



# Texas Beacons of Excellence

A Partnership Led by:



## RESEARCH SUMMARY

### Competitive Employment for Transition-Aged Youth with Significant Impact from Autism: A Multi-site Randomized Clinical Trial

#### A Quick Look

The unemployment of youth with a significant impact from ASD is a major societal problem. Youth with ASD are the most likely disability group to leave school without competitive employment with a significant number exiting school unemployed. While federal legislation has mandated enhanced services for transition during recent years, via the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act reauthorization (IDEIA 2004) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA 2014), many young adults with ASD still face unemployment and underemployment upon leaving secondary education settings.

This outcome occurs after hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent in both public and private school education for these students from approximately 2 to 3 years old up through 18 to 21 years of age.

This study reports the results of a multisite, parallel block randomized clinical trial to expand the previous findings regarding the implementation of Project SEARCH plus ASD Supports (PS + ASD) on employment outcomes upon graduation from high school. Participants were 156 individuals with significant impact from ASD between the ages of 18–21.

This study poses the questions:

- What we are doing, or perhaps not doing, in the specialized education of students with ASD that leads to an absence of competitive employment?
- What happens to these students as they become adults?

This research engaged in a series of studies to develop, research, and document an evidence-based practice that could lead to CIE.

#### Key Findings

- Evidence highlights the tremendous need to improve transition outcomes for adults with ASD.
- Demographically, young adults with ASD appear to be at an even higher risk for unemployment when compared both across disability categories and to older adults with ASD.
- Of all individuals sampled with ASD, transition-age youth comprised the largest portion of individuals using VR services yet had the worst outcomes of any age group.
- Individuals with ASD and co-morbid intellectual disabilities (ID) are observed to attain even lower rates of employment (14.3%) than those with ASD alone.

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- While most individuals with ASD are not employed, the few who are working tend to be underemployed and earn less than peers without disabilities.

In summary, the majority of youth with ASD continue to face severely limited opportunities to achieve meaningful paid work in adulthood.

## Putting It Into Practice

- PS + ASD requires intensive time in both the operation and implementation by all staff and students. It is important that replication sites allow ample time for the project to develop.
- In order to implement a PS + ASD site, replication sites must coordinate with and purchase training and technical assistance for Project SEARCH from Cincinnati Children's Hospital Project SEARCH developers. In addition, replication sites will need resources to fund staff and outfit the classroom with materials and supplies. These costs represent more upon start-up but also continue across the life of the project.
- Because of the unique skill sets required, there is an additional training requirement for PS + ASD staff, especially in the area of applied behavior analysis instructional and behavioral practices. Replication sites will need to account for this training.
- Interagency collaboration: Because of braided funding and program design, PS + ASD requires participation from multiple agencies. It also requires agencies to come to an agreement regarding admission and service provision. This can be a barrier in some locations.
- The PS + ASD model requires a business to participate as a host site for the project. It is helpful if that site is large enough to accommodate multiple internships while allowing staff to act as mentors to interns. Small communities that do not have access to such businesses may struggle to find business participants.

## More About this Article (Where to go from here?)

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the efficacy of a 9-month internship on competitive employment outcomes for youth with ASD.

The results demonstrate that an internship designed with specialized supports can lead to competitive employment in varied types of industries at a competitive wage for a level of hours of work that provides an excellent foundation for a long career and work history.

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