

# The Watson Institute School-Based Cyber Academy (WISCA) at The W. Bruce Thomas Education Center Sharpsburg, PA



**The Watson Institute School-based Cyber Academy (WISCA)** is designed to meet the individual needs of adolescents with Asperger's Disorder and High-functioning Autistic Disorder who require therapeutic intervention and supports that cannot be delivered in a traditional secondary setting. We are committed to providing a safe, comfortable, flexible and supportive environment so that each student can experience success in learning. Curriculum is state approved and internet based and supported for each student with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Students enroll in classes according to their grade level and graduation requirements. Electives can be chosen based on individual interests. Therapeutic training that provides instruction and practice in pragmatic language, social, organizational and life skills are integrated into the daily schedule. Community based instruction and service projects are scheduled to program for the generalization of skills taught in the therapy and social groups and to prepare students for transition to post secondary opportunities.

## Academics

The academic curriculum is provided through a partnership with the National Network of Digital Schools. This online curriculum provides specialized academic subject teachers while a classroom based, certified special education teacher assists with necessary scheduling, adaptations and specially designed instruction. This mode of instruction allows for extensive individualization and the incorporation of advanced academic content within a supportive and therapeutic environment. Self advocacy, independence and the development of appropriate social skills are the ongoing focus to prepare students for post secondary educational or vocational endeavors.

## Therapeutic Component

A significant percentage of adolescents on the autism spectrum experience anxiety disorders and/or depression. Mental health support is often critical in the successful education of students with Asperger's Disorder. The mental health needs of the students at WISCA are addressed daily utilizing cognitive behavioral methods with a focus on social skills training, creative problem solving, self regulation, perspective taking and developing relationships with others. Master's level mental health professionals provide individual therapy, group therapy and case management services as needed for individual students.

The academic, social, therapeutic and community components of the Watson Institute School-based Cyber Academy prepare students to meet future challenges with independence and self-assurance.

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