

Strategies for teaching common core to teens with autism show promise

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Credit: High school classroom in Newark, Delaware, public domain image, courtesy of Wikimedia

Scientists at UNC's Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (FPG) report that high school students with autism can learn under Common Core State Standards (CCSS), boosting their prospects for college and employment. Newly published recommendations from FPG's team also provide strategies for educating adolescents with autism under a CCSS curriculum.

"The number of [students](#) with autism who enter [high school](#) settings continues to grow," said Veronica P. Fleury, lead author and postdoctoral research associate with FPG's Center on Secondary Education for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. "Many educators may find that they're not prepared to adapt their instruction to meet both state standards and the diverse needs of these students."

In 2010, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers released the CCSS for English and mathematics in an effort to better prepare students for college and careers. According to Fleury, the greater demand for a technologically advanced workforce also makes academic skills now even more essential for [high school graduates](#).

"But the college enrollment of people with autism is among the lowest for all categories of disabilities," Fleury said. "In addition, less than 40% of the population with autism is employed—and most of those with jobs only work part-time, without benefits."

However, she said that academic performance in high school plays an important role in opportunities for a college education and employment. Yet, while the CCSS outlines expectations of what educators should teach, it provides no guidance on how to teach these skills to students with or without autism.

Fleury believes the most effective high school instruction requires understanding the complex profile of students with ASD, who possess both strengths and weaknesses.

People with autism have some social deficits and may process language at a slower rate, she said, while many also have enhanced visual processing. Some may have difficulty learning to make calculations, but others are mathematically gifted.

"It's extremely hard to draw general conclusions about academic performance for these students," Fleury said. "But adolescents with autism often do have difficulties comprehending texts, and many find writing a burdensome task."

Fleury added that work in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math) are replacing manufacturing jobs and may provide viable opportunities for many people with ASD. She said people with autism often gravitate to these fields in college, highlighting the need to equip them as [high school students](#) with skills that will enable them to compete and achieve.

"While the very structure of high school poses challenges for students with autism, being able to anticipate and understand activities, schedules, and expectations can improve their ability to respond to classroom demands," she said. "Establishing routines and creating written schedules also helps."

In a new article in *Remedial and Special Education*, Fleury and her co-authors recommended several strategies to educate students with ASD effectively, including exposing them to assignments before presenting the work in class. The researchers also noted a variety of techniques for delivering the highly explicit instruction that teenagers with autism require, such as teaching mnemonic devices for remembering steps in a task.

"High school students with ASD also need ample opportunities to practice skills across settings throughout the school day," she said. "And teaching them to monitor their own behavior can help them to use their skills in a variety of settings."

Fleury added that because there is a strong link between social and academic skills, new research should focus on developing interventions

for students with autism that can address both areas of need together.

"We know that when students with [autism](#) receive appropriate instruction and supports, many of them are capable of learning academic content that is aligned with state standards," she said. "And better academic performance often leads to a more successful outcome after high school."

Provided by Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute

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