

Summary of Mt. Diablo Unified School District's Autism Program Descriptions

Please note: all student placements are determined based on the student needs as designated in the IEP. Some student needs may be diverse or difficult to specify or assess. Therefore, these groupings may ultimately include students who display qualities from other categories (but predominantly one level more than the others).

“Intensive” (Severe)

Qualities of the program:

- Founded in the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), including use of Pivotal Response Treatment (PRT), Discrete Trial Teaching (DTT), and Natural Language Paradigm (NLP), individual reinforcement systems
- Physical structure, scheduling, and use of visual supports based on TEACCH model
- Small group instruction for the majority of the day (2-3 students per group)
- Short work rotations (7-10 minutes)
- Behavior analyst consultation weekly
- Embedded language/verbal behavior support throughout the day (e.g., speaking, PECS, signing)
- Functional and life skills addressed at all age levels
- Highly modified access to grade level standards and curriculum

Qualities of students who tend to benefit from this model:

- Minimal or no functional communication
- May not yet attend to instruction
- May display challenging behavior (e.g., aggression, self-injury, elopement, property destruction, tantrum, inappropriate vocalizations, severe noncompliance)
- Working on a functional/life-skills curriculum (non-diploma track)
- Emerging academic or pre-academic skills (far below grade level)
- Early level social skills (e.g., emerging eye contact and joint attention)
- Little to no interest in peers

“Strategic” (Moderate)

Qualities of the program:

- Founded in the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), including use of Pivotal Response Treatment (PRT), incidental teaching, programming for generalization, introduction of class-wide motivation systems
- Physical structure and schedule based on TEACCH model with sections of the classroom replicating a regular education classroom for that grade level and fading of visual supports
- Combination of small group instruction and whole-class instruction throughout the day
- Up to 20-30 minute work periods
- Per student IEP's, mainstreaming for leisure/social activities and possibly some academics
- Behavior analyst consultation available as needed (at minimum)
- Embedded language/verbal behavior support throughout the day
- Exposure to modified grade-level academics and curriculum per student needs

Qualities of students who tend to benefit from this model:

- Established functional communication (e.g., one commonly used mode of socially appropriate communication to get needs met)
- Attends to instruction with moderate prompting
- May display challenging behavior that is not tolerated in some regular education settings (varies by teacher and grade level, see behaviors listed above)
- Working below grade level academically but making steady progress (non-diploma track) or has splinter skills in academics
- Emerging social skills (e.g., parallel play, turn-taking) requiring adult facilitation

- Emerging interest in peers

“Benchmark” (Mild)

Qualities of the program:

- Founded in the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), including use of Pivotal Response Treatment (PRT), incidental teaching, programming for generalization to the general education setting, class-wide and school-wide motivation systems utilized
- Classroom structure replicates a regular education classroom for that grade level
- Frequent whole-class instruction and independent work
- Up to 45 minute work periods
- Per student IEP's, access to mainstreaming for academic and leisure times
- Behavior analyst consultation available as needed (at minimum)
- Embedded social skills opportunities with facilitation throughout the day and explicit social skills instruction
- Instruction to grade-level or slightly below grade-level academic curriculum

Qualities of students who tend to benefit from this model:

- Age-appropriate (or slightly below) repertoire of verbal and communication skills
- May display challenging behavior related to social skills issues
- Working slightly below or at grade level (graduation/diploma track)
- Social skills deficits in the areas of conversation skills, perspective-taking, “Theory of Mind,” problem solving, friendship

“Magnet” (Part-time Special Education)

Qualities of the program:

- Founded in the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and implemented through behavior analyst support in program and curriculum development and social skills instruction methodologies, use of program-based and school-wide reinforcement systems
- Inclusion model with specific services available including behavior intervention services, social skills instruction, and full inclusion facilitator (per student IEP's)
- Pull-out social skills groups on site during the school day once or twice per week (per student IEP)
- Assistant support per grade level at minimum for implementation of student goals and facilitation and generalization of social skills
- Specific referral process to obtain placement in program based on specific criteria and educational experience (i.e., mainstreaming)

Qualities of students who tend to benefit from the program:

- Primary diagnosis of a neuro-cognitive disorder (i.e., Autism Spectrum Disorders) manifested by deficits primarily in the following areas: social-emotional, pragmatic language, and executive functioning
- Average or above average cognitive ability as demonstrated by standardized assessments
- Working at or above grade level academically (diploma track)
- No significant behavior problems that pose a risk to the safety of self or others (i.e., aggression, elopement, self-injurious behaviors, property destruction) for at least one year
- Demonstrated success in general education setting 70% or more of the day