

LEGISLATIVE REPORT:
**Coordination of Programmatic
Activities and Spending Plans**

*Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism
&
Delaware Department of Education:
Autism Resources*

May 1, 2024

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Purpose

House Bill 195 allocates funds to support autism spectrum disorder (autism) to the Department of Health and Social Services, Developmental Disabilities Services, and Administration (35-11-10). These pass-through funds are used to administer the Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA), which is housed at the University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies.

This report outlines the coordination of spending plans and programmatic initiatives between the DNEA and the Delaware Department of Education's Autism Resources workgroup. These coordination efforts ensure there are no duplicative activities or spending between these two entities, as they work collaboratively to improve outcomes in servicing the autism community.

Epilogue Section 166, Section 1 of requires the details of the coordination efforts be submitted to the Co-Chairs of the Joint Finance Committee, the House and Senate Chairs of the Education Committees, the Controller General's Office, and Office of Management and Budget by May 1, 2024.

Introduction

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disability marked by significant differences in social communication and the display of restrictive and repetitive patterns of behaviors (APA, 2022). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports one in 36 children is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (Maenner et al., 2023). It can impact a person's capacity to communicate, socially interact, process information, and manage stress. However, the greater challenge is often living in a world that lacks the awareness and tools to effectively support autistic people and their families.

People with autism are more likely to experience additional health concerns compared to the general population. They are more likely to have co-occurring mental health, medical, and dental needs and frequently report experiencing a lower quality of life due to health- and wellness-related issues (Davies et al., 2023). The systems that serve autistic people are often not equipped to do so. For example, one study found that people with autism often face barriers to accessing employment, transportation, community activities, health care services, and other services that support their day-to-day living needs (Roux, et al., 2017). Autistic people are more likely to be under- or unemployed, despite their cognitive ability (Chen et al., 2015), and are also more likely to have negative interactions with police and first responders (e.g., Boukhechba et al., 2018).

Individuals with autism represent 12.22% of all students receiving special education services in Delaware (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). This population of students requires specialized services as outlined through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). At minimum this includes: (a) an analysis of present levels of performance; (b) educational goals; (c) services including the frequency and duration of time in special education and/or general education settings; (d) accommodations and modifications; (e) additional supports for accessing the general education curriculum; (f) guidelines for statewide testing participation, (g) transition services (students over age 14); (h) and the extent of participation in natural environments (preschool aged students) (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004).

Increasing prevalence rates of autism necessitates the need for professionals in all settings (e.g., education, healthcare, mental health, social services, vocational) to have expertise in how to support autistic people across the lifespan. Autism Resources (AR), through the Delaware Department of Education, collaborates with Exceptional Children Resources to ensure these services are provided to students with autism in public education settings. The Delaware Network of Excellence in Autism (DNEA) serves those professionals who work with autistic people in other contexts and settings, including private education settings, in addition to providing resources that directly benefit autistic Delawareans and their family members. This report will provide an overview of AR and the DNEA, and explain how they collaborate to coordinate their training, technical assistance, information dissemination, and direct support activities to ensure their spending plans and programmatic initiatives best serve this growing population of Delawareans.

Background

Delaware Network of Excellence in Autism (DNEA)

The Delaware Network of Excellence in Autism (DNEA) provides training, technical assistance, and information dissemination that benefits individuals with autism, their families, and the professionals who serve them. Established through Delaware Senate Bill 93 (SB93) in 2016, the DNEA leverages interdisciplinary expertise to promote equity, inclusion, and access through the use of evidence-based and promising practices for individuals with autism across the lifespan. The DNEA works to strengthen Delaware’s state- and system-wide capacity to improve outcomes for individuals with autism and their families by supporting systems that include healthcare, social services, and vocational services. The DNEA is led by the University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies (CDS) and also supports the provision of Family Navigation services through its subcontract with Autism Delaware.

The DNEA organizes its work into three tiers of training and technical assistance activities. Its Tier 1 and Tier 2 services focus on providing the community with general training, technical assistance, and resources that benefit most professionals (Tier 1) or a subset of professionals from a given field (Tier 2). Tier 3 services represent those activities that are intensive and tailored to a specific site or setting. In addition to these training activities, the DNEA also oversees a robust information dissemination initiative by developing and distributing evidence-based training videos, tutorials, resource guides, and implementation tools. In FY2023, DNEA-funded initiatives touched over 10,000 Delawareans.

The Interagency Committee on Autism. The Interagency Committee on Autism (ICA) was also established by SB93 and is composed of key stakeholders within the Delaware autism community. It includes 14 different state agencies and community organizations, including Dale Matischevich (Exceptional Children Resources) and Mary Whitfield (Autism Resources), a parent/caregiver from each county, and a person with autism. The DNEA Principal Investigator, Sarah Mallory, serves as the Administrative Chair of the ICA and the DNEA facilitates the coordination of ICA meetings and activities. The ICA leverages resources across member organizations and agencies to identify gaps or overlaps in services in order to help advise the development of goals and priorities for the DNEA.

Delaware Department of Education, Autism Resources (AR)

Autism Resources, formerly administered by the Christina School District as the Delaware Office of Statewide Autism Programs (DOSAP) and previously as the Delaware Autism Program (DAP) – officially joined the Delaware Department of Education in January 2023. Autism Resources is tasked with providing training and technical assistance across all public schools within the state on behalf of students with an educational classification of autism, including high-quality professional learning, consultative services, performance feedback, and parent training based on evidence-based practices. Additionally, as outlined in Section 1332 of Title 14 of the Delaware Code, Autism Resources facilitates and offers support for educational programming through the Statewide Monitoring Review Board, the Peer Review Committee, and the Statewide Parent Advisory Board.

DNEA & AR Coordination of Program Plans

The Peer Review Committee reviews educational and behavioral procedures and programming for students with autism and related disabilities. The Statewide Monitoring Review Board reviews the education and provision of related services provided to students with an educational classification of autism throughout all public schools to ensure the application of evidence-based practice and opportunities for meaningful and measurable progress and inclusion, as appropriate, are afforded students. The Statewide Parent Advisory Committee, made up of Parent Advisory Committee representatives from each Local Education Agency (LEA) across the state, meets with the Autism Resources director yearly to discuss matters pertaining to the given LEA.

Legislative History of DNEA and AR

Establishment of the DNEA and ICA. In 2013, the *Blueprint for Collective Action: Final Report of the Delaware Strategic Plan to Improve Services and Supports for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder* (“the Blueprint”) was published. The Blueprint was the result of a two-year community needs assessment and planning process, with information gathered from family members, people with autism, providers and professionals, and other community members. The Blueprint outlined important recommendations for the state and, as a means to accomplish these recommendations, stakeholders collectively endorsed two systemic activities: (1) an autism resource center (i.e., DNEA); and (2) an executive group of state-decision makers and parents (i.e., ICA).

In 2016, SB93 was passed, resulting in the creation of the DNEA and ICA. SB93 specifically noted the roles and activities of the DNEA stating, “[t]he Network shall ... ensure adequate training across the areas of healthcare, education, vocational services and social services.” In terms of the field of education, the legislation noted, “[t]he Network shall consist of additional staff specifically designated to provide training, technical assistance and coaching to all local education agencies across Delaware” and that these activities, “...will be managed by the Network in collaboration with the office of [now known as Autism Resources].”

Establishment of the AR. Senate Concurrent Resolution 65 was passed in 2014, creating an Autism Educational Task Force. This task force was charged with prioritizing and making recommendations “regarding the initiation of Educational and Technical Assistance Teams and a statewide Autism Resource Center, and to research appropriate funding streams to enable the creation and implementation of these two programs.” As a result, in 2016, Senate Bill 92 passed changing the original description of Autism Resources, which had previously been detailed in the Delaware Code Title 14, Section 1332 almost 30 years prior. With the new changes, the statewide director of Autism Resources would have a team of education specialists and work collaboratively with other professionals in the autism field to provide training and technical assistance to school districts with “autism-approved” programs, and other educational entities. Additionally, under this Bill, the Parent Advisory Committee, Peer Review Committee, and Statewide Monitoring Review Board were established.

In 2018, House Bill 292 (HB292) passed. The Bill eliminated the distinction between “autism-approved” programs and other in-district programs, and opened the services of Autism Resources to include training, technical assistance, and committee support, to all public schools serving students with autism. HB 292 is also known as the “The Alex Eldreth Autism Education Law” in memory of Alex Eldreth, who worked to ensure statewide access to autism resources prior to unexpectedly passing on November 24, 2017.

Partnership Between the DNEA and AR. The passing of Senate Bills 92 and 93 created a mechanism for the leadership of the DNEA and AR to work in close collaboration to ensure: (a) the DNEA and AR do not duplicate training efforts, and (b) the DNEA and AR have a coordinated message about autism and the best practices that should be used to support those with autism. Indeed, the DNEA and AR are intentional in ensuring they conduct complementary professional training and technical assistance activities that serve educators (AR) and other professionals who serve individuals with autism across the lifespan (DNEA).

DNEA & AR Coordination of Program Plans

Recent epilogue language (Epilogue Section 166, Section 1 of House Bill 195) has requested that the DNEA and AR document how this coordinated effort is accomplished. The DNEA and AR met on July 5, 2023, to discuss how they could continue to ensure they avoid duplication and document the complementarity of their work for purposes of this report. The subsequent sections of this report will outline how the DNEA and AR work in close collaboration to coordinate their program initiatives and spending plans to ensure maximum benefit for Delawareans with autism and their families.

Coordination of Program Initiatives

The DNEA and AR established three strategies to coordinate program initiatives: (1) directors of the DNEA and AR established clear parameters for determining whether a programmatic activity aligns with the mission of the DNEA or AR; (2) directors of the DNEA and AR meet on a monthly basis to review current training and technical assistance activities to ensure duplicative supports are not being developed or provided to the community; and (3) each program has established a system for referring training requests to each other. These three strategies allow the DNEA and AR to effectively coordinate their content, audiences, and training initiatives to ensure maximum benefit to the community.

Leadership from the DNEA and AR conducted a series of meetings to establish clear guidelines for determining which training, technical assistance, and information dissemination activities fell under the authority of AR, and which were to be addressed by the DNEA. In short, all training activities that are related to public schools are addressed by AR; the DNEA does not target professionals from school districts and charter schools.

The DNEA, on the other hand, focuses on providing training and resources to all other groups of professionals who serve autistic individuals across the lifespan. This includes professionals in vocational fields, social services, and health-related fields. Additionally, DNEA funds are used to support activities that directly benefit autistic Delawareans and their family members. The section, *Coordination of Spending Plans*, provides a more detailed overview of the populations served by the DNEA.

DNEA and AR leadership also meet on a monthly basis to discuss their respective training initiatives. At monthly meetings, programmatic initiatives are discussed, including statewide professional learning offerings, professional learning and training requests, and other items related to autism happening throughout the state. Appendix A provides a summary of the meetings conducted this past year.

These meetings serve two purposes. First, they serve as a mechanism for ensuring that the appropriate entity is addressing an identified training need in the state. Some professional groups, such as early childhood professionals, require a high degree of coordination between the DNEA and AR due to young children being served across a wide range of settings. Some settings, such as childcare centers, do not fall under the purview of the Department of Education; while others, such as district-based special education preschools, are supported by Delaware's education system. As a result, program activities that address this population of children undergo careful scrutiny to ensure the appropriate entity is addressing the needs of the professional group. This past year Sarah Mallory (DNEA) and Mary Whitfield (AR) presented to a group of early childhood leaders to help further clarify the roles and responsibilities of the DNEA and AR in serving this population.

The DNEA and AR are also intentional about coordinating specific training events that may be inclusive of overlapping audiences. In these cases, DNEA and AR communicate to ensure they are not simultaneously offering the same training content to the same group of professionals. For example, the DNEA recently concluded training and technical assistance sessions about an evidence-based parent coaching model called Project IMPACT (PI); this evidence-based practice

DNEA & AR Coordination of Program Plans

could be equally effective to use in school and non-school settings. Therefore, during the initial planning phase, the DNEA collaborated with AR to ensure that PI's training objectives did not conflict with any of AR's training initiatives and that it did not potentially duplicate or conflict with any parent-based coaching models that AR may be offering its staff.

Second, these meetings serve as a platform for ensuring the DNEA and AR have consistent messaging across the different professional sectors they serve. Many evidence-based practices, such as visual supports, can be beneficial to individuals with autism of all ages who are served in many different settings (e.g., schools, doctor's offices, first responder settings). Coordinating consistent messaging across the professional sectors served by the DNEA and AR ensures these practices are implemented consistently. Further, the DNEA and AR use these opportunities to share resources and materials with one another, so as to not duplicate each other's content development efforts.

On the occasion that the DNEA or AR receives a training request that falls outside their designated constituency, leaders from these entities established a procedure for efficiently making cross-program referrals. For example, when an educational professional requests autism training from the DNEA, the DNEA coordinator contacts the person making the request using the email template provided in Appendix B. The requester is directed to complete the *Autism Resources Request for Support* application, which is available in Appendix C. Additionally, the DNEA website and training information request page states that Delaware public school educators looking for autism related training or support should contact DDOE's Autism Resources workgroup. An image of this messaging on the DNEA website can be found in Appendix D.

Coordination of Spending Plans

The careful coordination of program initiatives across the DNEA and AR ensures their respective spending plans avoid funding the support of overlapping groups. In doing so, the DNEA and AR are able to maximize the reach of their work and the funds that each respective organization is allocated. The following sections offer a summary of the spending plan and reach of each respective program, demonstrating how the spending plans and use of funds by the DNEA and AR are unique from one another.

Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA) Spending Plan

The DNEA is charged with serving individuals with autism across the lifespan by improving the capacity of different systems to serve these populations of individuals. The DNEA serves a wide range of constituencies ranging from people with lived experience, such as autistic individuals and their family members, to professionals who work in the fields of vocational rehabilitation, healthcare, and social services. The legislation that established the DNEA, SB93, also indicated the DNEA should support professionals in the field of education. Given the work of the AR, the DNEA intentionally limits this work to those education professionals who work in settings not served by the AR; please see the section, *Coordination of Program Initiatives*, for additional information about how this is accomplished. Table 1 summarizes the groups of Delawareans served by the DNEA in FY2023.

Table 1

Community Groups Served by the DNEA in FY2023

Autistic Delawareans	Family members	First responders
Childcare providers	Mental health providers	Human & social services groups
Healthcare providers	Dental providers	Early childhood professionals
Vocational rehabilitation staff	Faith-based organizations	Researchers & academics
Advocacy groups	Direct support professionals	Other interested community members

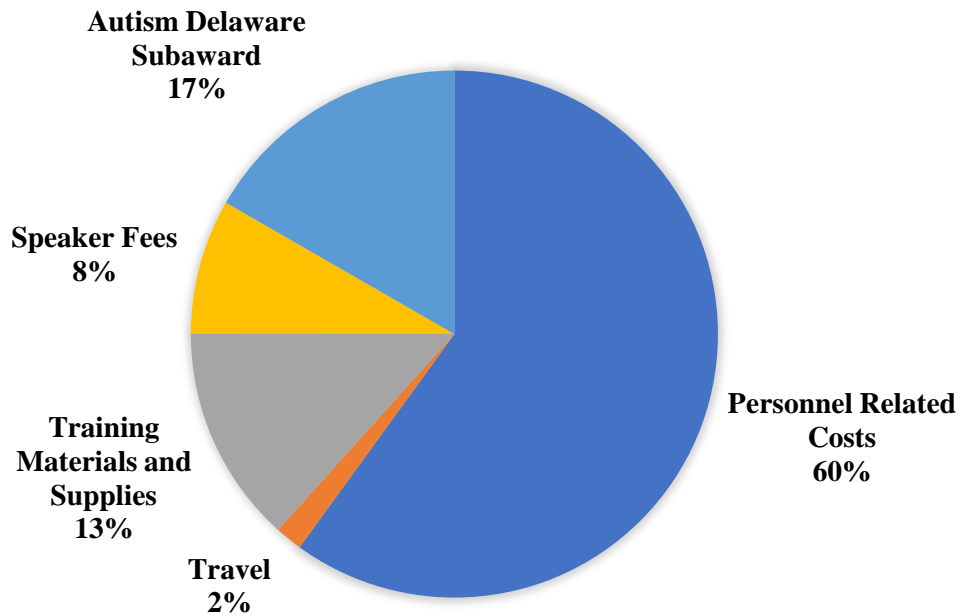
The reach of DNEA program activities is broad and maximizes the funding the DNEA receives from the state. In FY2023 the DNEA touched **10,117 Delawareans** by providing training to 2,062 individuals; disseminating evidence-based resources to 5,917 points of contact; and providing direct support to 2,482 individual family points of contact through its subcontract with Autism Delaware.

The DNEA spending plan allocates funds for DNEA to support work with these groups, following the guidance outlined in SB93. This includes funds to support DNEA personnel-related costs including a director, administrative support, and training staff with expertise in autism. It includes costs associated with travel to training sites, as well as training materials and supplies needed to maintain the DNEA website and to host on-demand, virtual, and in-person training activities. SB93 also allows for the DNEA to have the authority to contract with outside agencies to conduct needed training and technical assistance activities (i.e., speaker fees). Finally, the DNEA budget includes funds to support Family Navigation services through a subaward with Autism Delaware. Figure 1

provides an overview of how DNEA funds were spent in FY2023. A complete summary of DNEA programmatic activities, including a detailed budget, can be found in the **DNEA's FY2023 annual report**.

Figure 1

DNEA Spending (FY2023)

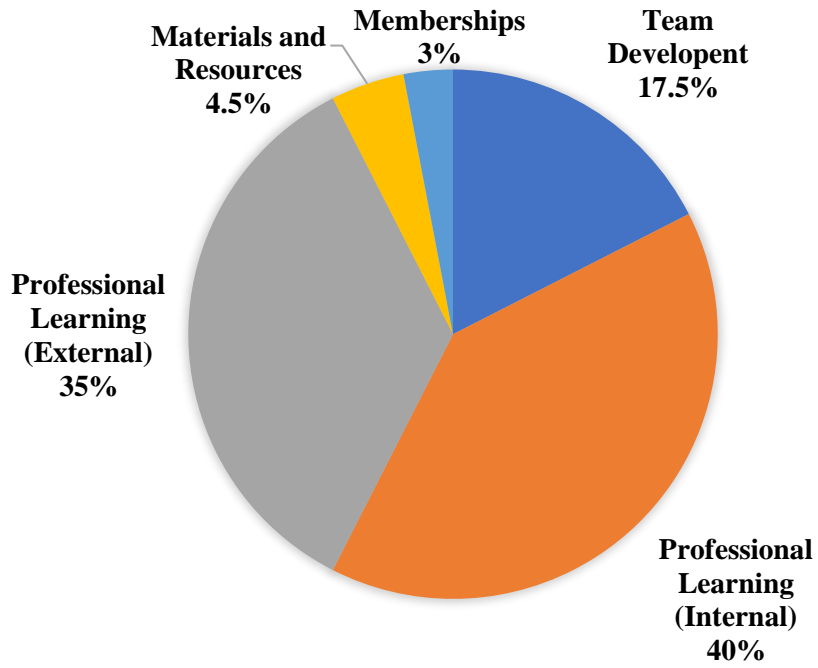


Autism Resources Spending Plan

AR is responsible for ensuring students with autism receive high-quality, evidence-based educational programming that prepares them for success in life and allows them to be productive, socially connected, and personally fulfilled members of the community. As outlined in Section 1 of 1332, Title 14 of the Delaware Code, this work is facilitated through training and technical assistance across all public schools in Delaware on behalf of students with an educational classification of autism [spectrum disorder]. The AR spending plan allocates funds to support this charge through professional development and professional learning for AR workgroup members, professional learning and training opportunities for public school teams, and materials, resources, and professional associations that contribute to the work. Figure 2 provides an overview of how AR funds were spent in FY2023.

Figure 2

AR Spending Plan (FY2023)



Conclusion and Next Steps

Autism spectrum disorder is a developmental disability that affects multiple aspects of a person's life. With increasing prevalence rates, autism is typically diagnosed in childhood and requires professionals from multiple disciplines to have the resources and expertise to serve this population and their families over the course of a person's lifetime.

The DNEA and AR were established to address the needs of this growing population of Delawareans, their families, and the professionals who serve them. Both the DNEA and AR have a component of their work focused on professional training and technical assistance activities. AR exclusively serves educators and professionals in public school settings, while the DNEA serves all other groups of professionals who serve individuals with autism across the lifespan. Additionally, the DNEA includes funding to support Family Navigation services provided by Autism Delaware.

Both the DNEA and AR are intentional in ensuring their spending plans and programmatic activities are complementary and not duplicative of one another. This has been accomplished by: (1) establishing clear parameters for determining whether a programmatic activity aligns with the mission of the DNEA or AR; (2) meeting on a monthly basis to review current training and technical assistance activities to ensure duplicative supports are not being developed or provided to the community; and (3) establishing a system for referring training requests to one another.

The DNEA and AR will maintain their monthly meetings to carry out these collaborative activities. Through these efforts, the DNEA and AR will continue to ensure they maximize the impact of their respective funding and reach a broad audience of Delaware professionals who serve individuals with autism, autistic Delawareans, and Delaware families.

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Appendix A

Meeting Summaries

The section below provides a brief synopsis of the topics discussed in the monthly meetings between leadership from the Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA) and Autism Resources (AR). These meetings started in September 2023 and have been occurring monthly.

September 14, 2023

Epilogue guidelines were reviewed to ensure understanding of which work may be considered overlap and how to document the coordination of activities discussed during these meetings. We agreed to seek additional guidance from our respective leadership for clarification. It was also agreed that the DNEA would not create professional learning content on behalf of Autism Resources.

October 10, 2023

A training about the principle of “presumed competence” that was mentioned at the September 19, 2023 ICA meeting was discussed. The possibility of bringing in a speaker to talk on this subject was the main topic of the conversation/

November 14, 2023

Delaware code was discussed in relation to training activities offered by The DNEA and AR on similar topics. The DNEA noted that they were removing mention of educators on their website. DNEA stated that they would also add language to their website to drive educators to DDOE’s Autism Resources website. Autism Resources stated they would like to update their website with more information before this happens.

December 12, 2023

DNEA discussed an invitation to present at the DASP conference in April. The DNEA and AR agreed there would be no duplication in effort since the presentation was not education-specific; DASP attendees would include attendees who do not work in public education settings; and that Autism Resources would not be presenting. The DNEA offered to send the PowerPoint to Autism Resources to review before they presented it as another way to ensure there would be no duplication of effort.

January 9, 2024

DNEA brought forward a training request that came in from a charter school about training occupational therapists. They discussed with Autism Resources who should respond to this training request. It was determined that this request should be sent to Autism Resources as the charter school fell under their authority.

February 13, 2024

Meeting was canceled due to conflicting schedules and no new business.

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March 12, 2024

DNEA and Autism Resources Workgroup began discussing the report due on May 1, 2024 and the efforts they would take to collaborate with each other to complete it. Updates to the DNEA website were discussed again in relation to directing educators to the Autism Resources webpage. The proposed website changes were completed following the meeting.

April 9, 2024

DNEA and Autism Resources Workgroup discussed the report due on May 1st and agreed upon a plan and timeline for completing the report in collaboration with one another.

Appendix B

Email Template

The below email template is used by the DNEA to refer education-related training requests to AR.

Dear [Name],

Thank you for reaching out to the Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA) to request autism-related training. The Autism Resources Workgroup manages all school-related training/education requests. Please complete the attached Request for Support document and email it to AutismResources@doe.k12.de.us. Feel free to let me know if you have any questions.


Please check out our [resource guides](#) and [training videos](#) as they may be relevant to your needs.

Sincerely,

Appendix C

Autism Request Workgroup Request for Support application

The below image is a screenshot of the *Autism Resources Request for Support* application that requestors are directed to complete when seeking an education-related training from AR.


DELWARE
Department of Education
AUTISM RESOURCES
REQUEST FOR SUPPORT

Directions: Please complete this form and return it to: Autism.Resources@doe.k12.de.us.

Date: _____ **School/Site:** _____
Contact Person: _____ **Administrator:** _____
Email Address: _____

Section 1: Type of Support Request

Behavior Support Professional Learning

Section 2: Behavior Support

Has this student's case ever been reviewed by the PRC? Yes No

Most recent PRC date: _____

Student's Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____
Grade: _____ Age: _____
District: _____ School/Site: _____
BCBA/School Psychologist: _____ Teacher: _____
Speech Pathologist: _____
Placement Setting: _____
Primary Eligibility: _____ Related Services (e.g., OT, PT, AT): _____
Secondary Eligibility: _____ AT Devices: _____
Medication(s): _____

What is the primary reason for this request?
Please describe: _____

What would you like as an outcome of the consultation?

Section 2: Professional Learning

Behavioral Instructional

Who is the professional learning being requested for?

Individual Group (*positions, grades:* _____)

District/School Train-the Trainer Lead: _____ Proposed Location: _____
Proposed Dates/Times: _____

What topic will the professional learning be centered on?

Behavior Skills Training Implementation Fidelity Data
 Behavior Support Plans Instructional Strategies
 Classroom Management Peer Review Committee Meeting
 Data Collection Statewide Monitoring Review Observation
 Differential Reinforcement Time Delay
 Functional Behavior Assessment Writing Goals & Objectives
 Other (specify): _____

Additional Notes: _____

For office use only...

Date received: _____ Forwarded to: _____ Date Forwarded: _____
Notes: _____

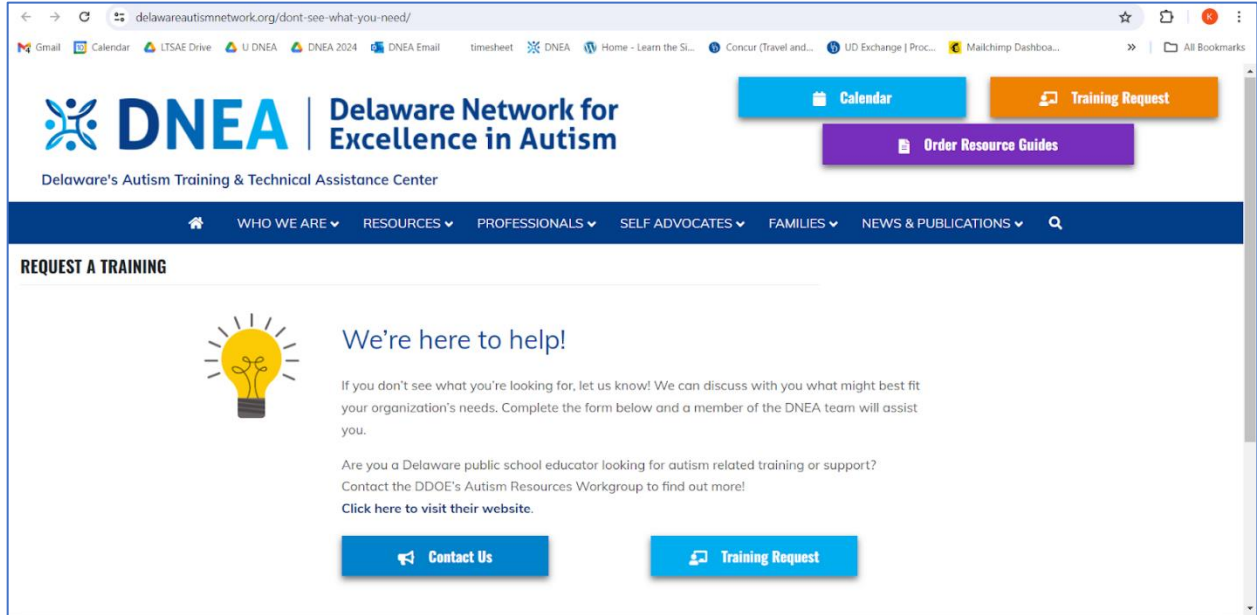
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Appendix D

Sample DNEA Website Language

The images below include examples of how the DNEA redirects educators seeking training opportunities to AR.

Example 1 - On the DNEA *Request a Training* page, there is specific language directing educators to go to the AR website.



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Example 2 - Text identifying appropriate training audiences is noted for each DNEA training on their online registration system. For example:

“This training is designed for all community members. For example this may include, but is not limited to, people with autism, their families, healthcare providers, first responders, direct support professionals, and early childhood professionals.”

The screenshot shows an email registration page for a training event. The event title is "6:00 PM: INTRODUCTION TO AUTISM". The date and time are "6:00 pm – 8:00 pm" on "April 10, 2024". The text describes the training as being designed for all community members, including people with autism, their families, healthcare providers, first responders, direct support professionals, and early childhood professionals. It also mentions that participants will be emailed log-in information and training details approximately 48 hours before the training date, and that seating is reserved for Delaware residents and Delaware professionals. The page includes a "More Information" link and a "Mailing List" button.

6:00 PM: INTRODUCTION TO AUTISM 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm April 10, 2024

The Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA), housed at UD's Center for Disabilities Studies, offers training and technical assistance that benefits individuals with autism, their families, and the professionals who serve them. We are pleased to announce our statewide virtual training schedule designed to introduce participants to the core characteristics of autism and practices that provide support in a variety of settings.

Introduction to Autism will provide a basic overview of autism. This training will include content about disability-friendly language, the history of autism, core characteristics of autism, and general tips and considerations when supporting people with autism.

This training is designed for all community members. For example this may include, but is not limited to, people with autism, their families, healthcare providers, first responders, direct support professionals, and early childhood professionals.

Participants will be emailed log-in information and training details approximately 48 hours before the training date. Please check the email you used to register and/or your JUNK mail if you do not find the confirmation in your inbox. Participants will be emailed a certificate of attendance approximately two weeks post training.

Seating is reserved for Delaware residents and Delaware professionals. The DNEA reserves the right to cancel training if the minimum threshold for attendance is not reached.

Please email Katie Booz at boozkp@udel.edu for any accommodation requests. Please submit any accommodation requests at least 72 hours in advance in order to ensure accommodations can be coordinated and provided.

Event Details

[More Information](#)

[Mailing List](#)