



## **AUTISM TRAINING** and Technical Assistance Project

Advocacy in the Workplace:  
Avoiding Bias, Requesting Accommodations, and  
Disability Disclosure for Neurodivergent Individuals

icsps

Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support,  
Illinois State University, College of Education

# Moderator Information



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# The Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project

The Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project (ATTA) develops and presents resources that assist individuals with autism in their transition from secondary education to postsecondary education or employment.

ATTA provides training and support to important stakeholders as they work to provide an equitable experience for individuals on the spectrum.



# The Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support

The Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support (ICSPS) resides in the Educational Administration and Foundations Department in the College of Education. The Center has been a part of Illinois State University's College of Education since 1977. The mission of ICSPS is to support the success of every learner through the comprehensive application of research-based practices, encouraging professionals to educate equitably, and offering expertise in creating excellent learning environments through professional development events.

ICSPS designs and delivers professional development, technical assistance, and program improvement strategies for career, technical, and adult education and workforce professionals. The Center focuses on equity, access, diversity, and inclusion in recruitment, retention, completion, and transition for Illinois students - encouraging achievement of special population learners. ICSPS offers customized professional development on Universal Design for Learning, strategies to enhance recruitment and retention, embracing a growth mindset, and supporting special populations students.





# Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project (ATTA)

<https://autismcollegeandcareer.com>



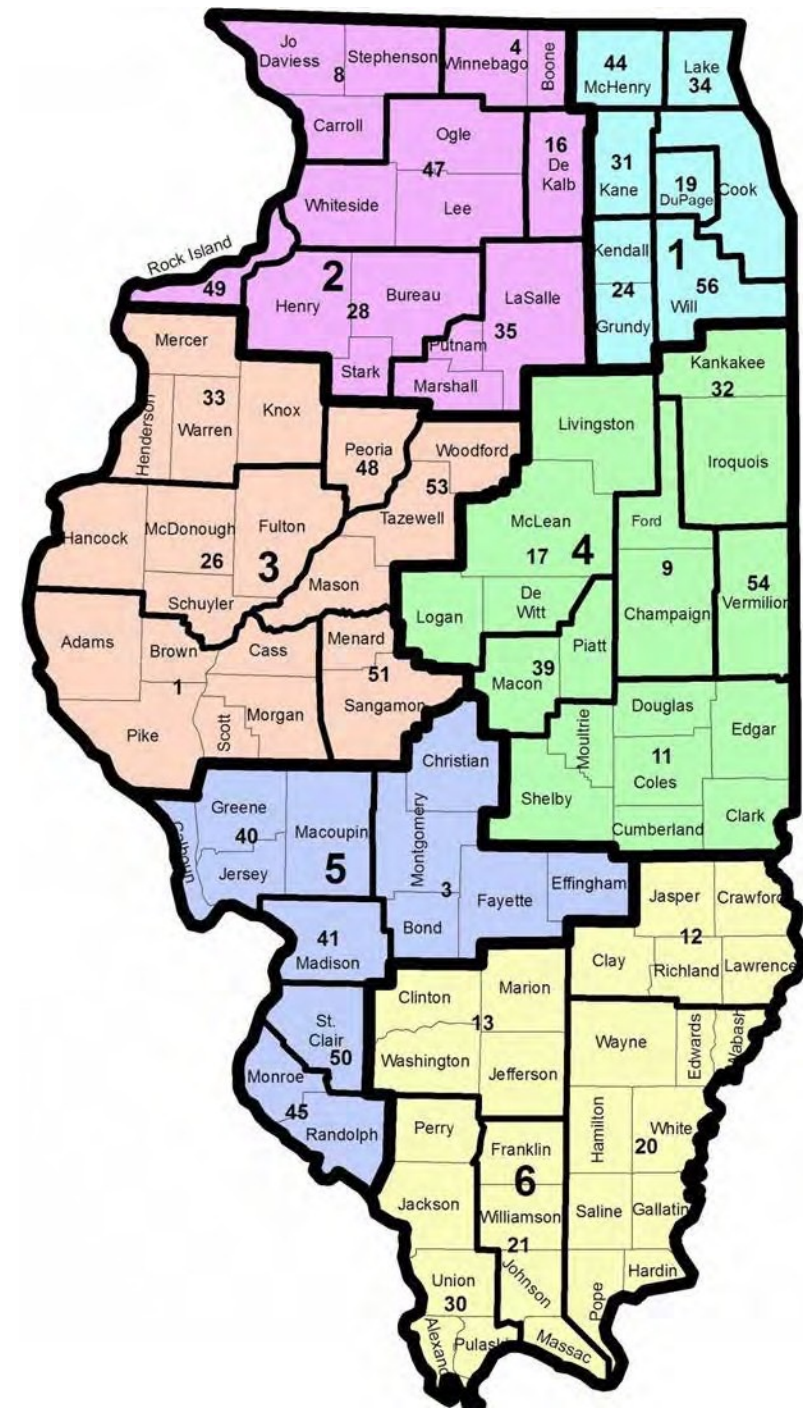
Illinois  
State Board of  
Education

icsps impacting  
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equity

Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support,  
Illinois State University, College of Education

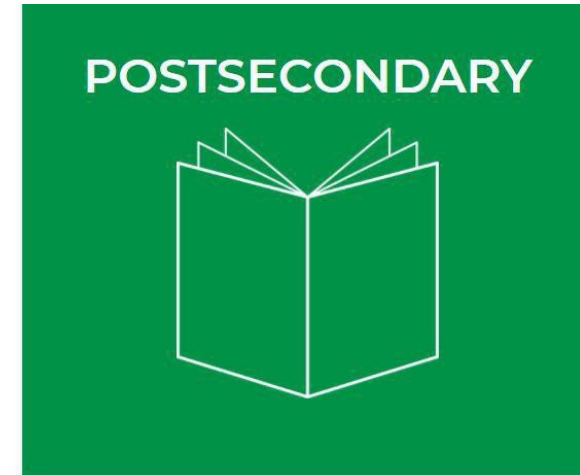
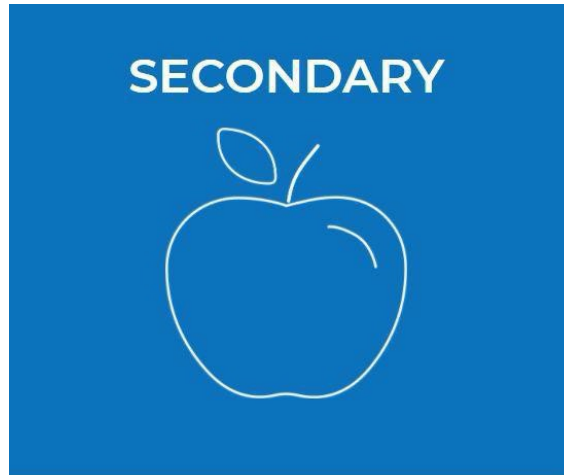
# Which Region are you Located in?

1. Chicago
2. Northeast
3. Northwest
4. Central
5. Southwest
6. Southeast





# Which ATTA Stakeholders do you Represent?



# Presenter Information



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# Advocating for Ourselves

- Self-advocacy skills empower people with disabilities to make choices that affect their daily lives and allow for greater independence
- “Self-advocacy – as a personal and political philosophy – is a movement primarily of and by [people with disabilities] who are making their own decisions, speaking for themselves and for others with disabilities, and taking control over their lives.”

**Advocating for ourselves is harder than advocating for others!**



# How Bias Shows Up For Neurodivergent Individuals

- Neurodivergent employees may face overt discrimination or bullying at work
  - A 2012 study reported one-third of autistic employees being bullied at work while a 2009 report from the Department of Education showed 88% of young autistic people said they were treated “pretty well” at work (Hensel, 2017)
- Bias can be systemic, meaning it shows up in how work environments and processes are designed to favor the neurotypical brain
  - Job applications and descriptions
  - Interviewing



# What's the Deal With Disclosure

**Disclosure** refers to a variety of **processes and tools** that a person uses to **share their disability status** with others in order to receive **support, accommodations, and acceptance.**

Disabled folks and our allies all have different perspectives and roles to play when it comes to disclosing.



# Disclosure Goals



# Why People Disclose Neurodivergence at Work

- Why would someone share they are neurodivergent at work?
  - They want to be proactive and avoid misunderstandings
  - The disability is evident or obvious
  - The person needs an accommodation under the **Americans with Disabilities Act**
- Others may choose to **volunteer to disclose**:
  - They want to be their authentic selves at work and take **pride in their identities**
  - They view neurodivergence as a **strength**
  - Disclosure can help **bridge the gap and provide context** about why an individual behaves a certain way, or to explain why a candidate may have held several jobs or inconsistent employment in the past. (Hensel, 2017).



# Types of Disclosure Strategies

## Soft disclosure

- When you might hint at having a disability – but someone else might not be able to confirm or deny it
- Mentioning you are a member of an allyship or affinity group
- Asking for support in a vague way

## Hard disclosure

- When someone precisely mentions they have a disability
- You describe it in a cover letter, resume, or other application materials
- You request an accommodation under the ADA





# Bridging the Gap Between Disclosure and Accommodations

- The **Americans with Disabilities Act** forbids employers from discriminating against a qualified individual with a disability.
- Under the ADA, you don't have to disclose until an accommodation is needed.
- Title I of the ADA requires employers provide **reasonable accommodation** to qualified individuals with disabilities who are employees or applicants, except when it would cause an undue hardship.
- Reasonable accommodations should help the individual perform the **essential functions of the job**.
  - “The fundamental job duties of the employment position the individual with a disability holds or desires.” 29 C.F.R. § 1630.2 (n)(1).
- Ideas for accommodations and info on specific disabilities can be found at the **Job Accommodation Network** ([askjan.org](http://askjan.org)).



# Breaking Down Reasonable Accommodations

- Accommodation requests must be reasonable and not cause **undue hardship**
  - “Undue hardship refers not only to **financial difficulty**, but to reasonable accommodations that are **unduly extensive, substantial, or disruptive, or those that would fundamentally alter the nature or operation of the business**”
- Employees must prove the accommodation is reasonable on its face or special circumstances make it reasonable in a specific situation; employers may then consider whether or not it is an undue hardship.
- Accommodation requests have an average one-time cost of \$300; the majority are free (Job Accommodation Network).



# Your Responsibilities

- Put your workplace on notice for need. If you don't tell them, they will not know.
- If not visible, be prepared to provide medical documentation.

Even if you don't know what to ask for, it's OK to ask for help with the challenge.

- Don't worry about knowing the resolution, tell your manager or the Human Resources department what issue you're struggling with.
- Stay focused on what is hard for you, not the accommodation solution.



# Protecting Your Rights

- If your request is done verbally, send a follow-up letter or e-mail to “recap” what was discussed and print a copy to keep at home.
- This will give your school or employer the opportunity to let you know if there was a miscommunication and ensure you have documentation of the request.
- If the accommodation they grant is not what you asked for, or if your request is completely denied, ask for their response and rationale in writing if they did not already provide it in that format.
- If you feel that your rights have been violated after the above, seek help from an advocate or attorney.

**DISABILITY RIGHTS**  
**ARE CIVIL RIGHTS**



# Questions and Discussion

