

ASD Nest Program  
Middle School/High School  
**Nest Essentials**

*Key Practices for Supporting Adolescents with ASD*

Adolescents on the autism spectrum have predictable challenges that can impact their ability to access the middle and high school experience. Middle and high school Nest classrooms are designed to meet these students' needs.

The six areas below outline expectations for Nest classroom structures and strategies to support students in individual classrooms and consistently across their school day.

## 1 Organization of Classroom Environment

Because students with ASD can become distracted or overwhelmed by their environment



**Nest classrooms are arranged and organized in such a way as to avoid visual and auditory distractions**

At a minimum:

- Classrooms are neat and organized, without visible clutter
- Only relevant charts are displayed for easy reference
- Classroom materials are well organized and clearly labeled
- Adjustments are made to address students' sensory needs, such as minimizing sound and adapting lighting

## 2 Classroom Structures & Routines

Because students with ASD benefit from structure and predictability



**Common classroom routines are established, taught, and reinforced**

At a minimum:

- Classroom procedures are taught, posted & practiced consistently
- Entering and exiting routines are established, posted, and used – and referred to daily
- An agenda & homework area is displayed in the same location every class session, and is referenced throughout the period
- Expectations for behavior are explained, and positive behavior is highlighted and reinforced
- Students are prepared ahead of time (*primed*) for changes in routines, new material, and potentially challenging tasks

## 3 Self-Regulation Routine

Because students with ASD can become overwhelmed and struggle with self-regulation



**Nest classrooms have a routine for allowing students a break to help them self-regulate and avoid becoming overwhelmed**

At a minimum:

- A specified routine is established and/or a designated space (e.g., break area, Nest room) is created to allow students to take a break and ready themselves to return to instruction
- The break routine is taught and practiced, and a visual reminder is posted in all classrooms
- Students are reminded about the break routine, and breaks are suggested if teachers notice early signs of distress
- Sensory tools, such as stress balls, are made available

## 4 Social Supports

Because students with ASD may misunderstand aspects of social relationships and social expectations



**Classroom structures, instruction, and activities are planned to support students' social challenges**

At a minimum:

- Social concepts explored in SDI are incorporated in the classroom through a) the use of social vocabulary, b) highlighting perspective-taking, and c) facilitating problem solving
- Before beginning group work, options for each student's role are determined and clarified
- Support is given during class activities that may tap in to social challenges (e.g., finding a partner, accepting feedback from peers)

## 5 Instructional Strategies & Classroom Language

Because the academic performance of students with ASD can be impacted by their social challenges and impairments in executive functioning



**Instruction is delivered in a way that is accessible to Nest students**

At a minimum:

- Visuals support oral directions and reoccurring abstract concepts
- Copying from the board is limited, and note-taking supports are implemented (e.g., graphic organizers and guided notes)
- Complex tasks are broken down into clear sub-steps
- Instruction and assessment are differentiated according to students' learning needs and special interests
- Timers are used to show how long activities last and to prepare students for transitions
- Language and directions are: clear, explicit, concise, and positive
- Students are given additional time to process when offering verbal responses (*wait time*)

## 6 Collaboration & Individual Supports

Because students with ASD benefit from a coordinated, consistent system of supports



**Teachers across subjects collaborate to plan and implement individual supports for Nest students**

At a minimum:

- Teachers and teams develop strategies for individual struggling students and continuously refine those supports as necessary
- Strategies developed in team meetings are implemented consistently across classes
- Teachers share successful individual strategies with the Nest team
- Teachers reflect on their practice—considering core challenges and needs for differentiation—to best support students' social and academic success and independence

*Special thanks to the Middle School/High School Task Force:: Elise Andrepont, Allison Brown, Kristin Buono, Christine Coffey, Karoline Engel, Jessica Fink, Diane Frangos, Andrea Gallis, Emma Groetzinger, Marianna Houston, Sam Innes, Candace Lee, Carol Lewis, Raeann McElveen, Joan McLean, Meghan Pate, Pamela Palumbo, Pat Realmuto, Jessica Susca, Andrew Urbanski, Emily Vasquez, Stacey Weinberg*