

Kansas Department of

Social and Rehabilitation Services

Gary Daniels, Secretary

Legislative Educational Planning Committee
September 25, 2006

Autism Initiative

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Social and Rehabilitation Services

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Chairperson Decker and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services' Autism Initiative. I am Gary Daniels, Secretary of SRS. Today I would like to provide you with information regarding our plans for an early childhood Autism Program.

SRS staff is planning for an early childhood Autism program to provide services to children with autism and their families. SRS is exploring the options of implementing the program through either a Medicaid Waiver program or through a provision of the Deficit Reduction Act.

To begin the planning process, SRS, in conjunction with the Governor's Commission on Autism held three public forums across the state to meet with parents and families to determine what services they need. Based on these discussions we have identified needs including: respite care, parent support and training, attendant care, social skills training and behavioral intervention, therapeutic daycare, and case management.

Studies show that early intensive behavioral intervention for these children is the most effective method for increasing functional skills, replacing challenging behavior, and improving the quality of life for the children and their families. Not only would the program greatly benefit children with autism and their families, but intensive early intervention treatment for children with autism also has the potential to provide dramatic cost savings to the state, as these children are less likely to depend on public services over the course of their lifetime. According to the Autism Society of America, the cost of lifelong care can be reduced by 2/3 with early diagnosis and intervention. Additionally, studies show that early intensive behavioral intervention for children with Autism has a potential cost savings benefit of \$656,000 to \$1,082,000 per child from ages 3-55 years old .

Currently, Autism can be diagnosed as early as eighteen months of age. Services provided to children during early childhood have the additional benefit of preparing children for entering the school system. Studies show that with intensive early intervention around 50% of children with Autism can succeed in the regular education classroom by first grade. Still others will make gains significant enough that they will only require partial or less intensive special education services.

There are restrictions on what the SRS Autism Program will be able to provide. Federal Medicaid regulations will not allow SRS to provide services which are mandated to be provided by other agencies. Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides services to children under the age of three through the Kansas Infant-Toddler Services network and Part B of the IDEA mandates service provision through the education system for children ages three and over. While these service networks are already providing services, we learned from parents and families first hand, that they are not receiving all the services and support they need.

Services provided through the SRS Autism Program would enhance the services already mandated by, and provided through Part B and C of the IDEA. Combined, these systems will complement each other and ensure that children and families do receive all the services and supports they need.