

Preface

In 2002, District 15 Superintendent Carmen Farina led a group of educators in a study of the growing number of higher functioning students on the autism spectrum in District 15's schools. Where were these children being educated – public school or private school? District 75 or community school? General ed class, CTT class or self-contained class? What are the characteristics of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs)? What are their needs? What kind of education and related services do they need to help them succeed? What does research tell us? Are there any successful evidence-based models?

The study group was guided by the research findings of the National Academy of Sciences' 2001 report "Educating Children with Autism" which articulated the belief that the school must become a "vehicle for therapeutic change." During the 2002-03 school year, a District 15 planning committee designed the ASD Nest model based on the recommendations of that 2001 report. The district piloted the program, launching it at PS 32K in September 2003.

The goal of the ASD Nest Program is to help higher functioning children with autism learn how to function well academically, behaviorally and socially in school and in their community.

The ASD Nest Program model adheres to many of the principles of Dr. Philip Strain's LEAP model. A form of Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT), this inclusion model was developed collaboratively by District 15 and District 75 in the early 1990s, and adopted by the NYC Department of Education in the late 1990s.

The ASD Nest model strives to create a therapeutic environment in which the requisite supports are provided, within a grade-appropriate academic framework, by an interdisciplinary, collaborative team of trained educators and therapists. Essential to the success of the program are classroom modifications and a variety of strategies designed to meet the specific academic, behavioral, and social needs of students with ASDs; as well as the belief that the "expert" in the program is the Nest team itself.