



FOCUS on Results

Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services

February 2009**Accountability****Assessment****Curriculum & Instruction****Dispute Resolution****Early Childhood****IEPs & IFSPs****Personnel****State & Federal Policy****Transition****Other**

***FOCUS on Results* offers valuable, up-to-date information for special education stakeholders, including parents, teachers, school administrators, counselors, and others.**

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Packet #13, Article 1

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This *FOCUS on Results* document provides an overview of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and delves into the need for comprehensive, systematic supports for students with ASD at the school building level. System level changes that better support students with ASD are also beneficial to other students with intensive education needs and are necessary to support all students across all school environments.

Students With Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Are Changing the Way Educators Do Business in Schools

by Amy Matthews, Jamie Owen-DeSchryver, Kelly Dunlap, and Maureen Ziegler

The Impetus for Change

In the early days of serving students with autism, the disorder was considered low incidence; in fact, in 1990, only 1,208 students were served in Michigan under the special education category of autism. In those days, schools relied on consultants with special expertise in autism and tended to place students with autism in special schools or classrooms to meet their more intensive needs. It was uncommon for general education teachers to encounter a student with autism during their school day.

Since 1990, there has been a substantial increase in the number of individuals identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) across the United States and within Michigan (see Figure 1 on page 3). There are currently 12,595 students being served under the new state definition of Autism Spectrum Disorder (see definition on page 2). Also, since 1990, legislation, such as the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), has mandated that students with ASD (and all students with disabilities) have access to the

general education curriculum. Additional support for students with ASD to access the general education curriculum is provided by recent outcome studies as discussed by Iovannone et al. (2003). These factors, along with the ever increasing numbers of students with ASD in public schools, require educators to change the way we do business. In sum, we need to look at students with ASD differently than we have in the past. This *FOCUS on Results* document provides an overview of ASD and delves into the need for comprehensive, systematic supports for students with ASD at the school building level. System level changes that better support students with ASD are also beneficial to other students with intensive education needs. System level changes support all students across all school environments.

We did what we did when we knew what we knew. Once we know different, we are accountable to change.

-Statewide Autism Resources and Training Staff



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The Statewide Autism Resources and Training (START) Project was funded by the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services (MDE, OSE-EIS) in 2001 to develop a training and resource model for educators serving students with ASD. The current goals of the START Project are to increase local capacity, promote collaboration across the state, and create a more progressive model for serving students with ASD. The START Project is focused on training educators to support students with ASD using empirical literature and educational law as a foundation, along with parent input, to ensure the needs of students are met in school, at home, and in the community. The START Project does not provide direct services to students but works with school professionals to build local and regional capacity within every area of the state.

The START Project's Primary Components

The START Project has evolved over the past several years to include four key components—Collaboration and Networking, Effective Practices, Training and Coaching, and Resources.

Collaboration and Networking

- Regional Collaborative Networks (RCNs) provide the infrastructure for collaboration and coordination across school districts and intermediate school districts (ISDs), allowing shared training and resources and systemic planning on a broad scale.

At this time, there are 17 RCNs across the state of Michigan with more than 90 percent of the counties in Michigan involved. Most RCNs meet on a monthly basis with multiple counties and districts represented. This results in approximately 160 meetings per year involving educational professionals in the process of sharing effective practice models and strategies, resources, and information about ASD. The RCNs also link school professionals with parents and community agencies (e.g., local law enforcement, university representatives, and community mental health agencies) to make system-wide changes for students with ASD locally (see Figure 3 on page 6).

Effective Practices

- The START Project emphasizes effective practices through the use of the Universal Supports Assessment

What Is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) experience challenges in the areas of social interaction, communication, and behavior that typically impact their academic performance and ability to function independently.

This lifelong disability has a neurobiological basis and occurs in all racial, ethnic, and socio-economic groups, although it is more common in boys than girls. Studies show that rates of ASD are increasing and according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1 in 150 children have ASD (2008). The increase in prevalence is attributed to a combination of factors, including better identification and broader definition of ASD. In the past, the post high school outcomes for individuals with ASD have not been promising, but earlier identification and more intensive interventions are improving the prognosis for children currently being identified.

and Planning Tool (USAPT). The design of this tool is based on an extensive review of the research on effective practices for students with ASD. The USAPT is intended to help school professionals identify building and classroom strengths and needs in order to prioritize goals and plan for improvement. The USAPT offers a set of best practice guidelines as well as a planning tool for supporting students with ASD.

Training and Coaching

- The START Project provides year-long intensive training (IT) and technical assistance (TA) to school districts using a team-based approach at both the K-12 and preschool levels. To date, IT has reached more than 26 counties and more than 2,000 educators and professional staff. Additionally, professionals may participate in the Effective Practices Leadership Initiative (EPLI), a program designed to build local capacity by increasing the training and coaching skills of local professionals. Trainers/coaches are provided with materials, additional training, and TA to implement local and regional training, thus reducing

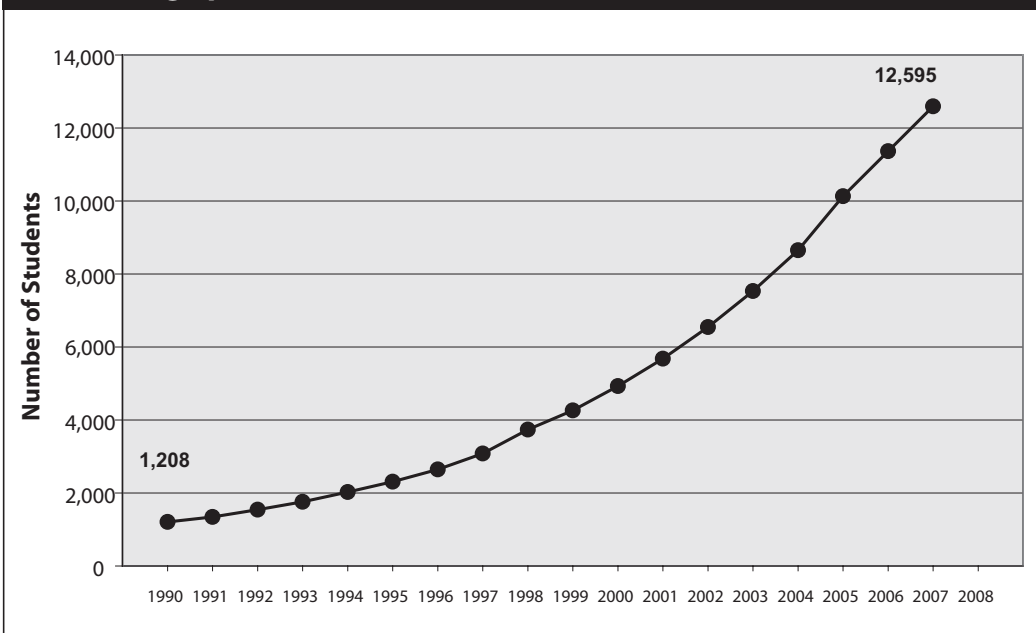
the need to involve outside consultants who have less knowledge of the local culture and needs. According to Lang & Fox 2003, professional development with follow up greatly increases the rate of implementation of strategies (see Figure 2 on page 4).

Numerous trainings have been provided by the START Project’s trainers/coaches on the topics of behavior support, educational strategies, universal supports, and peer-to-peer support. The START Project’s coaches work with building teams that support students with ASD to ensure that appropriate services and supports, based on effective practices, are available and implemented with fidelity. A key goal of the START Project is to ensure that a START-trained coach is available in every school building supporting students with ASD in the state of Michigan.

Resources

- The START Project utilizes school professionals who are utilizing effective practices to develop resource materials, which are

Figure 1: Michigan Students With Autism Spectrum Disorder Receiving Special Education Services



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disseminated statewide through the project Web site, annual conference, leadership meetings, and summer institutes. For example, the Livingston Educational Autism Network (LEAN), a START RCN, created sample coaching kits at four levels, from preschool to high school, for all RCNs in the state.

Systems Level Change

It isn't change for the sake of change; it is to improve what we do for students.

-Statewide Autism Resources and Training Staff

The START Project emphasizes a statewide collaborative system that includes all counties and school districts in Michigan. The START Project's professional teams work together under a common philosophy based on effective practices, leading to more effective programming and support for students with ASD.

Over time, the focus of the START Project has become systems level change that must be initiated and implemented by school staff and administrators willing to commit to using effective practices in the areas of educational programming,

professional development, parent-professional collaboration, and cross district/county collaboration. Students with ASD cannot function successfully in school buildings that are not fully prepared to support them academically, behaviorally, socially, or philosophically. Buildings need to be fully prepared for students with ASD. Systems change happens in schools in various ways, such as shifting to a positive behavior supports philosophy, running more effective team meetings, and/or utilizing differentiated instruction. Thus, in changing practice for students with ASD, educators are changing the school climate, which changes the business of how many students with different learning needs are supported.

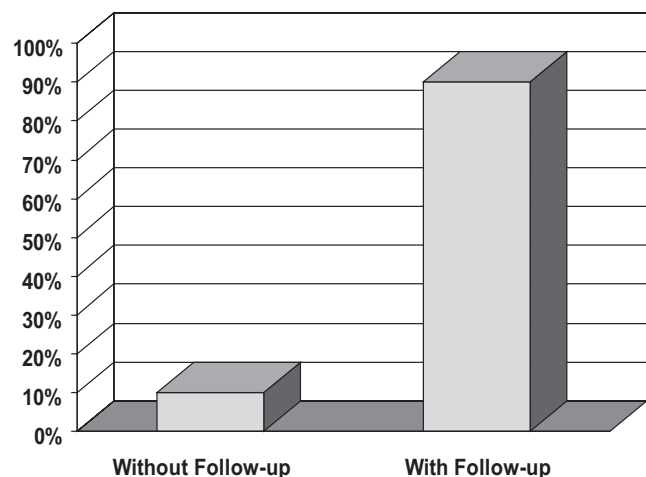
Table 1 on page 7 lists ten ways to change supports for students with ASD, while also improving the educational experience of other students. The START Project supports these changes.

Working Together to Reach Our Goals

With the multitude of demands and initiatives overwhelming school personnel, it becomes critical to identify strategies and models that serve not only students with ASD, but other students as well. It also becomes critical for statewide projects to collaborate and

Figure 2: Making Professional Development Effective (Lang & Fox, 2003)

- Traditional professional development without follow up results in a 5-10% rate of implementation of strategies.
- With follow up, that number can rise to 75-90%.



coordinate activities to reduce redundancy and confusion on the part of school professionals and families. Working in concert, state projects and initiatives can move beyond providing information and resources to schools, to full implementation of effective practices and measurement of outcomes at the district, building, classroom, and student level. The ultimate goal is to assist students with ASD to become contributing members in their schools and local communities and successfully move into adulthood as maximally independent individuals with many choices and opportunities.

For more information about the START Project, visit www.gvsu.edu/autismcenter. The START Project is an

MDE, OSE-EIS Mandated Activities Project (MAP) funded through the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA).

In order to promote increased system efficiencies and effectiveness—as well as improved student performance—MDE, OSE-EIS has established an integrated system for improvement initiatives known as Michigan's Integrated Improvement Initiatives (MI3). The START Project is supported by MI3. For more information about MI3, contact: Beth Steenwyk, Director, at (231) 288-4001, beth.a.steenwyk@mac.com, or visit www.cenmi.org/MI3.

Peer-to-Peer Support

In the past several years, peer-to-peer programs have become critical as schools look for ways to provide the least restrictive environment (LRE) for their students with ASD and provide meaningful educational and social experiences.

After receiving training from the START Project, Saginaw Township Community Schools started a peer-to-peer program called Kids Need Opportunities To Socialize (KNOTS) in 2005. The program began with one student with ASD and involved three peer mentors. The program continues to grow, and during the 2007-2008 school year it expanded to include four elementary buildings and the middle school, matching 150 general education mentors with 62 students with ASD or other special needs. Students with special needs receive social exposure and access to the curriculum within the general education setting, and mentors learn about leadership and compassion through initial training and ongoing case conferences to identify supports for their peers with special needs.

The KNOTS program benefits mentors as much as it does the students with ASD. For example, one student mentor had missed more than 40 days of school the previous year and is now one of the most involved mentors, with less than 10 days of school missed. Mentors realize the importance of being at school to help their friends. The Saginaw Township Community Schools were awarded the 2008 Michigan Association of School Boards Education Excellence award for their implementation of the KNOTS Peer-to-Peer Program.

Mentors from all types of backgrounds work with school staff and develop true friendships with their peers who have special needs. Starting and maintaining a peer-to-peer program is a significant amount of work for the staff, but very rewarding when they witness life-changing experiences for students with special needs and peer mentors.

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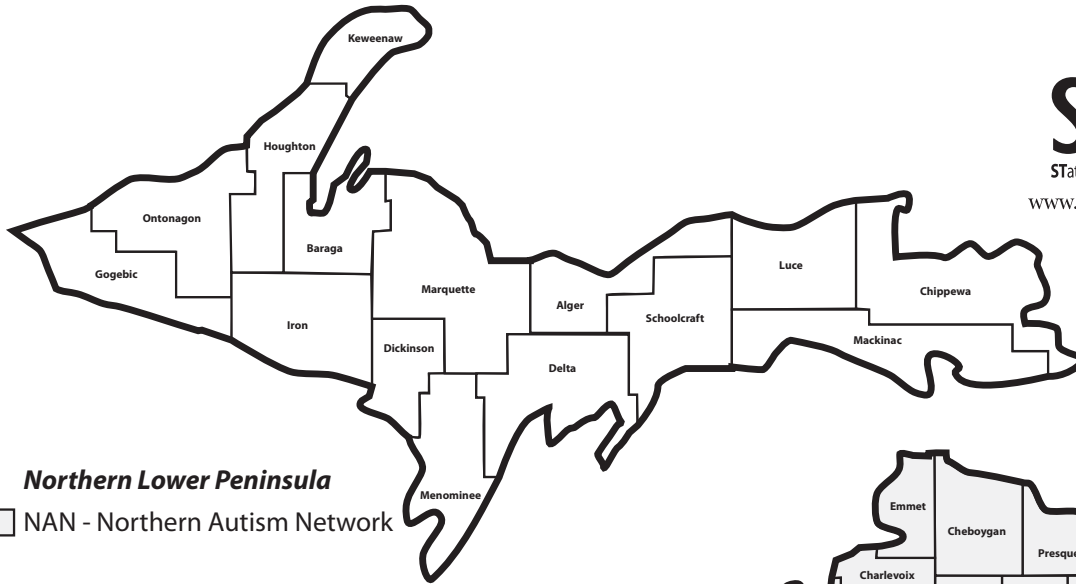


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Figure 3: Regional Collaborative Networks (RCNs)



www.gvsu.edu/autismcenter



Northern Lower Peninsula

- NAN - Northern Autism Network

Thumb and Central Lower Peninsula

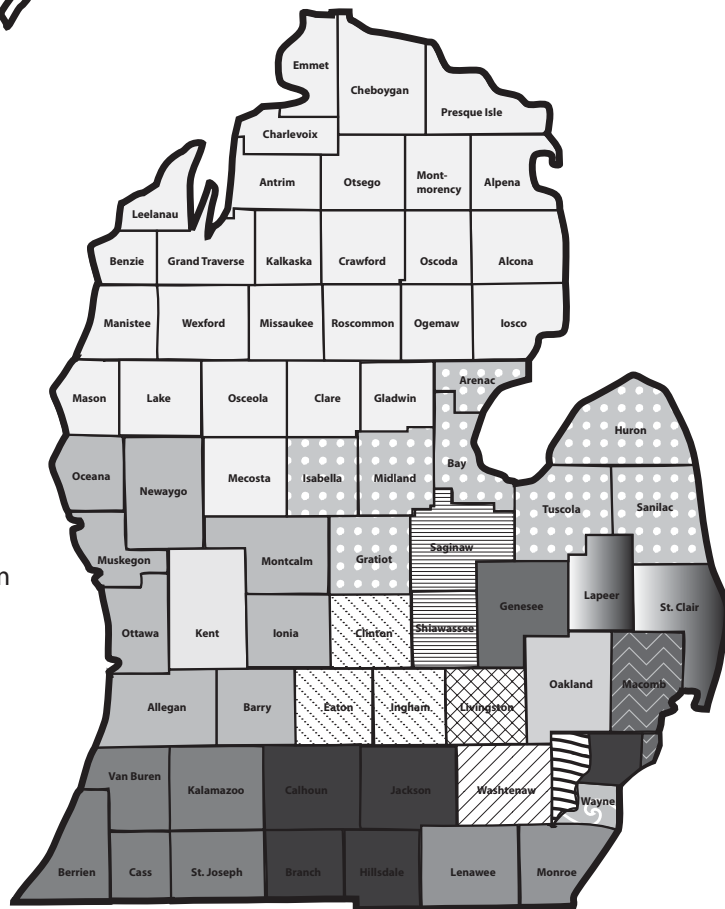
- ▨ ACES2 - Autism Collaborative Endeavor for Saginaw and Shiawassee Counties
- CAN4GCA - Collaborative Autism Network for Genesee County Area
- ▤ CRAN - Capital Region Autism Network
- ▧ MMAN - Mid-Michigan Autism Network

Southwestern Lower Peninsula

- Kent CAN - Kent County Autism Network
- SMART - Southern Michigan Autism Resource Team
- ▨ WestMAC - West Michigan Autism Collaborative

Southeastern Lower Peninsula

- RCNs Under Development
- ▨ DDRCN - Downriver Dearborn Regional Collaborative Network
- ▤ Lakeside Regional Collaborative Network
- ▧ LEAN - Livingston Educational Autism Network
- ▨ L-SC/AN - Lapeer-St. Clair Autism Network
- ▨ OCAN - Oakland County Autism Network
- ▨ SEMAC - Southeast Michigan Autism Collaborative
- ▤ WIN4Autism - Washtenaw Interagency Network 4 Autism
- ▨ WWRCN - Western Wayne Regional Collaborative Network



Upper Peninsula

- UPAN - Upper Peninsula Autism Network



**For more information, visit:
www.gvsu.edu/autismcenter**

Table 1: Ten Ways to Change Supports for Students With ASD

Critical Practices	How START Supports Implementation of Critical Practices
1. Promote inclusion opportunities and access to general education curriculum for all students.	START Philosophy
2. Provide appropriate accommodations and modifications to curriculum to increase access to general education curriculum and settings.	Educational Strategies Training Module
3. Train educational staff in the team process and problem solving to improve efficiency and productivity of all teams.	Meeting Mechanics Training
4. Provide training in Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) and increase awareness of Schoolwide PBS to improve behavior supports at the building and individual student level.	PBS Training Module
5. Establish a set of universal supports to serve as a foundation for effective programming for all students with ASD. Support areas include program guiding principles, family involvement, effective team processes, paraprofessional training, visual supports, peer-to-peer supports, behavior supports, and effective educational strategies.	Universal Supports Assessment and Planning Tool (USAPT)
6. Involve and support general education peers in authentic interactions with students with ASD. Peers benefit from engagement in real life experiences related to diversity, tolerance, and building the school community.	Peer-to-Peer Support Training Module
7. Rework early childhood special education programming to actively structure teaching, learning, and engagement for students with ASD as well as students with other early childhood developmental delays.	Early Intervention Training
8. Promote collaboration and networking across districts, counties, and regions to increase opportunities for sharing training and resources and moving toward a common philosophy and principles for effectively educating students with ASD.	Regional Collaborative Networks (RCN)
9. Re-examine the role of the teacher consultant with a move away from direct service provision to building team support.	Teacher Consultant Role and Responsibilities
10. Link and coordinate with other state initiatives focused on improving outcomes for students.	Collaboration with Michigan's Integrated Improvement Initiatives (MI3)

Statement of Compliance With Federal Law

The Michigan Department of Education complies with all Federal laws and regulations prohibiting discrimination and with all requirements and regulations of the U.S. Department of Education.

Compliance with Title IX

What Title IX is: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is the landmark federal law that bans sex discrimination in schools, whether it is in curricular, extra-curricular or athletic activities.

Title IX states: "No person in the U.S. shall, on the basis of sex be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal aid."

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is in compliance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, as amended, 20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq. (Title IX), and its implementing regulation, at 34 C.F.R. Part 106, which prohibits discrimination based on sex. The MDE, as a recipient of federal financial assistance from the United States Department of Education (USDOE), is subject to the provisions of Title IX. MDE does not discriminate based on gender in employment or in any educational program or activity that it operates.

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RESOURCES

Statewide Autism Resources and Training (START)

www.gvsu.edu/autismcenter

Autism Society of America

www.autism-society.org

Autism Society of Michigan

www.autism-mi.org

Centers for Disease Control

www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism

Michigan Education Web Sites

Michigan Department of Education

www.michigan.gov/mde

Michigan Department of Education (MDE)

Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services (OSE/EIS)

www.michigan.gov/ose-eis

Center for Educational Networking (CEN)

www.cenmi.org

Michigan's Integrated Improvement Initiatives (MI3)

www.cenmi.org/MI3

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