

Autism Family Resource Guide

The Nest and Horizon Programs are two different special education programs in District 1-32 schools that serve some students with autism. Both programs aim to enhance students' academic, communication, and social skills, but they have different eligibility criteria. The same application process is used for both Nest and Horizon Programs.

NEST PROGRAM OVERVIEW	HORIZON PROGRAM OVERVIEW
The Nest Program is a partnership between the NYCPS and Nest Support Project NYU Steinhardt	The Horizon Program was developed by the NYCPS. Rethink Ed Platform Solutions provides support and instructional materials.
CLASS STRUCTURE	CLASS STRUCTURE
The Nest program serves students with autism in a classroom with students with and without disabilities. This class is an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class, with one special education teacher and one general education teacher. As students get older, the class size increases. There is no classroom paraprofessional in this model.	The Horizon program serves a maximum of eight (8) students with autism in a Special Class (SC). This class is taught by one special education teacher and one classroom paraprofessional (8:1+1). Opportunities for inclusion with general education students are encouraged.
CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION	CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION
Nest Program classes follow the New York State Learning Standards and the same curriculum are used in all NYCPS schools. Nest teachers are trained in specialized teaching strategies for students with autism, including a special social curriculum called Social Development Intervention (SDI) developed by NYU. SDI is an evidence-based program that supports the social/emotional development of Nest students. SDI is taught in small groups and generalized throughout the day.	Horizon Programs follow the New York Learning Standards, and the same curriculum is used in all NYC Public Schools. Horizon teachers are trained in strategies to support the learning, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of students with autism. Rethink Ed Platform Solutions provides support including evidence-based instructional materials, based on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to support student skill building, social-emotional and behavioral learning.
SOCIAL / EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS	SOCIAL / EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS
Related service providers use SDI to help students improve social functioning. This social language curriculum is taught in small groups.	Related service providers and Horizon classroom teachers are trained in a social curriculum designed for Horizon programs to support and develop social communication in weekly group speech sessions. These skills are then generalized throughout the school day and re-enforced by the Horizon classroom team.

NEST STUDENT PROFILE	HORIZON STUDENT PROFILE
Students accepted to the Nest Program must meet the following criteria:	Students accepted to the Horizon Program must meet the following criteria:
COGNITION / INTELLIGENCE	COGNITION / INTELLIGENCE
Nest students have average to above average intelligence with consistent development including verbal and nonverbal abilities, working memory, language, and attention.	Horizon students have below average to average intelligence with areas of strengths and weaknesses.
CLASSIFICATION	CLASSIFICATION
Students must be eligible for an educational disability classification of Autism.	Students must be eligible for an educational disability classification of Autism.
CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION	CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION
Nest students have academic skills on or above grade level. Students can work independently and in small groups with minimal support. Students participate in standard assessments, including New York State (NYS) Math and English Language Arts (ELA) exams. Accommodations are provided as written on the student's IEP.	Horizon students have academic skills at or near grade level. Students benefit from instruction incorporating ABA strategies and interventions. Students can work independently with some support. Students participate in standard assessments, including New York State (NYS) Math and English Language Arts (ELA) exams.
LANGUAGE / COMMUNICATION	LANGUAGE / COMMUNICATION
Nest students have language skills on or close to age level, except in social language. These skills include staying on topic, and using socially appropriate nonverbal gestures, responses and facial expressions. For example, Nest students may have difficulties that include unusual responses and/or misunderstanding others' statements and/or behaviors.	Horizon students have mild to moderate language difficulties. They may have difficulty expressing themselves and understanding what others are saying. They may also have difficulty with social language. Students entering kindergarten can speak in at least 2-3-word, meaningful sentences and older students have more developed language, but need support to communicate effectively in social situations.
SOCIAL FUNCTIONING	SOCIAL FUNCTIONING
Nest students have social delays. For example, Nest students may demonstrate challenges in interacting and/or playing with peers or adults, with handling changes in routine, and with monitoring and controlling their own emotions and behaviors.	Horizon students have delays in playing and interacting with other students. Students may participate in social activities but often prefer to engage in activities by themselves.
BEHAVIOR	BEHAVIOR

Nest students may have behavior challenges related to autism. For example, strict adherence to a school, challenges with social cues or misunderstanding, resistance to change which result in a student attempting to escape the setting, saying no due to feeling overwhelmed, task refusal, or engaging in repetitive moments for self-regulation. These behaviors may interfere with learning and are supported in an autism program to build skills so students can meaningfully engage in learning.

Horizon students may have behavior challenges related to autism. For example, repetitive moments, strong interest and self-directed, struggles with change in routine, challenges understanding social cues or misinterpretation, task refusal, which may result in a student leaving to escape the demand, pushing an item away, or vocalizing frustration. These behaviors may interfere with learning and are supported in an autism program to build skills so students can meaningfully engage in learning.

AUTISM PROGRAM ADMISSIONS PROCESS

1. **Submit an application:** If you would like to apply for the Nest or Horizon Program you can submit an online application at any time. The online applications can be found on the [Specialized Programs for Students with Disabilities](#) website ([Autism Program Application \(Page 1 of 39\)](#)). If your child is entering kindergarten next year, we recommend you let us know as soon as possible. If your child is currently in grades K-12, work with your child's IEP Team to complete and apply. All assessments needed for the application process can be completed by your child's IEP team.
 - a. Work directly with your child's IEP/CSE Team to complete and submit the application.
 - i. If your child is going into kindergarten, submit the online application as early as possible during your child's preschool year.
 - ii. Kindergarten students should also participate in the general [Kindergarten](#) admissions process.
 - iii. In grades, 1-12, submit the online Autism Program application anytime.
2. **Confirmation of Application:** After an online application is submitted, an automated message will be generated to confirm receipt of the application.
 - a. If you do not hear from the Central Autism Programs Team within two weeks of submitting your application, please contact autismprograms@schools.nyc.gov.
3. **Initial Review for an Autism Program:** We will review your child's current testing to ensure it gives us a complete picture of their intellectual abilities, as well as their social language, behavior, academic, and adaptive skills.
 - a. **Up-to-Date Assessments:** If the Central Autism Programs Team needs more information about your child or if the assessments are not current, we will ask your child's IEP/CSE Team to get your consent and conduct any additional assessments needed. This may include conducting an autism assessment if one has not been conducted yet. This is a collaborative process with your child's IEP or CSE team.

- b. **Additional Information:** You may also submit additional evaluation materials with their application for review by the Central Autism Programs Team. However, additional evaluations and materials are not necessary, and any assessments can be conducted through the IEP process.
- 4. **Autism Program Admissions Process & Timeline:** If the information provided during the initial review indicates your child may be a candidate for either a Nest or a Horizon Program, a Central Autism Team member will work closely with you and your child's IEP Team to schedule an observation.
 - a. Following the initial review, the Central Autism Programs Team will contact you with next steps in your child's Autism Program admissions process. If your child's clinical information indicates that s/he:
 - a. **May be a good candidate for an Autism Program:** You and your child's school will be contacted by a Central Autism Programs Team member to review the information and discuss the next steps in the process.
 - b. **Does not meet admissions criteria:** The Central Autism Programs Team will contact you to discuss the determination and your child's IEP Team will work with you to determine an appropriate special education program and/or service recommendation to meet your child's needs. You can submit a new Autism Program application at a later date if new information about your child becomes available.
 - b. **Autism Program Admissions Observation:** If the initial review shows that your child may meet at least some of the eligibility criteria, an observation will be scheduled either by an Autism Program School or by a Central Autism Team member. The Central Autism Team will review your child's observation report and if your child meets admissions criteria and there is availability we will offer an Autism Program placement. You and your child's current school will receive a copy of the written observation report, and you will be contacted by the Central Autism Team to discuss the results.
 - c. **Admissions Determination:** An admissions determination is based on the information and data gathered from your child's psychoeducational evaluation, autism diagnostic testing, observations, and any additional information submitted. The Central Autism Programs team will discuss whether your child meets the admissions criteria for a Nest or a Horizon Program with you and your child's IEP Team. Once a student is accepted to an Autism Program, his/her IEP will be written by your child's IEP Team with guidance from the Central Autism Programs Team.
 - d. **Visiting an Autism Program:** If your child is accepted to an Autism Program you may visit the school where the program is offered. Because Autism Programs are not in every school and there are a limited number of seats, student applications are assigned to a specific school. We are not able to accommodate requests for specific schools. Families of accepted

students will be contacted by the school being offered to arrange a school visit and to enroll at the school.

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS ACCEPTED TO AUTISM PROGRAMS

Families of newly accepted students will receive a Prior Written Notice (PWN) and School Location Letter (SLL) following the IEP meeting. The SLL will specify the school your child will attend. Upon receipt of the SLL, families of accepted students should bring the documentation needed to enroll their child at the school as soon as possible. It is important to register at the Autism Program school as quickly as possible so that transportation, if included on the IEP, is not delayed.

- **Transportation:** [Transportation Overview](#) is provided to and from school. Work with your child's IEP Team to receive special education transportation as an IEP service. The need for special transportation accommodations such as limited travel time or a temperature-controlled vehicle, must be supported by medical documentation.
- **Autism Summer Program:** The Nest and the Horizon Program follow the ten-month District 1-32 school calendar from September through June. The NYCPS provides an optional summer program for students in Autism Programs in kindergarten through eighth grade. The purpose of the summer program is to promote continued social development.

A Central Autism Programs Team member will work closely with your child's IEP Team and will also have ongoing contact with you regarding your child's application.