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Preparing Classroom Teachers to Educate Students with Autism Places Huge Demand on School Districts

90% of teachers surveyed feel unprepared having a child with autism in their classroom

DENVER (Sept. 30, 2009) – According to the United States Department of Education, more than 80 percent of children with autism are in general education classes for at least part of each day. This means that approximately one in four general education teachers’ works directly with a student with autism, and nearly all school staff members interact with a student with autism on a regular basis. Challenged by an increasing number of students diagnosed with autism in the school system, districts are struggling to prepare general education teachers and frontline paraprofessionals to educate and care for this growing population.

As an example of the issues districts are facing, in a recent analysis, Virtual Expert Clinics found more than 90 percent of surveyed educators are uncomfortable having a child with autism in their classroom. Also, frontline paraprofessionals and teaching assistants who work with children with autism often have high turnover rates – every 9 months – which requires districts to train new staff on a consistent basis.

“Autism needs to be demystified for all educators, especially classroom teachers,” said Kevin Custer, CEO of Virtual Expert Clinics. “Districts can provide training that combines flexible online learning opportunities, visual representations such as videos, and examples that can be practiced first-hand in the classroom. The smallest amount of training can make a huge difference in the education of a child with autism, and leveraging opportunities delivered online provides educators and administrators with a cost-effective and manageable professional development solution.”

In addition, a study by the Special Education Expenditure Project (conducted for the U.S. Department of Education) found that special education classes, therapists, aides, transportation, and facilities for a student with autism cost on average nearly \$19,000 per year, or roughly triple the cost of a typical student. Providing cost-effective training and having autism-focused resources available to general education teachers and staff will help significantly to decrease these expenditures for districts nationwide.

And, intervention for children with autism is no longer a “one-size-fits-all” answer. This places a great deal of pressure on district leadership to design and implement differentiated instruction plans that meet the expectations of all parties.

There are technologies available that can help districts address these growing concerns. For more information about one viable online solution, visit www.AutismPro.com.

About Virtual Expert Clinics, Inc.

Virtual Expert Clinics, provider of a 21st century response to educating students with autism, works with school districts, early intervention providers, and governments to supplement quality programs. The company’s flagship product, *AutismPro*, allows administrators to build capacity and helps educators to improve outcomes. Virtual Expert Clinics has offices in Denver, Colo., and Fredericton, New Brunswick. For more information, visit <http://www.AutismPro.com/Media> or phone 1-866-462-0991.

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