



Autism and Tertiary Behavior Supports  
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# THE GOLD ACADEMY

## Au

East Central Kansas Special  
Education Cooperative  
(ECKSEC)



Pictured below: (L to R) Rockville staff: Principal Emily Fleming, Kindergarten Teacher Niki Cash, 1st Grade Teacher Meghan Reilly, Special Education Teacher Jessica Gibbons, and ECKSEC Assist. Special Ed Director Pauline Hintz.

## The Gold Academy Intentional Professional Development

TASN ATBS is excited to highlight East Central Kansas Special Education Cooperative. (ECKSEC) This Coop employs over 400 staff and provides services to eight districts in four counties. In this newsletter, assistant special education director Pauline Hintz shares about their "Gold Academy" program which provides intentional professional development (PD) to coop staff. She is quick to share that this program would not be as successful without the hard work and effort that district teams have put in.

If you're interested in learning about an innovative way to provide professional development opportunities, read the following excerpt in which Pauline shares how the academy came into existence. Rockville Elementary staff also share how the Gold Academy has impacted students and staff.

[Listen to the Rockville team interview here.](#)

Author: Pauline Hintz, Assistant Special Education Director.

For years, our cooperative sustained an Autism Support Team (AST) which was a cadre of twelve of our most highly trained and skilled certified staff. This team was available to provide consultation and other support for students and staff in our eight-member districts. The AST has a valuable role in providing the most skilled support/intervention for our most complex challenges.

But, in a cooperative this size, the needs were significant, and we needed to look at how to support schools differently. Using a "Specialist" model has its advantages. Still, if that is your only option, the drawback is that the Specialist comes into your school and provides excellent advice, gets everyone excited, then leaves. Forty-eight hours later, the excitement has worn off and things tend to settle back to where they were. We knew we needed to build local capacity.



## Looking for something different.....

We began looking for additional PD opportunities for a greater number of staff but couldn't find exactly what we were searching for. We didn't need "technical" or "intensive" training (we already had the AST with those credentials). We needed user-friendly PD with more "breadth" than "depth" to get us started. If we really were to build local capacity, we needed to train large numbers of staff, but we weren't in a position to send them "out" for training. We needed PD that wasn't a "one-and-done". We needed ongoing growth and involvement, collegiality, and excitement.

So, we figured we would create our own program. We already had incredibly talented people on staff who are passionate about their areas of expertise and willing to share when asked. One person would coordinate opportunities, but no one person has to do everything, which is an example of being greater than the sum of our parts.

In September of 2016, we put together a fabulous agenda of relevant topics with our own presenters. We offered the training on four consecutive Thursdays (we've tried that a variety of different ways, and have since settled on one day per month for four consecutive months during the fall semester).

Our plan was to provide foundational knowledge, timely topics, and most importantly – LOTS of useful, easy, research-based strategies that everyone could use and share.

And yet, no one would come.

- I don't have time.
- If I'm going to go for PD, it's going to be about reading.
- I don't have any of those kids in my class.
- If I come to the training, they will put all of those kids in my class.

So we had to try something different. We went to our cooperatives superintendents' meeting, explained the training, and asked for them to nominate teams of staff in their buildings to be in our first cohort. The criteria were simple. We wanted their:

- Instructional leaders
- Best communicators
- Staff most likely to reach out and help others

Within three days, we were sending emails to these staff, congratulating them on their nomination, and asking them to RSVP for the Gold Academy. That initial group went back to their districts in the Spring of 2016 and shared their experience. Since then, we haven't had any issues filling seats at Gold Academy.



## Going strong...

Since that first group, we have had diverse teams from every district come to Gold Academy. Those teams have included one hundred and fifty paraprofessionals, General Education Teachers, Special Education Teachers, Therapists, School Psychologists, and Principals. Once a member of Gold Academy, you are then invited to return twice a year for Gold Reunions where we brush up on strategies, explore new and/or relevant topics, and share.

It doesn't take long for members to realize that "what's essential for one student is good for all" and they become more effective in supporting **ALL** of their students. Competence increases confidence, and confidence increases competence.

Gold Academy members are talented and committed, willing to share, and willing to support their colleagues. These characteristics look different in each of their buildings. There are paras who have presented to faculty meetings about how they've implemented a strategy and its outcomes. There are members who keep on the lookout for teachers struggling with a student, then offer to collaborate with them on strategies they might try (as well as help with the laminating and Velcro on supports) There are teachers who collaborate in their buildings to get strategies implemented school-wide. There are principals who make it a priority for their staff to join Gold Academy so they can expand their teams. Gold Academy looks different in each district because each team is different, and each district has different needs.

As for "Gold Academy" and how the name came about (because in an endeavor such as this one, you need a name...) There was a time when we were often struggling to support students with autism. Every time we would meet or have conversations, we would take notes, and after a while, you just abbreviate Au for autism. Au=Gold.

If you are interested in additional information about this program feel free to contact the following individuals.

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