Multi-informant Assessment of Transition-Related Skills and Skill Importance in Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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The Center on Secondary Education for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (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.

- Post-high school outcomes are particularly bleak for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). One maleable contributor to post-school outcomes is the quality of the transition plans developed as part of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP).
- The Secondary School Success Checklist (SSSC) is a new measure developed to allow students across the spectrum to describe their current skill level in transition-related domains as well as rank their priorities for goal setting, thus actively contributing to the transition planning process.
- The SSSC is designed to collect data from the perspective of multiple informants including the student, their parents, and the student’s teacher.

Participants

- The parent version of the SSSC included 105 items and the student version of the SSSC had 25 items (see Figure for example)
- Both sets of items were representative of four key domains: independent behavior, transition, social, and academic
- For each item, participants indicated on a Likert-type scale if the behavior was:
  0 = not like student
  1 = like student
  2 = much like student
- Respondents also provided a priority ranking for learning each item. The priority raking was used to calculate the proportion of students who “really wanted to learn” each skill
- Priority ratings on the SSSC were collapsed from three levels (0, 1, 2) to two categories (0 vs 1 and 2, combining “sort of want to learn” or minor concern and “really want to learn” or major concern)

Analysis

- Analyses were primarily descriptive with statistical tests of key relationships. Summaries of individual responses to SSSC items were provided for skill estimates by three informants: adolescents, parents, and teachers. Tests of mean differences on each item enabled comparisons and contrasts between informants.
- Differences between informants were estimated via 3-level HLM analyses.

Skill Levels and Differences Between Informants

- Random effects for school largely non-significant with z-scores ranging from 0.33 to 1.95 and only three tests significant at p < .05. The intercepts for student, however did tend to be highly significant with z-scores ranging from 1.55 to 6.80 and only one non-significant, p = .0602 result.

Measure

- The table indicates the percentage of respondents who identified that learning the skill was a priority (rating of 1 or 2) as well as a percentage of respondents who identified the skills as a high priority (rating of 2).

Table 2. Priorities indicating an SSSC item is a priority and high priority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Adolescents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating 1</td>
<td>92.9 (10.2)</td>
<td>93.3 (10.5)</td>
<td>91.3 (11.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating 2</td>
<td>76.8 (14.5)</td>
<td>77.0 (13.8)</td>
<td>76.4 (12.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>169.7 (23.7)</td>
<td>170.3 (24.3)</td>
<td>177.7 (24.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

- Findings from over 500 adolescents with ASD across the United States indicate discrepancies between adolescent, teacher, and parent ratings of skills highlighting the importance of the inclusion of multiple perspectives in transition planning.
- Although ratings varied, agreement between adolescents with ASD, parents, and teachers across the highest and lowest rated skills suggests the need to broaden the focus on critical transition skills to include problem solving, planning for life after high school, and self-advocacy.