

MISSION

Identify common goals related to enhancing the accessibility, number, and quality of Autism Spectrum Disorder-related services available in the state of Mississippi.



STRATEGIC GOAL 1

Require public school districts to conduct annual in-service training on Autism Spectrum Disorders and related evidence based interventions and education.

STRATEGIC GOAL 2

Establish an Office of Autism Services to coordinate ASD efforts among primary agencies that serve Mississippi's population of children and adults with ASD and their families.



MAAC

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER
STRATEGIC PLAN FOR MISSISSIPPI

A WORD FROM THE COMMITTEE

The Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee (MAAC) is pleased to present the following report and strategic plan to the Mississippi Legislature. These documents outline the struggles faced by Mississippi families living with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and outline several key areas in need of immediate reform.

Autism Spectrum Disorder now constitutes a public health crisis in Mississippi and our nation as a whole. Data from the Centers for Disease Control shows a steady increase in the prevalence of ASD with 1 in 59 children being affected.¹ Children diagnosed with ASD need access to specialized services as quickly as possible. Getting access to these services or even knowing where to look and who to ask about these services can be confusing and frustrating for parents. There are several state agencies providing services related to ASD along with countless private businesses. Parents must make quick, informed decisions about early intervention, education, specialized therapy, transition to adulthood, employment, independent living, and other needs. In Mississippi, these

families are essentially on their own. There is no public entity dedicated to helping people understand the services available for people living with ASD.

As part of this report, the MAAC recommends expanding access to training related to educational methods for children with ASD and the establishment of a statewide Office of Autism Services (OAS). An Office of Autism Services is an innovative approach intended to help individuals and families overcome the challenges listed above by providing information about resources and services for people with ASD in Mississippi. The OAS or a similar entity is necessary to implement a plan of action such as the one outlined in the accompanying strategic plan.

On behalf of people with ASD, their families, and professionals who work with them, the MAAC would like to thank you for the opportunity to recommend improvements to the services and quality of life available to Mississippians living with ASD.

Sincerely,
Members of the MAAC



MAAC



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29 Committee members including parents of children diagnosed with ASD, mental health professionals, and employees of various state agencies.



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15 different stakeholders have appointment authority including the Governor, Lt. Governor, the Speaker of the House, and the Commissioner of Insurance.



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The MAAC has issued 7 annual reports since its creation. The Committee also meets at least 6 times per year.



MAAC

STRATEGIC GOAL 1 – REQUIRE PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO CONDUCT ANNUAL IN-SERVICE TRAINING ON AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS AND RELATED EVIDENCE BASED INTERVENTIONS AND EDUCATION.

GOAL OVERVIEW

Data collected by MAAC over the years has supported the growing number of individuals identified with autism spectrum disorder within Mississippi. It has been documented that many individuals are not diagnosed until they are already school-age and enrolled in the Mississippi public schools.

Further information received has revealed that the majority of school districts in Mississippi do not provide ongoing training on Autism Spectrum Disorder, despite the growing numbers. While some teachers may have exposure to children with autism or have received training in the past there is no process to ensure that they have received ongoing training for the advances related to treatment advances

and interventions strategies with this increasing population of students with ASD.

MAAC is recommending that the legislature support a bill, similar to the current statutes related to suicide prevention training and active shooter response, requiring the annual exposure to in-services/trainings, live or online module based, related to behavior interventions and educational programming that are usable with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and/or related Developmental Disabilities for all public school employees. MAAC believes that this would increase the possibility of public school employees feeling competent and feeling able to respond proactively to the needs of individuals with ASD. This would also decrease ongoing

difficulties related to suspensions and significant disciplinary referrals with this population.



STRATEGIC GOAL 2 - ESTABLISH AN OFFICE OF AUTISM SERVICES TO COORDINATE ASD EFFORTS AMONG PRIMARY AGENCIES THAT SERVE MISSISSIPPI’S POPULATION OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH ASD AND THEIR FAMILIES.

GOAL OVERVIEW

An Office of Autism Services (“OAS”) is needed to identify gaps in autism-related services and to facilitate the development of a state-wide strategic plan to improve and expand effective services and resources for people with ASD and their families. Every year since its inception, the MAAC has made the recommendation to the legislature, in one form or another, to establish an entity dedicated to coordinating ASD services in the state.

Several state agencies currently provide services related to ASD, however these services are scattered and inconsistent from one part of the state to the next. Committee members regularly hear from people looking for information on both public and private ASD service providers. Parents and families of Mississippians diagnosed with ASD are struggling to understand the services available to

them, how to access these services, and where to start.

These challenges are not unique to Mississippi. In 2008, the Missouri Legislature established an Office of Autism Services to “provide leadership in program development for children and adults with autism spectrum disorders, to include establishment of program standards and coordination of program capacity.” An Office of Autism Services (OAS) is an innovative approach intended to help ease this process by providing information about ASD resources and services to the people Mississippi.

A major goal of the OAS will be identifying, developing and coordinating services throughout the state and to form interagency agreements with entities/agencies providing services and training to people with ASD and related disorders, and their families.

The MAAC envisions an Office of Autism Services that operates as follows:

- Adopts, implements, and regularly assesses the progress of a statewide ASD strategic plan.
- Develops and maintains various mediums for distributing information and resources related to ASD such as a website, toll-free phone number, and contact information for key contacts at various state agencies.
- Designs and annually updates a Mississippi Autism Services Handbook that combines information about how to navigate the medical, educational, and community services in Mississippi with information in the form of credible websites and relevant telephone contact numbers.
- Provides an integrated support system for families of children with ASD by facilitating communication with state agencies providing ASD-related services.



- Coordinates with state agencies providing ASD-related services to track, identify, and assist people diagnosed with ASD.
 - Establishes an ASD Network of state and national experts to assist the OAS in identifying promising practices and model programming.
 - Organizes and coordinates a comprehensive program of outreach, involving the dissemination of information on Mississippi ASD resources to families, service providers, and local communities.
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- Develops a social media campaign (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to communicate about ASD and other related disabilities throughout the state.
 - Ensures that a link to the OAS webpage is available on the websites of all state agencies providing ASD related services.
 - Plans, coordinates and facilitates regional and statewide training programs for ASD assessment teams, general educators, para educators, parents and local communities.
- Acts as liaison to the MAAC and provide reports to the committee at each of the six annual meetings.
 - Assists school districts with initial ASD assessment information and scheduling, or referral to regional ASD teams when needed.
 - Works with the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services to develop an adequate pool of qualified personnel to work with people with ASD.