

Questions and Answers About Early Intervention Guidelines

Baltimore County Autism and Verbal Behavior Interest Group summaries of BCPS responses to questions submitted for our October 9, 2006 meeting.

1. How do these guidelines support the statement made by BCPS staff in our 8/15 meeting that VB programs will be covered?

Response 1: VB services are part of the services that BCPS provides, but BCPS does not provide VB exclusively. VB can be part of the program that an IEP team assembles for a particular student. If the team determines that it is working particularly well, and that other strategies would not work just as well, the team could put emphasis on it. A piece of the BCPS program is ABA using errorless learning techniques.

2. What guidance about the composition of home programs is implied by the Stahmer and Ingersoll study cited in the guidelines, since it is about classroom program design? Only two points appear to apply:
 - The emphasis on parent training
 - The passage on p.72 that lists the intervention techniques to draw from

Response 2: BCPS has no set design for home programs. They are tailored to individual students. BCPS approves home program hours to meet the ATF guidelines and then the design is determined by the IEP team. BCPS supports a combination of research-supported strategies.

3. In light of the IDEA 2004 requirement for scientifically based instructional practices, why does BCPS support a position on eclectic interventions with reference to a study based on an uncontrolled “quasi-experimental design” rather than more rigorously designed studies?

Response 3: Each of the strategies that BCPS supports has its own independent body of research support. Citations to this research will be provided following the meeting. BCPS does not refer to ‘eclectic’ interventions, just to a combination of research-supported strategies. As to whether the combination has been empirically validated, BCPS is using KKI results which are not published but to which they have access and their own results from their new autism classrooms. These results, for 17 students over 6 months with each student viewed as a single subject design study case, impress BCPS greatly. These results are particularly encouraging with regard to receptive and expressive language. Some of these students had supplementary home programs, others did not. There are currently 6 of these autism classrooms running half-day programs and which also include weekly parent training sessions and Friday home visits. There is a plan to expand this model, with additional teachers who are in training now.

4. How does BCPS support the assertion that classroom programs satisfy the Autism Task Force (ATF) recommendations when hours in those programs typically mean a 9:1:1 ratio? Consider:
 - The ATF recommends: “A low staff to child ratio (1:1 or 1:2), particularly



- during the initial period.”
- The ATF quotes the National Research Council that: “A child must receive sufficient individualized attention on a daily basis, so that individual objectives can be effectively implemented; individualized attention should include individual therapies, developmentally appropriate small group instruction, and direct one-to-one contact with teaching staff.”

Response 4: Current BCPS planning documents target 6:1:1 classroom ratios, plus additional adult support as required on students’ IEPs. A rotation strategy is used in these classrooms, under which each student receives 1:1 interventions throughout the day. BCPS described ways in which the recommendations on p.11 of the ATF report can be met.

5. Shouldn’t any guidelines specifically cite the 15-30 hours recommendation of the ATF? Or is the executive summary of the ATF report an attachment to the guidelines when presented to IEP chairs as it was in your 9/22 letter? If the latter, shouldn’t this attachment be noted on the guidelines document itself?

Response 5: The ATF report summary was attached to the guidelines when IEP chairs were trained. Training for IEP chairs has included this information for 2 years.

6. If these guidelines are sufficient direction for IEP chairs, why is the Office of Special Education representative necessary to approve home programs? This suggests that additional, undocumented criteria exist.

Response 6: The Office of Special Education representative is present as the person authorized to make the fiscal commitment for these services.

7. The guidelines state that home programs “will be developed and monitored by a designated BCPS teacher.” This is broad enough that either an IEP chair or the Office of Special Education representative could designate any teacher, regardless of their background in early intervention generally or in the methods intended by the IEP team to be used in the home program. Shouldn’t guidance about qualifications for program supervision be specified?

Response 7: This is a BCPS personnel standards decision. Special education teacher certification is the standard that is used. Individuals chosen to perform this role are chosen carefully to have special autism background.

