

Parental Perception of the Transition Process and the Role of Non-School-Affiliated Professionals

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Overview:

According to the Centers for Disease Control, the number of children receiving services for a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has been steadily increasing over the years. As a result, the educational system faces the challenge of preparing this growing population for the transition to adulthood. Research examining the effects of transition out of high school on the behavior of individuals diagnosed with ASD indicates that behavioral and adaptive functioning may be negatively impacted (Taylor & Seltzer, 2010). Because many individuals diagnosed with ASD receive services outside of school (e.g., behavioral therapy), it may be helpful to include such service providers in the transition process to make it as smooth as possible.

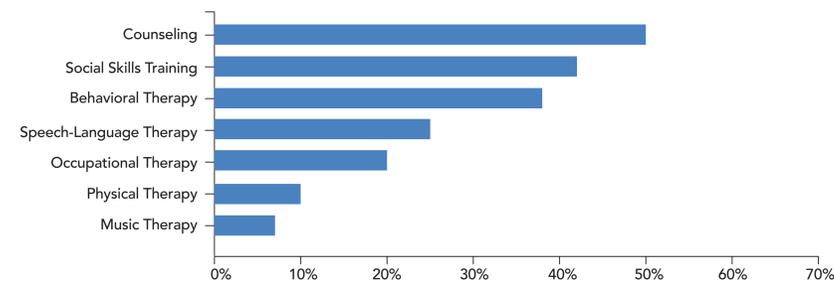
The purpose of this study was to gather online information from Maryland families with a child diagnosed with ASD, who have been through or are currently involved in the transition process, in an effort to improve transition services.

Results:

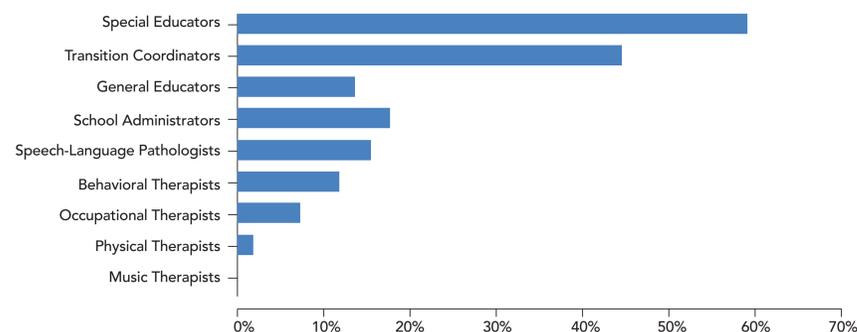
Information was gathered from over 230 participants, with at least one participant from 22 out of the 24 counties in Maryland.

Results indicate that counseling, social skills training, and behavioral therapy are the services most utilized outside of the school setting. Participants reported receiving the most support and information about the transition process from individuals within the school (e.g., school administrators, general educators, special educators, and transition specialists). However, even with the support provided by school personnel, participants reported feeling unprepared for the transition of their child out of the school setting. Approximately 58% of participants reported dissatisfaction with school-based efforts to help with transition services. Similarly, 59% of participants indicated dissatisfaction with the school system's involvement in transition planning. In fact, 84% of participants reported that they would appreciate additional support from service providers outside of the school setting.

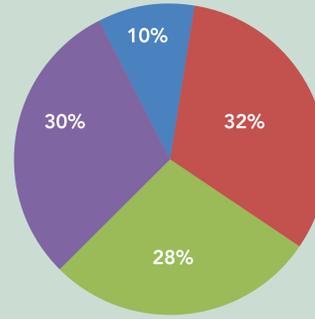
Percentage of Individuals with ASD Receiving Services



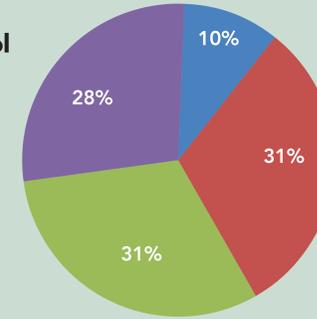
Percentage of Parents Who Received Transition Information From These Service Providers



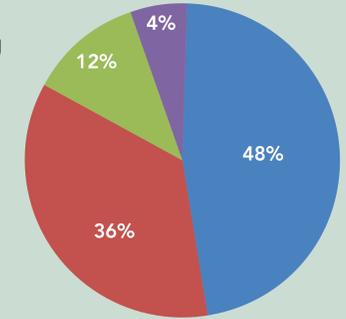
I think the school system has done a good job helping me understand transition services.



I am happy with the school system's involvement in my child's transition planning.



I would like help navigating the transition process from someone not directly involved with the school system.



Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Discussion:

Current research indicates that individuals diagnosed with ASD can be negatively impacted following exit from high school (Taylor & Seltzer, 2010). It stands to reason that if the transition out of the school setting is disruptive, or when post-secondary services are not in place immediately following the exit from high school, negative outcomes are more likely to occur. Results of this study indicate that many families of children with a diagnosis of ASD do not feel well-prepared for the transition out of the school setting. Feedback from participants indicates that parents often do not know what services are available in their immediate area and how to access those services. Additionally, although participants reported receiving support and information from school personnel, they would appreciate additional support. This suggests that it would be beneficial for service providers outside of the school setting to further assist their patients diagnosed with ASD by becoming more familiar with the transition process in Maryland.

Some organizations outside of the school system which are working to improve transition services for children diagnosed with ASD in Maryland include:

1. Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities (MCDD)
2. TransCen, Inc.
3. Maryland Consortium for Children with Special Health Care Needs
4. The Parents' Place of Maryland
5. The Arc of Maryland
6. Pathfinders for Autism
7. Autism Society of Howard County

Although there are multiple organizations working to improve the transition process for children diagnosed with ASD, participants in this study indicated that it can be difficult to access information. Thus, it will be important for these organizations, and others with the same goals, to continue to work together to increase the ease of access to transition planning resources and information. Also, it may be worthwhile for these organizations to reach out to service providers and provide them with information that can be shared with the families they serve.

What Parents are Saying:

- Transition planning "needs to start earlier."
- Maryland needs a catalog or online resource "that lets parents know what is available in each county...and what age group and level that particular entity caters to."
- "DORS is very confusing."
- "Maryland needs more resources to support young adults after transitioning from public education."
- Individuals diagnosed with ASD need to be "more involved in vocational work experiences from a much younger age..."

Special Thanks:

We would like to thank all of the dedicated professionals in the developmental disabilities community who helped this survey reach over 230 families in Maryland. Their efforts were instrumental in gathering these data on parental perception of transition services in Maryland. We would also like to thank all of the families who took the time to share their thoughts and ideas on transition services.

References:

Taylor, J.L., & Seltzer, M.M. (2010). Changes in the autism behavioral phenotype during the transition to adulthood. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 40(12), 1431-1446.

For more information, visit our website at mccd.kennedykrieger.org.



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