

# Citywide Autism Program

This citywide special education program serves Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) students from preschool to grade 12 with significant educational needs related to an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Individuals appropriate for this specialized citywide program are those who require a higher level of special education services than can be provided in the student's community or home school.

## **Characteristics of Students**

- Significant impairment in reciprocal social interaction (for developmental level).
- Significant impairment in verbal and nonverbal communication (for developmental level).
- Restricted repertoire of activities and interests.
- Apparent sensory dysfunction as evidenced by under-or-over-responsiveness to touch, light, sound, or pain.
- Uneven acquisition of skills and difficulty integrating and generalizing acquired skills.
- Repetitive, self-stimulatory behaviors including obsessive-compulsive behaviors and ritualistic behaviors.
- Verbal or physical aggression toward self or others that interferes with a student's ability to establish and maintain relationships

## **Program Description:**

The citywide autism program is designed to serve students who have been identified as demonstrating characteristics related to Autism Spectrum Disorders. Program components include highly structured and individualized programming, intensive communication and language training, social skills training, utilization of natural environments for instruction, positive behavioral programming, and educationally based sensory activities.

There are two specific curriculums that are used when students need an alternative to core curriculum:

**Unique Learning System** is an online, standards-based set of interactive tools specifically designed for students with special needs to access the general curriculum. Used daily in classrooms across the district, Unique Learning System provides preschool through transition students with rigorous, standards-based materials specifically designed to meet their instructional needs. Users interact with differentiated, thematic units of study with text to speech, interactive components, hundreds of activities and multiple opportunities to show what they know. Books, lessons & activities are viewable on a variety of hardware platforms, including tablets, whiteboards, and smartboards. Additionally, n2y's (news-2-you) proprietary user interface and tools combine with touch technology to encourage engagement and exploration of many types of content.

**The STAR Program** (Strategies for Teaching based on Autism Research) teaches children with autism the critical skills identified by the 2001 National Research Council and uses evidence-based practices. The ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) instructional methods of discrete trial training, pivotal response training and teaching functional routines form the instructional base, which is aligned to Common Core State Standards, of this comprehensive program for children with autism. The STAR Program includes detailed lesson plans, teaching materials, data systems and a curriculum-based assessment for teaching in the six curricular areas of receptive language, expressive language, spontaneous language, functional routines, academics, and play & social skills.