

Secondary Autism Focus Program Description - **GBAPS**

The Autism Focus (AF) Program is for students with a primary disability of autism spectrum disorder who have significant challenges in the areas of communication, executive functioning, sensory processing, social engagement, and/or behavior. Following are other characteristics we would typically see in students with autism spectrum disorders who meet district criteria for these programs:

- Have the potential for average intellectual abilities.
- Receive instruction in the universal curriculum, take standardized tests with accommodations.
 - The AF Program is not a self-contained classroom program. However, there may be situations where a student needs to be in a more restrictive environment in order to meet his/her individualized needs.
 - Students participate in general education and/or team taught settings with 25% or less adult autism support
- Struggle consistently with making friends, communication, and appropriate classroom and school behavior. They often need a “space” to cool down and address sensory needs on a regular basis (often hourly or daily)
- Struggle with executive functioning skills including: organization, planning, completing homework, prioritizing work needs
- Struggle with making friends and understanding social norms related to expected behavior
- Need a significant level of adult support throughout their day to find success behaviorally, socially and academically
- Has independent functional communication or independent use of functional communication system to express wants and needs
- Is able to participate independently in activities of daily living (cleaning up after oneself, navigating school and transitioning between classes)

The Secondary AF Programs are for both Middle and High Schools. These programs may or may not be a permanent support for students depending on their needs and growth. The goal is for students to get more intensive support in social thinking, coping and executive functioning skills so that they can have increased independence in the general education and cross-categorical environment. Students are placed in the

program on the basis of need (higher need first) and entrance criteria including a rubric with input from school staff and the Autism Specialists.

The goals of the program are to:

- Decrease behavioral referrals / alternative placements
- Increase academic success
- Increase social success at school
- Increase attendance / decrease absences and tardies
- Assist students in growth in the areas of self-regulation, communication, adaptive skills, executive functioning, social thinking and transition goals/planning
- Increase the ability of our students with ASD to plan for and go on to successful higher education or employment

Guidelines for the program:

- The Autism Focus teacher should be teaching Navigating Social Dynamics (one or more sections - suggested class size for each class is between 4-6) and then be available for the rest of the school day for 1-1 goal setting and support, de-escalation, push in for academic and behavioral support in general education, family communication, social support group creation and facilitation (POPS), sensory diet implementation, staff support regarding best educational practices for students with ASD, and transition planning for high school and for post-high school.
- Because of these multiple responsibilities, the Autism Focus teacher needs to only have Autism Focus as an assigned class. Putting this teacher into other special education classes or in co-taught environments will cause the program to fail as the teacher will not be able to be there consistently to work with students when they have meltdowns and struggles.
- It is imperative that the students know that there is ALWAYS a safe place in the building for them to go (that is always staffed by a familiar person).
- The Autism Focus Teacher may also implement or assist with the implementation of academic interventions or online learning alternatives (such as Odysseyware) if the IEP team has decided these are needed for this student.

The success of this program will be measured by:

- Measuring the amount of behavioral referrals and suspensions before and after autism focus placement
- Measuring if an increase is shown in academic performance (improved grades and passing rates) of participating students

- Input from students and parents of students with ASD on how the program has helped them and/or met their needs
- A decrease in the amount of time that building administration needs to devote to de-escalating students with ASD in crisis
- Measuring the number of alternative placements for students with before and after starting in the program
- Monitoring graduation and employment rates of students who have gone through Autism Focus

Middle School vs High School Autism Focus Considerations

Due to the maturity level of middle vs high school age students, there is most often a higher level of support needed for those in middle school AF programs. As a result, following is the number of recommended students for each group:

- **High School:** Number of students directly supported in the program should be capped at 12 *although this number may be decreased based on the severity of needs.*
- **Middle School:** Number of students directly supported in the program should be capped at 10 *although this number may be based on the severity of needs.*

Paraprofessional Support

Due to the increased emotional / behavioral needs, paraprofessional support is provided for each program. The paraprofessional FTE will be determined by the District and reviewed annually. The AF teacher will create the paraprofessional's schedule in order to meet the needs of the students in the program.