

Division Highlights



Autism Center for Excellence

Spotsylvania County Schools Hosts Visitors from Saudi Arabia



SPOTSYLVANIA COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By: Noel Woolard, VCU-ACE, Technical Assistance Associate

Spotsylvania County was chosen to be one of six school divisions for the second cohort of divisions to work with the Virginia Commonwealth University Autism Center for Excellence (VCU-ACE) to improve services and supports for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Spotsylvania began this intensive initiative in 2014 and received technical assistance from VCU-ACE to work towards systems change, specific to the area of ASD in the division.

The effort of staff in Spotsylvania County in collaboration with VCU-ACE has been very successful to create the kind of systems change the division was looking for and they are proud to showcase their work.

In November 2016, Spotsylvania County Schools was selected by the National Professional Development Center for Autism Spectrum Disorder (NPDC-ASD) to host a team of educators from the Center for Autism Research at King Faisal Specialist Hospital in Saudi Arabia. The team was accompanied by Evelyn Ford Shaw, researcher at the NPDC-ASD, Noel Woolard, Technical Assistant Associate with VCU-ACE, and Brittany Graveline Cornwell, Lead Autism Specialist from Spotsylvania County Public Schools. The intent was for the visitors from Saudi Arabia to see what services and supports for students with ASD look like and to gain more information about how the school division is implementing these.

Students with ASD living in Saudi Arabia typically do not receive educational services in a school setting. Some services may be provided to individuals through hospital outpatient programs but those programs do not have the capacity to support all people with ASD who require services. The Saudi Arabian professionals visiting the United States were selected to participate in a program based on their knowledge of ASD and their ability to translate evidence-based educational practices and diagnostic materials from English to their native language.

Prior to visiting Spotsylvania County Schools, the professionals from Saudi Arabia spent three weeks at the University of North Carolina intensively learning assessments and evidence-based practices effective with students with ASD. While visiting Spotsylvania County the team was able to spend time in classrooms across the entire educational continuum to see a variety of services and supports that are effectively implemented for students with ASD. Spotsylvania County Public Schools were excited to host these visitors and certainly hope the visit inspired an improvement in the services and supports to students with ASD in Saudi Arabia as well.

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