High School Experiences of Adolescents with ASD: Perspectives from Multiple Stakeholders


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CSESA is a 5-year research and development project that focuses on developing, adapting, and studying a comprehensive school and community-based education program for high school students on the autism spectrum.

**Components:**
- Academic
- Social Competence
- Transition and Families
- Adaptive Behavior and Independence

**Purpose**
Conduct focus groups prior to component development to:
- Explore contexts, considerations, and complexities of delivering interventions for high school students with ASD
- Gather perspective of practitioners, parents, and other key stakeholders

**Research Questions**
1. How are the transition-related needs of adolescents with ASD currently being addressed in secondary schools?
2. What considerations and challenges might arise when implementing interventions for adolescents with ASD?
3. What professional development, resources, and supports are needed to address the transition-related needs of adolescents with ASD?

**Participants**
- 28 Focus Groups held across 4 states (i.e., North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Wisconsin)
- Number of Participants = 152
- Group size varied from 2-11 participants (Mdn = 5)

**Data Analysis Process**
- Initial research questions reviewed and finalized by CSESA Focus Group Committee
- Proposed process for coding cross-site focus groups

**Findings**
- Research Question 1 – Current Practices
  - Participants feel strongly that secondary schools are efficiently addressing educational needs of students with ASD
  - Existing intervention efforts described as ineffectual and/or inconsistent
  - Suitable programs and transition services for students with ASD few and far between

- Research Question 2 - Implementation
  - High concern around feasibility of implementation
  - Skill level
  - Educator and parental “buy in”
  - Challenged by wide-ranging needs of students with ASD

- Research Question 3 – Professional Development & Supports
  - Need for professional development related to autism especially needed for general educators
  - Effective professional development challenged by “too much” on educators’ plates and attending to “buy in”

**Conclusion**
- Concerted and coordinated intervention efforts needed within secondary schools.
- Educators currently lack a strong, research-based foundation upon which to guide their intervention decisions.
- Careful consideration of stakeholder perspectives and practices critical to any effort to implement comprehensive interventions.
- Essential that interventions are tailored to address diverse and individualized needs of students with ASD.
- Strong, creative, and compelling professional development processes and resources to prepare practitioners.
- Broader efforts to ensure basic awareness of ASD across secondary schools.

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**Publication**