

Minnesota Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Needs Survey 2011-12

Executive Summary

Survey Overview: The Minnesota Department of Education and the Autism Society of Minnesota conducted a statewide survey in November 2011 for the purpose of identifying training needs to improve delivery of services through focused professional development and training as well as get feedback from parents to identify statewide educational needs and strengths in order to improve delivery of services for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in Minnesota schools. As Minnesota's child count for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) now stands at 15,378 individuals from Birth to 21 years old with a primary disability of ASD, and which represents 12% of all students who are receiving special education services, it has become more critical to identify professional development needs and continue preparing educators to provide needed services.

This final report represents an analysis of the results collected from this ASD Survey completed with educators and parents. This Executive Summary includes two sections. Part I, the Educator Survey represents results from 818 educators in all 11 regions the state. The largest groups responding were teachers (45%), related service providers (30%) and paraprofessional (2%) and other educators (23%). Responses were generally representative of the percentages of students with ASD served in the metro area (56%) and greater Minnesota regions. In Part II, the Parent Survey includes and summarizes the perspectives of 407 parents/caregivers throughout the state of Minnesota whose children receive services from 106 public school districts, 3 intermediate districts, and 25 other schools (charters, private, etc.).

Part I - Educator Survey

Key areas of strength that were identified by educators within each age group in the survey included:

- Birth-5 years: Ensuring that parents are collaborative team members throughout the evaluation process and program implementation.
- School Aged 6-13 years: Participating in comprehensive assessments, including the evaluation process.
- Transition 14-21 years: Preparing for successful transitions beyond school including knowledge of post-secondary education option (PSEO) courses, workforce centers, and independent living centers in order to help prepare students for post-secondary education, employment, and living in their communities.

Selected findings of the educator survey were:

1. Professionally licensed educators reported they are accessing a wide range of professional development activities. They identified "in district workshops" as the predominant source where they have received training (71%) followed by regional workshops (57%), and college/university courses (34%). The Autism Society of Minnesota was identified 54% of the time as a co-sponsor for training through its workshops and conference combined.
2. When asked the mode of training they preferred, most responded with "all day workshop" (96%), followed by partial day training (93%), and community based coaching and mentoring (79%).
3. Barriers to attending or receiving training most often were related to cost (77%), time (69%), scheduling/days offered (41%), and staff/class coverage (28%).
4. Paraprofessionals were reported to be providing a major portion of the support services for students with ASD. For school aged children (6-13 years), educators reported that majority of paraprofessionals (56%) are working with students with ASD almost half of the instructional day.

5. When educators were asked about the largest barriers for successful transition for 14-21 olds, (in the areas of post-secondary education, employment, and independent living), they responded the largest barriers were inadequate life skills, social skills, and self-advocacy skills for students with ASD.

Conclusions from Educator Survey

From the educator survey, three predominant “need” areas for children with ASD were identified: (1) paraprofessional training, (2) social skills development, and (3) life skills development. These are consistent with three primary conclusions identified from the Parent Survey in Part II. Educators reported that paraprofessionals were being utilized a significant amount of time providing services for children with ASD and parents also echoed this in the Parent Survey. This would indicate that paraprofessionals would benefit from ASD training. In addition, educators reported a deficit for social skills for students, particularly those entering post-secondary, employment, and vocational education opportunities, despite the fact that parents indicated that this was an area that was being worked on across K-12 with increasing levels of focus as the child got older. Educators also reported that children continued to have deficits in life skills that were impacting their long term success. Life skills include such areas as communication, safety, pursuing interests, sensory processing, self-regulation, independence, and self-advocacy. This data suggest that social skills and life skills both need to have an increased focus in educational programming.

Educator Survey Highlights

In the summary table below, the selected items are grouped by survey category or age group. Corresponding “strengths” and “needs” identified by the survey are listed here and ranked by their identified priority.

Category: Evidence Based Practices (Question #10)	STRENGTHS	NEEDS
Presented with a list of seventeen evidence based practices identified by the National Professional Development Center on ASD, educators rated how well prepared they were to implement each. “Well prepared” are indicated here as Strengths and “Minimally-Not prepared” as Needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual Supports: any tool presented visually that supports an individual as he/she moves through the day. Visual supports might include, but are not limited to, pictures, written words, objects within the environment, arrangement of the environment or visual boundaries, schedules, maps, labels, organization systems, timelines, and scripts. • Intervention based on Behavioral Principles: including prompting, reinforcement, task analysis, time delay, differential reinforcement, extinction/response interruption. • Social Narratives: interventions that describe social situations in some detail by highlighting relevant cues and offering examples of appropriate responding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pivotal Response Training (PRT): method of systematically applying the scientific principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA) to teach learners with ASD. PRT builds on learner initiative and interests, and is particularly effective for developing communication, language, play, and social behaviors. • Voice Output Communication Aide: electronic devices that are portable in nature and can produce either synthetic or digital speech for the user. Speech Generating Devices may be used with graphic symbols, as well as with alphabet keys. • Parent Implemented Interventions: entails parents directly using individualized intervention practices with their child to increase positive learning opportunities and acquisition of important skills. Parents learn to implement such practices in their home and/or community through a structured parent training program.
Category: Related Services (Question #20)	STRENGTHS	NEEDS
Related services staff were asked what information or training they would like to receive on ASD. Those topics identified most often are indicated as Needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional Behavior Assessment • Multi-Disciplinary Training • Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Management & Emotional Regulation • Behavior • Social Skills

Category: Birth – 5 Years (Question #22)	STRENGTHS	NEEDS
In the area of Birth-5, educators were asked if they felt they had the training, skills, and tools to educate children in this age range for eighteen different key areas considered essential to serving children with ASD. Those activities they identified as less prepared for are indicated as Needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that parents are collaborative team members throughout the evaluation and program implementation • Collaborate with other team members to address challenging behaviors and develop a proactive plan • Engage parents in problem solving and ongoing program modification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train or educate other team members in the use of evidence based practices • Implement a comprehensive program for addressing all areas of need in multiple environments • Train parents in the use of effective interventions
Category: School Aged (6-13 years) (Question #26, 27)	STRENGTHS	NEEDS
Educators working with students with ASD 6-13 years of age were asked how well they were prepared to perform a specific list of nine educational activities. Those activities they identified as less prepared for are indicated as Needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in comprehensive assessments, including eligibility determination. • Collaborating with general education teachers and related staff service providers to ensure comprehensive programming. • Analyzing data from IEP goals and objectives to make instructional decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing standards-based IEP goals and objectives based on individual student need. • Evaluating, planning, and teaching students with linguistic and cultural differences. • Preparing paraprofessionals to implement instructional programs for students in mainstream or other classroom where you aren't present.
Educators were asked to rate their level of need for training in the following curricular areas for students with ASD. Those subject areas identified most often are indicated as Needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science • Math 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Skills Training • Modification/Adaptation for Specific Subject Areas
Category: Transition (14-21 years) (Question # 29,30,31, 32)	STRENGTHS	NEEDS
For preparing students for post-secondary and training, educators were asked to rate their training need in six areas. Areas rated with highest levels of need for staff training in these categories are indicated as Needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-Secondary Educational Option (PSEO) courses • College or university program (4 yr. programs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term education or employment training program • Preparation programs for courses for college life (i.e. life skills for college, social skills training)
For preparing students for employment, educators were asked to rate their level of training need in seven areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Centers • Vocational Rehabilitation Services (inc. job development, job search, job placement assistance, job retention) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Skills Training for Employment • Employment skill development (Work-Based Learning)
For preparing students for independent living, educators were asked to rate their level of training need in five areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Living Centers • Public Health Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Social Services • Applied for Residential/Housing Supports

Part II - Parent Survey

Key strength areas that were identified in the parent portion of the survey included:

- Children are being medically diagnosed with ASD at earlier ages as compared to older children with ASD.
- Primary Care Physicians appear to be increasing their involvement in medical diagnosis.
- Parents rated their level of satisfaction with educational services highest with during preschool years, for infants-toddlers (76%) and 3-5yr olds (79%)

Selected findings of the parent survey were:

1. Paraprofessional services are viewed as one of the key special education services their children with ASD receive and parents reported paraprofessional services typically start at age 6 and continue through age 21, and parents of children in various age groups report paraprofessional services varying from a high for the 6-13 year old group (65%) to the 18-21 year old group (47%).
2. Parents of children birth – school aged (6-13 years of age) commented on the barriers they have been unable to overcome in the educational system. These barriers included securing adequate special education services as well as working with untrained school staff.
3. In terms of community and private family supports, the services families have utilized most often have been support groups (50%), individual counseling (44%), summer programs/camps for children with ASD (39%) respite care (33%), and family counseling (33%).
4. Advocacy organizations most frequently used for services are Autism Society of Minnesota (71%), PACER Center (62%), and Arc Chapters (38%). Sixty-six other organizations were also listed.
5. For children 14-17 years of age, parents reported (77%) that their school didn't prepare them for what would happen after their child graduated.
6. For children 21 years and older, parents reported (56%) that they did not feel the education their child received prepared them to retain a job.

Conclusion from Parents Survey

From the parent survey, three predominant “need” areas for children with ASD were identified: (1) paraprofessional training, (2) social skills development, and (3) life skills development. These are consistent with three primary conclusions identified from the Educator Survey in Part I. Paraprofessionals were found to be spending a significant amount of time supporting children with ASD, which would indicate they would benefit from training. Social skills were indicated as an area being worked on across K-12 with more focus as the child got older. However, educators reported a continued deficit for social skills for students entering post-secondary, employment, and vocational education opportunities. Likewise, life skills which include such areas as sensory processing, communication, safety, pursuing interests, self-regulation, independence, and self-advocacy emerged as a need area. Parents of school aged children 6-13 years old reported the lowest level of focus on life skills while parents of children 18 and older reported a focus rate three times that of school aged children. Nevertheless, educators reported that children continued to have deficits in these areas that were impacting long term success. Data for life and social skills may indicate a need to increase focus in these areas earlier in a child's education.

Parent Survey Highlights

In the summary table below, the selected items are grouped by survey category or age group. Corresponding “strengths” and “needs” identified by the survey are listed here and ranked by their identified priority.

Category: School Age (6-13 years) (Question #80)	STRENGTHS	NEEDS
Parents were asked to rate the need for teacher training for seven areas. Those areas identified most often are indicated as Needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using Assistive Technology more effectively for my child (ren) with ASD. • Tracking my child's progress and making adjustments in teaching were needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using teaching practices that are effective for child (ren) with ASD. • Teaching social skills to my child (ren) with ASD.
Category: Transition (14-17 years) (Question # 89)	STRENGTHS	NEEDS
Parents were asked to rate how their child's school is preparing them for success after graduation in five areas. Areas of needing improvement are indicated as Needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home/Independent Living • Recreation & Leisure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment/Job Training • Post-Secondary Education & Other Learning Opportunities
Category: Transition (18-21 years) (Questions #96 & 97)	STRENGTHS	NEEDS
Parents were asked to rate to what extent they felt a series of thirteen areas was important to their child's success. Areas rated of needing improvement are indicated as Needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of Volunteer Opportunities • Availability of Post-Secondary Education Opportunities • Availability of Housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability of educators, employers, & service providers to meet individual needs of those with ASD. • Availability of Employment Opportunities • A coordinated system of services across lifespan. • Ability of health care providers to treat individuals with ASD.
Parents were asked how well prepared they felt in assisting their child in twelve areas. Areas rated of needing improvement are indicated as Needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthcare (including private insurance & govern. programs such as Medical Assistance, Minnesota Care, etc.) • Recreational Activities • Healthcare providers who are knowledgeable about persons with ASD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Mentoring Opportunities • Self-Advocacy training • Social Support Groups
Category: Transition (21+ years) (Questions # 102 & 104)	STRENGTHS	NEEDS
Parents were asked to rate to what extent they felt a series of fourteen areas was important to their child's success. Areas rated of needing improvement are indicated as Needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of post-secondary educational opportunities • Availability for peer mentoring opportunities • Availability of volunteer opportunities • Availability of recreational activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of autism specific trainings for educators, employers, and service providers • A coordinated system of services • Ability of educators, employers, and service providers to meet individual needs of those with ASD • Availability of Employment opportunities
Parents were asked how well prepared they felt in assisting their child in twelve areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer opportunities • Recreational activities • Employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Mentoring opportunities • Social Support groups • Self-advocacy training

If you would like additional information regarding the Part I - Educator Survey portion of the ASD Survey, please contact Phil Sievers, Specialist for Autism Spectrum Disorders, Minnesota Department of Education, phil.sievers@state.mn.us, (651) 582-8607 or for information on the Part – II Parent Survey portion of the ASD Survey, please contact Sherrie Kenny, Executive Director, Autism Society of Minnesota at skenny@ausm.org, (651) 647-1083.