



# Using Peer Mediated Strategies to Increase Social Competence in Students with Autism

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# CSESA (The Center on Secondary Education for Students with Autism)

The Center on Secondary Education for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (CSESA) is a research and development project funded by the U.S. Department of Education that focuses on developing, adapting, and studying a comprehensive school and community-based education program for high school students on the autism spectrum.





# A social picture

- Six percent of teens with autism have reported that they frequently see friends outside of school
- Eighty-four percent reported that they never or rarely receives phone calls from friends
- Fifty percent of students with autism claimed they have not been invited to other youth's social activities during the past year

Wagner, Cadwallader, & Marder (2003)



## What are peer mediated interventions?

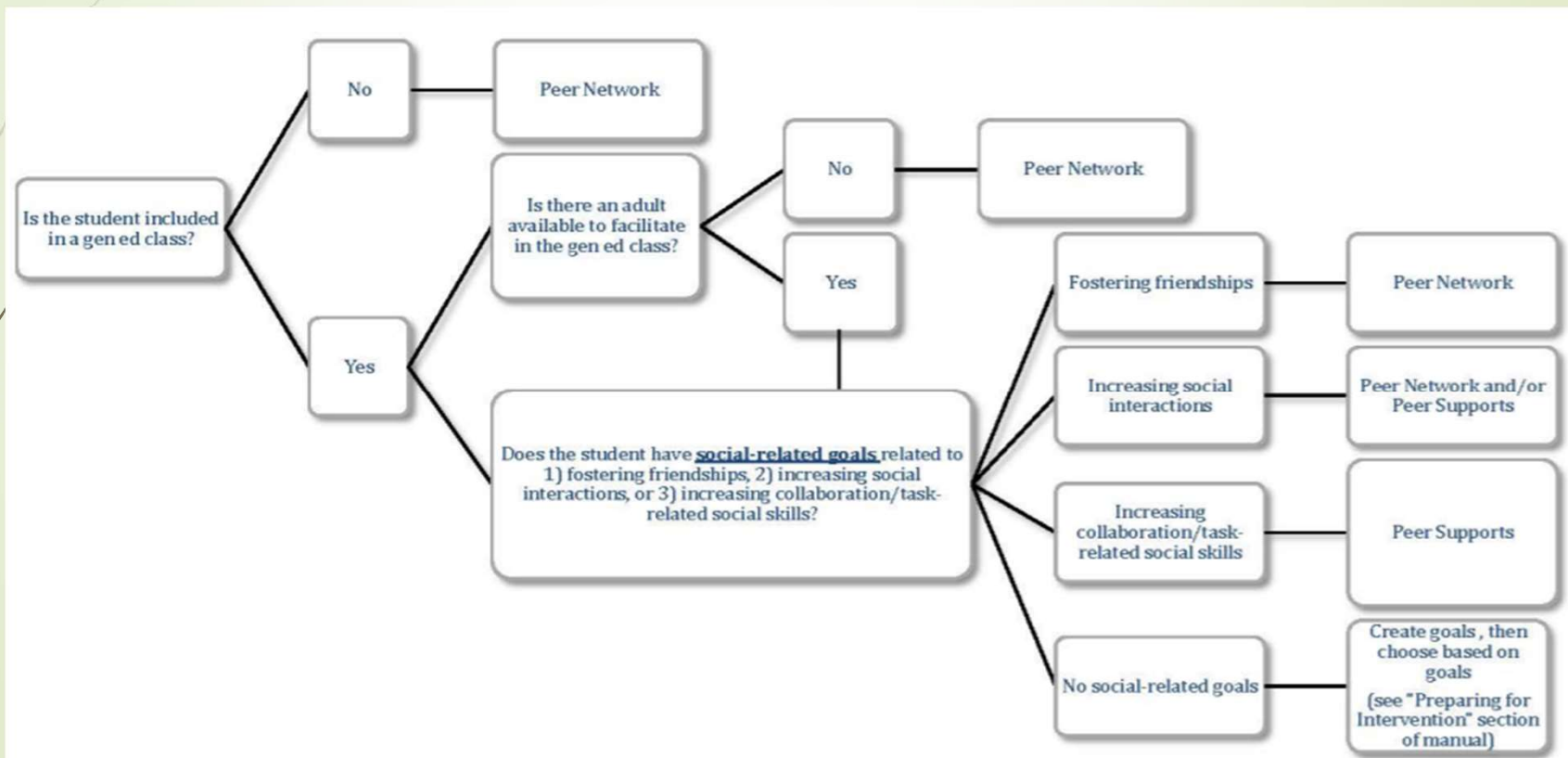
Peer mediated strategies are a recognized evidence based practice where facilitators teach students and peers ways to interact with and help learners with ASD acquire new social skills by increasing social opportunities within an authentic setting.




# Why use peer mediated interventions?

- They are easy to implement because it can be done during the school day and across the school setting
- Both the students can benefit from the intervention
- The student with ASD can practice with someone close to their age in a more relaxed and natural setting in order to meet their social goals and generalize these skills over to different settings
- The peer can use a variety of evidence based practices such as modeling, prompting, scripting, etc in order to not only help the student with autism with their social skills, but also with independence
- Very little (if any!) cost involved
- Peer-mediated arrangements substantially increase social engagement and foster social connections
- Reduced need for teacher support

# Decision Tree on what Peer Intervention to Implement






# Peer Networks

## What is a peer network?

A social group of students established around a student with a disability that

- Meets weekly to talk, participate in a shared activity, and discuss interactions that occur outside the group
  - Helps the student become more involved in everyday school life, norms, and cultures
  - Receives regular feedback and guidance from an adult facilitator
- 



# Goals of Peer Network

- Provide an intentional way for a student with a disability to meet new people and, hopefully, make new friends
- Increase the number of peers with whom a student with a disability regularly interacts
- Provide peers with opportunities to get to know a student with a disability
- Increase school participation of a student with a disability
- Help develop relationships that will last beyond the network
- May help to increase independence for the student with ASD





# Steps for implementing peer networks

- ❖ Identify students with a ASD that would benefit from a peer network
- ❖ Identify a network facilitator (teacher, paraprofessional, counselor, etc.)
- ❖ Invite 3-6 peers to join the group (Per student)
- ❖ Hold an orientation and training meeting with the peers
- ❖ Facilitate regular peer network meetings (Arrange a shared activity in which all members of the group can participate and enjoy, check-in on weekly social contacts, encourage expansion of the network)
- ❖ Provide feedback and support
- ❖ Fade adult support and maintain the network



## By meeting weekly with fidelity

- ❖ Peer network members, including the student with a disability, can interact and informally discuss weekly interactions
- ❖ Gives an opportunity to model and facilitate peer interactions
- ❖ Peers and the student with a disability can consider how to extend the Peer Network beyond the school day



# Implementation at two schools

- Settings- two high schools, one affluent, one served under Title 1
- Student population-students ranged on the spectrum from high functioning and on the general education diploma track to students who were on an adapted curriculum. Most students were verbal and a few were non-verbal
- Facilitators who showed interest in the intervention were chosen and trained, they also received ongoing coaching and support throughout the course of the intervention
- Students were nominated by faculty and staff as potential peers and given orientation
- Peer networks met weekly for 45 minutes during lunch time with choices of games as well as conversation starters



# Findings

Most students came every week with fidelity

Students reported eagerly anticipating the weekly sessions

Adult facilitators found that they were able to fade support quickly

Teachers reported seeing increased interaction outside of the network between the student with ASD and their network

Students with ASD in the network report having friends and have joined clubs with their friends, or gone to social events with people from their network, such as prom

Peers in the network state that it has been beneficial for them as well become more aware of differences and how to foster these relationships

Teachers were able to take data on IEP goals in a natural setting and see how skills are generalizing over and noted an increase in students meeting their annual goals (and at a faster rate)



## Peer Support Plans

### What are Peer support plans?

A strategic written plan in which a student is matched with a student with ASD to provide support inside the classroom.

#### Peers...


- Facilitate student participation in class activities
- Provide frequent feedback and encouragement
- Model communication and other skills
- Promote interaction with classmates
- Support progress related to IEP goals
- Support current behavior intervention plans, as appropriate





# Goals of a Peer Support Plan

- Provide an intentional way for a student with a disability to receive support within the classroom
- Have a chance for interaction with a peer with whom a student with a disability regularly interacts
- Provide peers with opportunities to get to know a student with a disability
- Increase school participation of a student with a disability
- Decreases need for teacher and paraprofessional support
- May help to increase independence for the student with ASD



# Steps for Implementing Peer Networks

- Identifying students with ASD who need assistance to participate in class activities
- Recruiting peers from within the same classroom to help provide some of these supports
- Arranging for students to sit next to each other during class activities
- Orienting peers to their roles and showing them basic strategies for supporting the academic and social participation of their classmate
- Providing ongoing monitoring, feedback, and assistance to peers and their partners throughout the semester, as needed
- Shifting paraprofessionals to a broader support role within the classroom through which they assist all students, as directed by the teacher



### Example One of Peer Support Plan

The Biology class is a great place for Brad to work on goals related to developing social and conversational skills, as well as expanding his typing and writing skills. Below are some ideas for how Brad might become more involved in class activities during Biology, as well as some ideas for how the peers at Brad's table could support him.

#### At the beginning of class....

Brad could...	Peers could...	The facilitator could...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk quietly with his peers (when it is okay with the teacher)</li> <li>• Pass out worksheets or other materials to the class (if there are any that day)</li> <li>• Listen and respond to Ms. Hale do attendance</li> <li>• Boot up his laptop, if he will be taking notes in class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask Brad about his day or upcoming school events</li> <li>• Help Brad pass out any worksheets</li> <li>• Make sure Brad has all of the same materials for class, such as a book, worksheets, lab materials, etc.</li> <li>• Help Brad get out his notebook, pen, paper, etc. for class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to draw some of the peers at the table into conversation with Brad—you may have to do some modeling or give them some ideas of things they could ask about or prompt Brad to ask questions of his peers</li> <li>• Make sure Brad has the same materials as his classmates, such as a book, any worksheets, paper, pencil, lab materials, etc.</li> <li>• Look through the materials quickly to see if there are any things that could be adapted readily</li> </ul>

## At the beginning of class...

## Lectures or whole group instruction...

#### When there are lectures or whole group instruction...

Brad could...	Peers could...	The facilitator could...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to Ms. Hale as she presents information to the class</li> <li>• Quietly ask his peers questions about the material Ms. Hale is presenting</li> <li>• Take notes by typing important specific key words or phrases that are being written down by a peer (preferably) or the facilitator</li> <li>• Copy by hand those same key words or phrases with the facilitator's help or highlight notes</li> <li>• Turn off/on the lights when Ms. Hale is using the overhead projector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure Brad has all of the same materials for the activity as they do</li> <li>• As you are taking your own notes, copy down on a separate piece of paper some of the important words or ideas from the class discussion; Brad can then type these as his own notes or copy them down with the facilitator's help. Write fairly large so Brad can see clearly.</li> <li>• Periodically check to make sure Brad is doing okay with typing or writing his notes</li> <li>• Occasionally lean over and quietly summarize a key point or interesting fact for Brad, or ask him simple questions that help him follow along</li> <li>• Encourage Brad with lots of positive feedback!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure Brad has the same materials as his classmates</li> <li>• Always brainstorm ways Brad can be engaged in the discussion: Can he answer a question? Can he share an idea?</li> <li>• Help Brad to take modified notes by typing key words/phrases on the laptop (preferred) or writing them out by hand</li> <li>• Encourage Brad to look at Ms. Hale or the whiteboard as instruction is taking place</li> <li>• Let the peers know when they are doing a great job interacting with or supporting Brad</li> <li>• Prompt Brad to ask his peers to double check his notes</li> </ul>



## Findings in two schools

- Teachers were able to collect data on IEP goals
- Teachers and paraprofessionals were able to fade support for the student and were able to spend more time giving direct whole group instruction and support
- Both students reported that there was a mutual benefit
- The student with ASD became more independent and the peer was able to scaffold support



# Outcomes

- ❖ Considerable improvements in the peer interactions, (durable) social contacts, and (lasting) friendships of students with ASD
- ❖ Beneficial for peers without disabilities in terms of changed views, expectations, and friendships
- ❖ Considered feasible and acceptable by peers, staff, parents, and other stakeholders; highly valued and low-/no-cost
- ❖ Easy to implement throughout the school



# Thank you!

## Resources

<http://www.engagingalllearners.ca/sal/peer-mentoring/index.php>

[http://www.pattan.net/Videos/Browse/Training%20Series/Starting+Points+and+Possibilities+Promoting+Inclusion+Learning+and+Relationships+for+Students+with+Complex+Needs/Single/?code+name=starting+points+and+possibilities+\\_peer1](http://www.pattan.net/Videos/Browse/Training%20Series/Starting+Points+and+Possibilities+Promoting+Inclusion+Learning+and+Relationships+for+Students+with+Complex+Needs/Single/?code+name=starting+points+and+possibilities+_peer1)

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