Preparation High School Students with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder for Adulthood

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BACKGROUND

- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition of currently unclear etiology. It typically becomes evident around the age of two and ranges in severity (APA, 2013).
- As of 2018, ASD occurs in approximately 1 in 59 children in the U.S. In comparison, the prevalence in 2002 was estimated to be 1 in 150 (CDC, 2018).
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that children with disabilities have access to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.
- Students with high-functioning ASD (HFASD)1 have average or above average intelligence and may be on track to receive a high school diploma. In spite of their academic achievement, they exhibit very low educational and vocational success rates after high school.
- According to the IDEA, these students should primarily be in general education with the addition of some supports, but this is not always the case.
- There is a need to examine the variety of factors that impact the educational experiences of high school students with HFASD.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics of high schools that are associated with a higher percentage of time spent by students with HFASD in general education classes?
2. Are these high schools more likely to provide certain kinds of supports and services to such students?

FINDINGS

More likely to:
- Prepare students for what to expect in their special education (IEP) meeting
- Have general education teachers attending students’ IEP meetings
- Teach students self-determination, problem solving, and goal setting skills
- Have a higher percentage of students with a primary plan of post-secondary education after high school

Logistic Regression Model

A logistic regression was conducted to determine the most significant factor in predicting when students with HFASD spend more time in general education.

CONCLUSIONS

- The findings suggest that high schools with a large population of students with HFASD who plan to attend college are appropriately serving these students in general education.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Urban schools with significant low-income and minority populations may need additional resources in order to better support students with HFASD.

METHODS & DESIGN

- Participants completed a 64-item survey through Qualtrics software.
- The survey was developed through (1) qualitative data from focus groups of school personnel, (2) an extensive literature review, and (3) consultation with the research advisory board, which included school personnel and a young adult with HFASD.
- The survey included questions about eligibility and consent, the participant and the nature of their work, the participant’s school district, students with HFASD at the school, and the supports and services provided for them.

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