

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



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Background

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-or are anticipated- when implementing interventions for adolescent with ASD?
3. What professional development, resources, and supports are needed to address the transition-related needs of adolescents with ASD well?

Publication

Kucharczyk, S., Reutebuch, C.K., Carter, E.W., Hedges, S., El Zein, F., Fan, H., & Gustafson, J. R. (in press). Addressing the needs of adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder: considerations and complexities for high school interventions. *Exceptional Children*.

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)

Variables	Parents/ caregivers	Individuals with ASD	Educators	Administrators	Service provider or community member	All study participants
Focus groups	10	1	9	5	3	28
N	47	6	45	30	24	152
Race/ethnicity*						
Black	7	1	7	1	1	17
Hispanic	1	0	2	0	1	4
Multi-racial	2	1	5	2	2	12
White	38	4	35	27	19	123
Gender						
Female	45	1	38	27	22	133
Male	2	5	7	3	2	19
Age						
18 or under	0	3	0	0	0	3
19-25	-	1	5	0	2	8
26-40	4	2	22	10	13	51
41-55	35	0	14	12	6	67
56 or over	8	0	4	8	3	23

Focus Group Process

- Facilitated by 11 university-based personnel
- Presentation of CSESA and 1-2 Components
 - 9 focus groups covered Social Competence
 - 7 focus groups covered Transition and Families
 - 7 focus groups covered Adaptive Behavior & Independence
 - 6 focus groups covered Academic
- Facilitation of core questions

Examples:

How might this approach look similar or different for students all along the autism spectrum?
How would implementing this intervention align with other interventions strategies you are already implementing with students with autism.

- Facilitation of intervention questions

Examples:

Which aspects of the proposed intervention strike you as most or least promising for improving "social competence"?
How do you see the transition and family component supporting your child's overall educational plan/goals?

- Adaptation – additional materials were developed to support the participation of the members of the adolescent group

How does a focus group work?

- Everyone gets a turn to talk.
- All answers are okay. It's okay if your answer is different than someone else's.
- If you don't want to answer you can say "I pass".
- What other people say is private.

Findings

Research Question 1 – Current Practices

- Participants feel strongly that secondary schools are insufficiently addressing educational needs of students with ASD
- Existing intervention efforts described as ineffective and/or inconsistent
- Suitable programs and transition services for students with ASD few and far between

"I'm seeing a whole lot of that [social skills] falling to the wayside come middle school and high school." - parent

"If you're lucky, there's at least one person in the school that's willing to address [needs of adolescents with ASD]. You go to School A at this end of the road and School B at this end of the road, and you have completely different views about what autism and what goes with it looks like." - service provider

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

"These individuals that are classified as ASD...it really is a huge spectrum. And that to me is the most troubling aspect. What you are trying to tackle here...you just have a huge gamut of issues that you're trying to deal with." - parent

"I have to make a choice about how much effort I put into ensuring it's implemented with fidelity. I have to know if I do it as directed, I'm more likely to get results." - educator

"My sister's a regular education teacher and she'll get these IEPs and have all these goals and modifications she needs to do and these combinations. She doesn't know if the kid is learning-disabled, if they have autism, if they have an intellectual disability...so she has a lack of knowledge across the board. She doesn't know how to address his needs, just what the goals are." - special educator

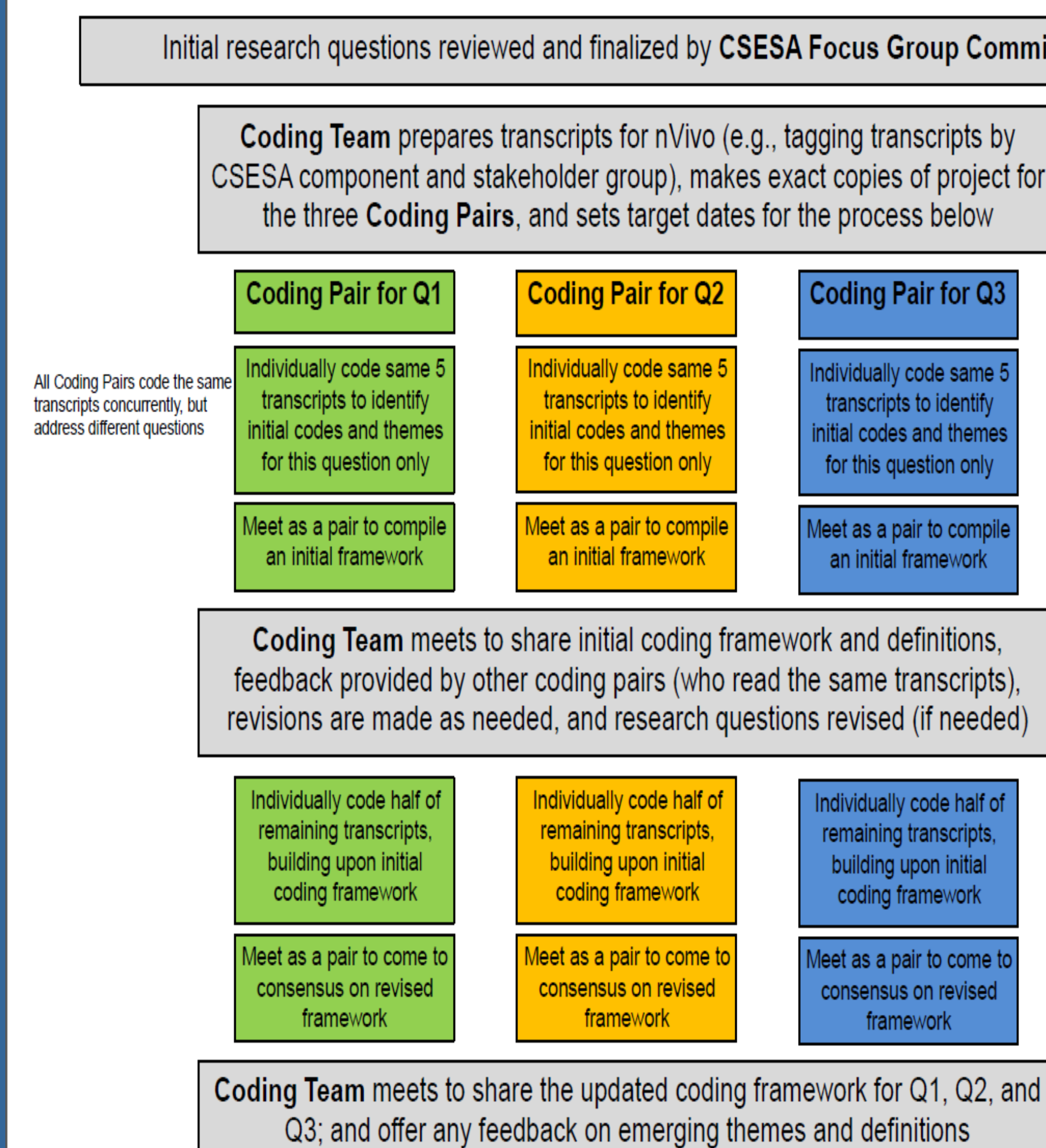
"...I'm thinking about even with autism training in general, teachers have a lot. They have the whole staff. They have so many things. Yes, they have students with autism, but they have students with a lot of disabilities...they have a lot." - educator

Research Question 3 – Professional Development & Supports

- Need for awareness of autism across secondary school stakeholders
- 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"

Data Analysis Process

Proposed Process for Coding Cross-site Focus Groups



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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