

Staff Training

A key component to the ASD Nest program is the rigorous pre-service and ongoing in-service training that all Nest professionals receive. Staff who are new to the program complete graduate coursework tailored to the Nest program, and experienced staff participate in ongoing professional development throughout the school year to deepen their knowledge and understanding of how to meet the needs of students on the autism spectrum. A core goal of the ASD Nest program is to strengthen school-based teams through professional development to increase the internal capacity of each school.

New staff training:

- Hunter College coursework: New ASD Nest staff complete two graduate classes prior to and in preparation for working in the Nest program: Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders (SPEDE 771) and Positive Behavior Interventions (SPEDE 772). Professionals receive graduate credit for successful completion of these courses.
- ASD Nest “Boot Camp”: New staff who are unable to participate in the coursework at Hunter College before starting in the program participate in a three-day workshop that outlines the core features of the Nest program. This workshop does not replace the Hunter College coursework, and staff must complete the full coursework the following summer.
- SDI Training: New SLPs in the ASD Nest program participate in a four-day training in August. New teachers attend a three-day workshop series in the winter. This training prepares them for planning and facilitating SDI, and incorporating social supports into the classroom.

Ongoing training:

- Large-scale workshops:
 - *The New School Year Kick-off* welcomes back Nest professionals and sets the tone for the new school year. It offers designated workshops for different disciplines as well as a variety of professional development opportunities.
 - *Understanding Academics* workshops focus on the unique academic challenges of students with ASD and provide training on turn-keying the information back to attendees' schools.
 - *“Illustrious expert” conference*: One staff member from each school is invited to attend an ASD conference to hear a leader in the autism field. They are expected to disseminate information and resources from the presentation at their school.
- Educator and related service provider workshops:
 - To deepen their knowledge, educational professionals and related service providers participate in workshops focusing on domain-specific content. Differentiated workshops are offered for ASD Nest cluster teachers, speech and language pathologists, occupational/physical therapists, and social workers/guidance counselors. Content is shared back at each school and serves to standardize practice across Nest schools.
- Specialty seminars/workshops:
 - Experienced teachers may participate in year-long seminars on best practices to share expertise and deepen the Nest's program's understanding of how to meet the needs of its students. One such seminar focuses on supporting the ASD Nest Coach. The participating staff become on-site resources for other professionals at their schools.
 - *Content-area workshops* focus on specific strategies such as using technology in the classroom and using behavioral interventions in the classroom.

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Additional Questions & Considerations:

Who leads the professional development activities?

The ASD Nest professional development program is organized by the ASD Nest Support Project's directors of professional development, in collaboration with the ASD Nest consultants. Nest consultants lead workshops and seminars in their individual areas of expertise.

How is the content of the workshops decided?

Workshops content is based on areas of need suggested by consultants, Nest staff members, and administrators. Content is updated every year, and workshops are geared towards developing and expanding the knowledge of all Nest professionals.

How are staff selected to participate in the professional development opportunities?

The New School Year Kick-off is open to all Nest professionals. All related service providers attend regular meeting throughout the year. Principals identify staff members to participate in other Nest professional development.

What are the expectations for staff attending the workshops?

All workshop attendees are expected to arrive on time, actively participate, and stay for the full workshop. After attending, they share information and resources from workshops with relevant professionals at their schools. Information can be shared at grade-level meetings, Nest team meetings, school staff meetings, or during additional professional development times. When sharing information and materials, credit must be given to the original presenter.

How can workshop information be brought back to schools?

Workshop information does not have to be shared only in a lecture/PowerPoint format. Other ways to share information include: creating packets of workshop resources with brief descriptions of handouts; running a book club around a relevant text; facilitating article discussions around readings from the workshop; and creating and introducing a resource binder.

Can content from workshops be shared with parents at parent workshops?

Relevant information from workshops can be shared with parents, although materials and information should be modified so that it is appropriate for the audience and setting. The original presenter should be credited. Focusing on how/when the content will be used by parents can help identify strong take-home points to share.

A note on the ASD Nest Model:

This paper outlines an element of the ASD Nest Model. Fidelity of implementation to the model is essential for program consistency. While a degree of flexibility is necessary given individual school needs, the program benefits from schools' commitment to a cohesive model.