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US Pilot Curriculum for Transitioning Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders from High School to College and the Workforce

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Abstract

Objectives: Few, evidence-based programs have been developed to prepare social skills for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) transitioning to the workplace or college setting.

This article describes a pilot curriculum developed for Tarrant County College (TCC) to address the transitional needs of high school students with ASD to a vocation or college.

Methods: TCC enrolled 123 high school students across the ASD who were taught a 2-h, 2-semester course on how to apply for college as well as employment applications, job interviews, and interpersonal skills. Work preparation and college preparatory skills such as communicating with professors regarding specific student learning accommodations were also included. Publicly available enrollment TCC data were utilized to describe the curricular program outcomes.

Program Outcomes: No statistically significant success rate increase was identified among enrolled ASD students obtaining college acceptance by participating in the TCC program. However, 14 students were successful in attaining employment. TCC enrollment data also showed that 1 course addressing high school ASD students' transitional needs to a vocation or college is not enough to ensure student success.

Conclusion: Ongoing mentorship and advising should play a major role in the development of several semester long transitional courses to assist ASD students as they seek employment or a college program. Such a curriculum should include parental support and ongoing employer and college advisor communication regarding curriculum expectations for long-term success in the lives of ASD students, as they gain the skills requisite for independent living.

Keywords: Autism · College · Vocation · Career · High school

Biography

Dr. KL Johnson, DrPH, MS, MA, CCC-SLP, CPH, CAS, CPCRT is a multi-lingual, nationally certified speech-language pathologist, linguist, certified autism specialist, certified public health researcher and certified in the therapy of vital stim and cognitive rehabilitation. A Fort Worth native, Dr. Johnson is passionate about educational and research pursuits lending her talents as an expert working with culturally and linguistically diverse children with an array of neurogenic communication disorders. As a full time healthcare specialist, Dr. Johnson is highly sought after with her expertise among multi-lingual and cultural pediatric populations with special health-care needs children. As a multi-state licensed and internationally certified healthcare provider, Dr. Johnson is a valuable asset working with multidisciplinary teams to provide cost-effective, evidence-based healthcare both locally and worldwide.