. Students participate in standard assessments, including New York State (NYS) Math and English Language Arts (ELA) exams.<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• <b>Language / Communication:</b> language skills are on or close to age level, except in pragmatic language, including staying on topic, meaningful conversation, and socially appropriate nonverbal gestures, responses, and facial expressions. Students may have challenges that include inappropriate responses and/or misinterpreting others' statements and/or behaviors.</li> <li>• <b>Social Functioning:</b> mild to moderate delays. Students demonstrate limited skills in interacting and/or playing with peers or adults, rigidity, and self-regulation.</li> <li>• <b>Behavior:</b> may have mild behavior challenges, but are not physically aggressive and do not have self-injurious behaviors. Students do not tend to show "escape behaviors," such as running away from staff or exiting the classroom or school building.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cognition / Intelligence:</b> low average to average intellectual functioning with uneven cognitive skills, with both strengths and challenges.</li> <li>• <b>Achievement:</b> academic skills on or near grade level. Students benefit from instruction based on the principles of ABA and can work independently with some redirection and adult support. Students participate in standard assessments, including New York State (NYS) Math and English Language Arts (ELA) exams.</li> <li>• <b>Language / Communication:</b> may have mild to moderate expressive and receptive with social pragmatic (practical) language delays. Students entering kindergarten can speak in at least 2-3 word, meaningful sentences and older students are able to string words to express needs and wants, but need support to communicate effectively in the social arena Echolalia may also be present.</li> <li>• <b>Social Functioning:</b> mild to moderate delays in initiating and sustaining peer interactions. Students may participate in social activities but often prefer to engage in these activities alone.</li> <li>• <b>Behavior:</b> may have mild to moderate behavior challenges, but are not physically aggressive and do not have self-injurious behaviors. Students do not tend to show "escape behaviors" such as running away from staff or exiting the classroom or school building.</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> The CSE is responsible for determining whether students are eligible to receive accommodations on state, local, and classroom tests and/or in the classroom: <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/SpecialEducation/Classroom/instruction>

## ASD PROGRAM ADMISSIONS PROCESS

Schools and families should read the ASD Nest Program and ASD Horizon Program student profiles in this guide. Your child’s school or district-based Committee on Special Education (CSE) should make sure the student’s entire clinical file is up-to-date so that the ASD Program evaluation process can be completed in a timely manner.<sup>5</sup> A Central ASD Programs Team member will work closely with your child’s school or district-based CSE and will also have ongoing contact with you regarding your child’s application. For current preschool students who are applying for kindergarten ASD Programs, you should work with your child’s Turning 5 Team.

See below for the steps in the ASD Nest Program and ASD Horizon Program application process:

**1. Submit an application:** if you think the ASD Nest Program or ASD Horizon Program may be appropriate for your child, work with your child’s school- or district-based CSE to complete and submit an application. This team will access, print, and submit the application for you. You can work with your child’s CSE to submit an application at any time during the year, but if your child is entering kindergarten next year, we recommend that you let us know as soon as possible. However, please remember that all assessments must be up-to-date in order for the admissions process to move forward.

- Work directly with your child’s current school- or district-based Committee on Special Education (CSE) to complete and submit the application.
- Your child’s current school can e-mail the application to [ASDPrograms@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:ASDPrograms@schools.nyc.gov) (*strongly preferred*), fax to (718) 391-6887, or mail to the Central ASD Programs Team at 28-11 Queens Plaza North (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor), Long Island City, NY 11101.

<b><i>If your child is transitioning to:</i></b>	<b><i>Submit an ASD Program application:</i></b>
Kindergarten	As soon as possible during your child’s final year in preschool. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Note: you should also apply to non-ASD kindergarten programs through the <a href="#">kindergarten admissions process</a>.<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>
Any other grade (1-12)	Anytime, as long as your child’s assessments are up-to-date

**2. Confirmation of Application:** applications submitted by email will receive an acknowledgement via email within one to two business days. Forms submitted by facsimile or regular mail will receive an acknowledgement via regular mail to confirm receipt, which will be mailed out within one to two business days of receiving your application. When an application is submitted, we will also contact your child’s school or district-based CSE to discuss the information provided on the application and ask any follow up questions.

- If you do not hear from the Central ASD Programs Team within 1 week of submitting your application, please contact [ASDPrograms@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:ASDPrograms@schools.nyc.gov) or call (718) 391-6887.

**3. Initial Review:** the Central ASD Programs Team reviews your child’s special education file to determine whether assessments are up-to-date and provide sufficient information about your child’s intellectual ability in

<sup>5</sup> All testing (psychological, academic, autism diagnostic) are up-to-date typically within one year of the application for students in Kindergarten through fifth grade and within three years for students in grades six-12. However, please note that recent materials within one year of the application are strongly preferred so that the Central ASD Programs Team can consider the most current information about your child’s functioning.

<sup>6</sup> The Office of Student Enrollment coordinates the kindergarten admissions process:  
<http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/Elementary/kindergarten>

addition to social, language, behavior, academic, and adaptive skills. In addition, we make sure the student meets criteria for an educational classification of autism on his/her Individualized Education Program (IEP).

- **Up-to-date assessments:** if the Central ASD Programs Team needs more information about your child or if the assessments are not current, we will ask your child's school or district-based CSE to get your consent to conduct any additional assessments. You will receive a letter from the DOE asking for your signed consent.
- **Additional information:** families may also submit additional evaluation materials with their application for review by the Central ASD Programs Team. As with the clinical assessments, materials containing additional information should be no more than one year old for applicants in grades K-5 and no more than three years old for applicants in grades 6-12.

The initial review of applicants' special education file can take between five and ten business days.

- 4. ASD Program Admissions Process & Timeline:** if the information provided during the initial review indicates your child may be a candidate for either an ASD Nest Program or an ASD Horizon Program, a Central ASD Team member will work closely with you, and your child's preschool, school, or district CSE to schedule an observation. The DOE may also conduct additional evaluations, as needed, and will obtain your consent to do so. Specifically, the DOE uses the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) for children who may be a good fit for the ASD Nest Program.

Within two weeks of the initial review, the Central ASD Programs Team will contact you with next steps in your child's ASD Program admissions process. If your child's clinical information indicates that s/he:

- **Does not meet admissions criteria,** your child's school or district-based CSE will work with you to determine an appropriate special education program and/or service recommendations to meet your child's needs. You can submit a new ASD Program application at a later date, if new information about your child becomes available.
  - **May be a good candidate for an ASD Program,** over the next two weeks you and your child's school will be contacted by a Central ASD Programs Team member to review the information and discuss the next steps in the process.
- 5. ASD Program Admissions Observation:** within four weeks from the initial review, an observation will be scheduled either by an ASD Program School or by an ASD Central Team member. Upon completion of the observation, results will be reviewed to determine if your child meets admissions criteria for and will be offered an ASD program placement. You and your child's school will receive a copy of the written observation report and you will be contacted by the Central ASD Team to discuss the results.
- 6. Admissions Determination:** is based on the information and data gathered from your child's psychoeducational evaluation, autism diagnostic testing, observations, and any additional information you submit. The Central ASD Programs team will discuss whether your child meets the admissions criteria for an ASD Nest Program or an ASD Horizon Program with you and your child's CSE. Once a student is admitted to an ASD Program, his/her IEP will be written with guidance from the Central ASD Programs Team.

- 7. Visiting an ASD Program:** families of students accepted to an ASD Program may visit the ASD Program school offered. Please note, due to the specialized nature of this program and the limited number of seats, accepted

students are assigned an ASD Program school- there is no application process for specific ASD Program schools. Families of accepted students will be contacted by the ASD Program school to arrange a school visit and to enroll at the school.

## **INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS ACCEPTED TO ASD PROGRAMS**

Families of newly accepted students will receive a School Location Letter (SLL) following the IEP meeting with their school- or district-based CSE. The SLL will specify the assigned ASD Program school your child will attend. Upon receipt of the SLL, families of accepted students should bring the [documentation needed to enroll](#) their children at the ASD Program school as soon as possible.<sup>7</sup> It is important to register at the ASD Program school as quickly as possible so that busing, if included on the IEP, is not delayed.

### **Transportation**

[Special education transportation](#) is provided to/from the ASD Program school if your child's school- or district-based CSE determines that s/he is eligible to receive special education transportation as an IEP service.<sup>8</sup> Special transportation accommodations, such as limited travel time or a temperature controlled vehicle, must be recommended by a medical doctor, approved by the Department of Health, and reviewed annually. You must complete and sign the [Authorization for Release of Health Information \(HIPAA\)](#)<sup>9</sup> to be submitted together with the [medical accommodation form](#)<sup>10</sup> filled out by your child's doctor. These forms must be signed and completed by you and your child's doctor and submitted annually to your child's school- or district-based CSE. Your child's school- or district-based CSE will submit signed and completed forms to the Department of Health for approval on your behalf.

### **ASD Summer Program**

The ASD Nest Program and the ASD Horizon Program follow the ten-month community school calendar from September through June.<sup>11</sup> The NYCDOE provides an optional summer program for ASD Program students in Kindergarten through fifth grade, to promote continued social development. This optional summer program runs for a half day, four days per week for four weeks. Summer program schedules are set by the summer school site that houses the ASD Summer Program.

### **Transitioning to Middle School (6<sup>th</sup> grade) and High School (9<sup>th</sup> grade)**

Current ASD Program students participate in a two-step middle school or high school transition process:

1. **ASD Program Choice Forms:** students currently enrolled in an ASD Program who are interested in attending an ASD Program for MS/HS must provide their program choices to their school-based ASD Program articulation point person (guidance counselor or social worker) no later than **December 1, 2015**.
  - The only way to receive an ASD Program placement for MS/HS is by completing an ASD Program Choice Form.

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<sup>7</sup> Enrollment documentation: <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/NewStudents>

<sup>8</sup> Specialized Transportation: <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/SpecialEducation/programs/additionalservices/transportation.htm>

<sup>9</sup> HIPAA form: [http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/2A444727-0597-4C92-84AE-D6CEF15E796B/0/hipaa\\_fillablecopy.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/2A444727-0597-4C92-84AE-D6CEF15E796B/0/hipaa_fillablecopy.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Request for Medical Accommodations:

<http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/98856A9E-517B-4198-8640-2B5BECFA10D4/0/MedicalAccommodationsRequest.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Your child's school or district-based CSE is responsible for determining whether Extended School Year (ESY), also known as 12-month school year, services are needed. If your child is eligible for ESY, an appropriate summer program placement will be made. Visit the NYCDOE website on ESY: <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/SpecialEducation/programs/additionalservices/extended>

2. **MS/HS Applications:** completed applications must be submitted to guidance counselors **by December 1, 2015**. Students should indicate the middle school(s) or high school(s) they are interested in attending.
- Remember that students are not placed in ASD Programs at community schools through the MS/HS application process, even if the schools listed on the MS/HS application have an ASD Program.

MS/HS ASD Program offers will be shared with families in the spring, at approximately the same time as HS Round 1 (March 2015) or MS main round offers (May 2015). Students in 8th grade may participate in Round 2 HS application process if they are seeking a non-ASD Program placement, but there will only be one round of MS/HS applications for ASD Programs. Additional information will be shared by your child's current school.