TO: County Special Education Administrators  
County Personnel Directors  
WV Autism Training Center  

FROM: Pat Homberg, Executive Director  
Office of Special Programs  

RE: Autism Mentor Classification - Qualifications and Process  

DATE: May 1, 2014  

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide information on the requirements that apply to Autism Mentors and an updated description of the WV Department of Education’s responsibilities in the implementation of the Autism Mentor policy, which was adopted by the West Virginia Board of Education in 1992 and revised in 2013. Policy 5314.01: Autism Mentor established the mandatory standards and experiences necessary to qualify for the service personnel class title of “Autism Mentor”. A copy of Policy 5314.01 is attached for your information.

The Autism Mentor standards include:

1. **Meet the qualifications of “Aide III” as delineated in West Virginia Code 18A-4-8.**  
Aide III means those personnel selected and trained for teacher-aide classifications such as monitor aide, clerical aide, classroom aide or general aide, and who hold a high school diploma or a general educational certificate, and have completed six semester hours of college credit at an institution of higher education or are employed as an aide in a special education program and have one year’s experience as an aide in special education. The local school district is responsible for verifying this standard.
2. Successful completion of a staff development program related to autism as determined by the West Virginia Department of Education.

Successful completion of staff development program related to providing Instructional supports to students with autism as determined by the (WVDE) and delineated in WVDE’s Guidelines for Best Practices Autism Spectrum Disorder: services in West Virginia Schools.

To become an Autism Mentor, an aide must earn, at a minimum, 15 points for participation in relevant staff development, which must include an overview of autism and positive behavior support strategies. Documentation of the individual’s number of earned points must be on file in the Office of Special Education at the Department.

3.2.a.3. Training is required on the use of restraint and must include prevention and de-escalation techniques with alternatives to the use of restraint.

3. Two years of successful experience working with autistic students.
The local school district is responsible for verifying this standard.

4. Physical ability and stamina necessary to complete all job tasks, including tasks related to ensuring student safety.
The local school district is responsible for verifying this standard.

Attachment

PROcedures FOR VERIFICATION OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES

An aide, who wants to meet the qualifications to become an autism mentor, must submit to the West Virginia Department of Education, Office of Special Education the following documentation to complete the staff development standard:

1. Verification of participation (e.g., registration receipt) for each workshop attended;
2. A description of the session content (e.g., conference flyer or agenda); or
3. A Certificate of Attendance/Participation, including participant’s name, title and sponsor (such as Autism Training Center) of workshop, date(s), and length (i.e., number of hours) of workshop, and signature(s) of presenter(s); and
4. Personal mailing address; and
5. Name of employer (county school district).
The staff development documentation is reviewed and points awarded for participation in approved staff development activities. Usually one-half of a point is awarded for each hour of participation. A letter is then issued stating what staff development workshop or conference was attended, the number of points awarded for each specific staff development experience, and the total number of points earned. The letter is sent to the aide who is earning the points and a copy is sent to the Director of Personnel in the school district that employs the aide.

3.2.b. **Upon completion of the analysis of the documentation submitted, the employee and LEA personnel director will receive a letter verifying whether the state requirements for this standard have been met.**

An aide must earn a minimum of 15 points for staff development within the past three consecutive years. Once an individual has met Standard 2 by earning the required 15 staff development points as verified by the Department, it is no longer necessary to submit additional documentation to the Office of Special Education.

The Department of Education does not issue certificates or other verification stating that an individual has met all the requirements to become an Autism Mentor, because the school district is responsible for verifying three of the four applicable standards. Therefore, it is the school district’s responsibility to determine when an individual has met all the requirements to become an Autism Mentor.

Documentation of participation in staff development workshops/conferences is to be submitted to:

**JoDonna Burdoff, Autism Coordinator**

*Office of Special Programs*

*West Virginia Department of Education*

*c/o RESA 7*

If additional information is needed or there are questions regarding this matter, please contact **JoDonna Burdoff** at (304) 365-2450 or jburdoff@access.k12.wv.us.
Department staff in collaboration with experts in the field of autism, reviewed competencies necessary to provide appropriate support services to students with autism. As a result of that review, the Department requires that the staff development experiences for Autism Mentors include the following areas:

1. Overview of Autism
   A. Definition of Autism
   B. Characteristics of Autism
2. Transition and integration techniques
3. Functional Analysis or assessment of behaviors
4. Assessment of the environment
5. Positive behavior support strategies, techniques and interventions
6. Data collection techniques
7. Understanding and enhancing communication and language
   A. Augmentative
   B. Vocal
   C. Sign
   D. Picture/Symbols
   E. Others
8. Other areas related to working with students with autism
9. Community resources
10. Social skills training.

There are currently a variety of staff development opportunities available in the field of autism that can result in the knowledge and skills necessary to provide appropriate support services to students with autism. Individuals who desire to be Autism Mentors should participate in workshops/conferences that cover a variety of topics and presenters to develop a broad base of knowledge.

The following is a list of organizations and agencies that periodically conduct workshops/conferences in West Virginia on topics related to autism. This list is not exhaustive and may be updated, when necessary.
Autism Society of West Virginia
Annual Conference

Autism Training Center, Huntington
Variety of workshops through-out year

West Virginia University Center for Excellence in Disabilities, Morgantown

“Positive Behavior Supports” workshops offered through-out the year

Marshall University, Huntington
“Introduction to Autism” - Semester course (10 points for completion of course)
Celebrating Connections Early Childhood Conference offers sessions regarding autism

Camp Gizmo: an assistive technology camp for young children.

WV Training Connections and Resources