

Small Group Sessions: Education

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Most individuals with autism spectrum disorders spend the majority of their formal learning time at school; however, school attendance does not necessarily result in learning in many cases. While some schools are successful at meeting the educational needs of students with ASD, many are not. Examination of issues related to educational success and best practices is necessary in order to improve the current situation for all learners with ASD.

Currently, we have research supporting a number of elements that are critical for school success for learners with ASD. These include the use of a wide range of environmental and curricular modifications, general education classroom supports, specific instructional methods, and attitudinal and social supports. In a recent report by the National Autism Centre in the United States (2009), several school-appropriate intervention approaches were rated as “established,” including: antecedent interventions that are designed to reduce the likelihood that problem behaviours will occur and behavioural treatment packages that include strategies for teaching alternative replacement behaviours. Additional interventions rated as “established” include video modeling, naturalistic teaching strategies, peer-mediated interventions, visual schedules, self-management skills, and story-based scripts. We also know that a coordinated team commitment, recurrent evaluation, and home-school collaboration are essential.

We have learned that, with the appropriate supports in place, many students with ASD can learn important skills in general education classrooms. We have also learned that, without such supports, learning is unlikely to occur in EITHER general or special education settings.

We know very little about how to manage the transition of young children with ASD (both those who receive early intensive intervention services and those who do not) into the school system; how parents, teachers, and students with ASD themselves define “success;” what core competencies are required for educational personnel to be successful; and how to support adolescents and adults as they transition from school to work.

Core Personnel Competencies

- ▶ What are the core competencies that school personnel (e.g., teachers, administrators, speech language pathologists, educational assistants, etc.) require to support students with ASD?
- ▶ How do these competencies differ depending on student age or grade?
- ▶ How are school personnel currently trained and how can we design training programs that better equip these individuals to work with students with ASD?
- ▶ How can we best match the competencies of school personnel to the needs of the students that they are working with?

Definition of Success

- ▶ How do we define success within the school system? For example, do we consider success to be academic progress, social networks, student and family happiness, etc.?
- ▶ Do different stakeholders (e.g., parents, children, teachers, etc.) define success in the same way?
- ▶ In what ways do cultural factors influence how individuals define success?
- ▶ How do individuals with ASD define success (including within the social domain)?

Best Practices

- ▶ What are the practices employed by the schools that are considered to be “the best” with respect to peer support, programming, etc.?
- ▶ What factors contributed to the emergence of these schools as leaders in the education of individuals with ASD?
- ▶ How can we ensure that school philosophies and curricula reflect the importance of fostering social functioning and community relationships?
- ▶ How do we identify the schools and people that are championing best practices?
- ▶ How can we use parents’ knowledge of their children to learn how to best support individuals with ASD within the school system?
- ▶ What are the best practices for helping individuals with ASD to deal with bullying, conflict resolution, community awareness, sexual health education?

- ▶ Once we know which competencies and characteristics are present within schools that best support individuals with ASD, how can we move other schools, personnel, etc. in the same direction?

Adults & Post Secondary Students

- ▶ What are the needs of, and established treatments for, adults and post-secondary students with ASD?
- ▶ How can we provide adults with ASD with the social, vocational, independent-living, self-management, and self advocacy skills, as well as post-secondary supports, that they require?
- ▶ What are the barriers that adults with ASD face in pursuing educational opportunities?

Differences Across Jurisdictions

- ▶ What are all of the provinces in Canada doing regarding ASD education and treatment?
- ▶ How can we create more equality across and within provinces with respect to the services that are available?