

# ACR 155 FINAL

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Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host, Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education. But my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research based practices in a practical way in your classroom, to make your job easier and more effective.

Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources podcast. I am Chris Reeve and I am so excited that you're here. We have been talking in the last couple of months about the classroom organization results in effectiveness framework or the CORE.

And I've talked about how it can make your classroom less stressful and save you time and make it easier to run and even that it can help you run the classroom when you aren't there. So if you want to know more about the CORE model, because we're going to continue talking about it, go check out episode 146. And you can get there at [autismclassroomresources.com/episode 146](https://autismclassroomresources.com/episode146). And I'll make sure that I put that link in the show notes as well. So that'll give you kind of an understanding of where we're coming from.

Now, in Episode 151, I talked about the CORE systems for special education in relation to paraprofessional duties, and the things that you want to have in place and you can get that episode at [autismclassroomresources.com/episode151](https://autismclassroomresources.com/episode151).

One of those systems was a classroom zoning plan. And mentioned then, at least I think I did, that a zoning plan is a schedule for the classroom staff. But it's really a ton more than that. And it's a pretty critical system for the classroom running smoothly, which I talked about in that episode. But it's also crucial to making your classroom team work well together and help you all be effective.

So in today's episode, I'm going to take us on a transition from talking specifically about the CORE organizational systems like the zoning plan, and I'm going to start talking about using the CORE systems to build classroom teamwork.

I think this is one of the most challenging aspects of running a classroom at times, because we're working with adults. And the one thing that I've heard throughout my career from people who become autism coaches and instructional coaches and administrators, is they will tell me, especially when they first start a new position, it's that the students are a piece of cake compared to try and change the behavior of adults.

So stay with me through the break and I'll be back to talk about all the burning questions that I've heard about zoning plans over the years, and their role in managing classroom staff. So let's get started.

So let me start with what a zoning plan is just very quickly, for those of you who have not heard of it before. I won't spend a lot of time on it.

It is a staff schedule, which I think is how many people think of it. But it's really a lot more than that, which is why I've stuck with the zoning name. It's more than where the person should be and who should be with them. It focuses on all different kinds of details across the day and it puts them in a written format that people can follow just like our students follow their picture schedules.

So it focuses on details like how transitions will be handled, who's going to take attendance, making sure that there's time for the teacher to write notes home, when everybody gets their breaks.

And the goal of the zoning plan, which I talked about in episode 151, is create a classroom that runs without a lot of discussion and without a lot of questions from the staff because everybody knows what they need to be doing. Once it's set up, the zoning plan addresses that.

The first question that I typically get about zoning plans is why is it called a zoning plan? And that is because it's also sometimes called a zoning defense plan. I took the defense out because I don't think there's anything defensive about it. But it's a term that comes from basketball so I had to adopt it because Duke basketball is the only kind of sport I like.

But actually it comes from a research article by LeLaurin and Risley back in 1972. And essentially what they did is they took a zoning plan like you would use as a defensive strategy in basketball, where you cover an area versus a specific player and they set it up so that worked in a classroom.

So rather than being in charge of specific children, the staff was in charge of an area. One person was in charge of a table where this students were working, another staff member was in charge of the bathroom area in this daycare center.

They assigned specific areas to the staff, and any student who came into that area became your responsibility. And what they found was that this approach resulted in higher engagement and less downtime than using what you would using the same metaphor called a man to man approach where I'm with this child and this child, and I stay with them throughout the day.

So in a zoning system, typically, a student waits at one station until it's their turn to go to another station. And when they do that, the person that's responsible for them is the person that is at the station. The students move, and the staff stays put.

So it's very similar, for those of you who followed for a while, to how I run most typically centers. Sometimes I will run centers where the staff changes, but most frequently, the students are moving through centers and the staff is staying in one place. So they are covering their zone.

So that allows there to be more engagement with the students, because the staff isn't constantly being split between these two people. So that is where zoning the name zoning plans come from. And the reason that we use them.

Now, that does not necessarily mean that we're only using a zone defense.

So one of the next questions that I often get is do you have to use zones in a zoning plan? So do you have to only have the staff in charge of areas and never have them in charge of students? And the answer to that is no, you do not always have to use zoning plans.

You're going to create a general plan and sometimes it will have man to man coverage or teacher to child coverage. And sometimes it will be covering a zone. So most plans are going to have a combination, depending on the time of day, the number of people that you have in the classroom and things like that.

The zone approach works really well when you have activities that take place in different spots and either students who can transition independently, or where you have zoned someone in to support that transition. So you've taken somebody and said, your job, at this moment is to transition your students.

It might be, I'm transitioning my students to my center, and then maybe the person who runs independent work is in charge of transitioning all the students to their schedule, and to back to the center, where they will move into the center zone with a staff member who stayed there. I often do

that with independent work only because they tend to get finished earlier than the rest of the staff.

So when you think about a zoning plan, probably that that's one example and the other is the time. When often there's a waiting period for students due to buses that are arriving at different times, car riders, walkers, students are coming in and drips and drabs.

So we generally set up a time at the beginning of the day where the students are doing something that is a little bit more independent, not a group activity, because we don't want to leave the students that are not there yet out of the activity.

But to keep students engaged during this time, when we also have to have somebody out getting students off the buses, someone meeting in the car line, we want to make sure that we have the students engaged with something who are in the classroom.

So if we have three staff members, I might assign one person to do those visual motor kind of work tasks with the students to keep them engaged once they've checked into class. I have another staff member who goes out to the buses in the cars and gets the students as they arrive. That person brings them to the classroom door. And the third person meets them at the door, sends the next adult back to the buses, and is there to help the students put their stuff away, check their schedule, and then transition into the area, the table area where the students are working until everybody arrives.

So each of them have their zone. When all of the students have arrived inside, then the supervision moves on to other activities, and you begin your instruction for the day. So you're giving the opportunity to use that zone area so that you can have people doing dedicated tasks.

Another question I get asked is I frequently when I talk about zoning plans, I talk about the importance of making sure that we have scheduled in breaks for staff and breaks for teachers and paraprofessionals. And so one of the questions I often get is do I have to give staff breaks?

Many of you may be in situations where you've been told not to get staff breaks. It's important though, that we give staff breaks, including the teacher, when we're following a zoning plan, because the whole point of a zoning plan is to make sure that the staff and the students are engaged throughout the day.

That takes a lot of brainpower, that takes a lot of focus. And without a break, it's very easy to find yourself getting distracted as the day goes on, because it's just hard to hold that focus for so long. So it is really important to give everybody a break, so that you are taking a break when you have planned for it.

So I set up specific activities, maybe we only have two groups running instead of three, so that during that afternoon time, I can have staff going out on their lunch breaks, and I can take a lunch break.

And in order to do that, we have planned for it. So if everybody just kind of zoned out or took a break or needed to go the bathroom in the middle of everything, it would be hard because we might be in a situation where we needed everybody in the room as opposed to having breaks that you've planned for. So if you've planned for them, then the breaks can be taken at times when everybody is ready for it, and that's one of the reasons why it's so important to put it into the zoning plan.

I do have a number of people who will ask, what if my staff can choose not to take a break? I know that there are some districts where there may be options that the staff could leave 15 minutes early by not taking their break during the day. I think it's still really important to give them a break, it just might look different than usual.

It might not look like leaving the classroom. It might be giving them some prep work to do for the classroom for 15 minutes, or providing them with just the opportunity to kind of sit at a desk and do something where they're not as focused on the students.

We want our staff really engaged in watching our students throughout the day. And in order to have that happen, they need to be aware and awake and alert. And it's hard to do that if you have to do it constantly.

Another question that I get asked is how do you develop the zoning plan? So I write the zoning plan often is a draft on my own. But I feel very strongly that the zoning plans should be a collaborative process. I just know that you don't have a lot of time to sit and collaborate with staff when students aren't there.

So generally, the teacher will make a draft of the zoning plan, get some feedback from staff about what they're comfortable doing and not doing.

So for instance, I had a middle school class that I worked in, and there was a nurse that was there supporting two of our students with really severe disabilities. And so one of the things that we did was when we asked her, she said, I'm not comfortable doing instruction, that's not my training. It's not what I'm here for.

And so we then scheduled her into the day doing sensory things and giving the students their rests out of their wheelchairs and things like that. We did not put her in an instructional center.

So it's important that you get their feedback and their input into it before you create the plan. But also that you create the plan and get their feedback on it, and then factor that back in.

Then we run the plan. And during that day, or that week, where we're running it and seeing how it works, I keep a notebook, usually in the center of the classroom or pad in my pocket, or sometimes now maybe I would take notes on my phone, but I can't type that path with my thumbs. And I jot things down as I realized that they got left off the list.

So the walkie talkie didn't go to PE with us, because everybody thought the other person had it. And then when I know those things, I add them in. So then I make revisions. And as I make revisions, again, I'm working with the staff to get their input about what's working and what's not working, so that I can make changes based on that.

You know, they may say, that is not enough time to make sure that I'm doing this this and that. Is there a way we can redistribute that a little bit?

So it's going to be started as a draft document that you're going to change but eventually it will become more set and people will know what it is without having to have it. But having that visual written plan in front of them is important, particularly at the beginning because they do need to refer to it. And it is fairly amazing how many managerial and staff issues I've actually dealt with just by putting the zoning plan in writing.

So if you are looking for tips or information on how to write a zoning plan, or we're working with classroom teams, which is what we'll be talking about in the next couple of weeks, then I have a Building Classroom Teams and Zoning Staff Toolkit. I think it's actually called paraprofessional scheduling something else now but I will make sure there's a link in the show notes.

It includes eight examples of different zoning plans for all different ages and types of classrooms. It has directions. It has cheat sheet. It has a checklist for you and making it as well as ideas for how to build relationships with staff and manage classroom conflict, which will be the topics of our next couple podcasts as well. So I will make sure there is a link to that in the shownotes and my TPT store.

Now, as a side note, if you'd like to get that for free, come and join the Special Educator Academy and is included in your membership to that. We have a whole course that has a whole module on zoning plans and classroom teamwork that is based off of that toolkit. So you've kind of got a do it yourself with some help vs come and we will help you with it directly in the Academy.

And you can find all the information about the Academy at [specialeducatoracademy.com](http://specialeducatoracademy.com). You can also get a free zoning plan in my free resource library and I will put that link in the show notes as well.

Thank you so much for listening. I would love to hear your thoughts on zoning plans. So come over to Instagram to [@autismclassroomresources](https://www.instagram.com/autismclassroomresources) and send me a message and let me know whether you use them, what you think of them, all those kinds of things. I love to talk to you and that's a great place to get in touch with me.

I hope you'll come back next week when we're going to be talking more about teamwork. And until then have an amazing week.