



The Status of Service and Support Provision for Diploma-Track High School Students on the Autism Spectrum

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The goal of the study

We wanted to learn about what services and supports are provided in high schools for students on the autism spectrum who plan to graduate with a high school diploma.

Who participated in the study?

107 special education administrators, special education and general education teachers, and related school personnel who work in Massachusetts and have experience working with diploma-track school students on the autism spectrum.

Why was the research done?

The services currently provided for high school students on the autism spectrum who plan to graduate with a diploma are not meeting their unique needs. Although these students complete high school successfully, they often struggle to complete college or find and keep jobs after high school (Roux et al., 2015).

One reason for this may be that it is difficult to balance time needed for general education academic commitments with additional supports or services necessary to prepare these students for adult life after high school (e.g., social, communication, executive function, mental health, and self-care skills; Anderson & Butt, 2018).

It is unclear what services are commonly provided for these students while in high school. Additionally, it is unclear at what age diploma-track students on the autism spectrum graduate, given that students who receive special education services can receive services through age 21 according to federal law (IDEA, 2004). Overall, there are no guidelines for addressing their unique needs.



Study methods

This research was completed using an **online survey**. Participants could complete the study from anywhere they wanted.

The survey was open from March 2017 - June 2018.



Survey questions


The survey questions were developed from 1) what we learned from focus groups of school professionals, 2) research articles on this topic and 3) consulting with an advisory board of school professionals and a young adult on the autism spectrum.


The survey included questions:

1. to obtain the person's permission to be a part of our study
2. on the person's role (e.g., job title, years of experience)
3. on the person's school district
4. on diploma-track students on the autism spectrum (e.g., time spent in general education setting)
5. on specific supports and services provided to these students
6. on transition planning for these students.

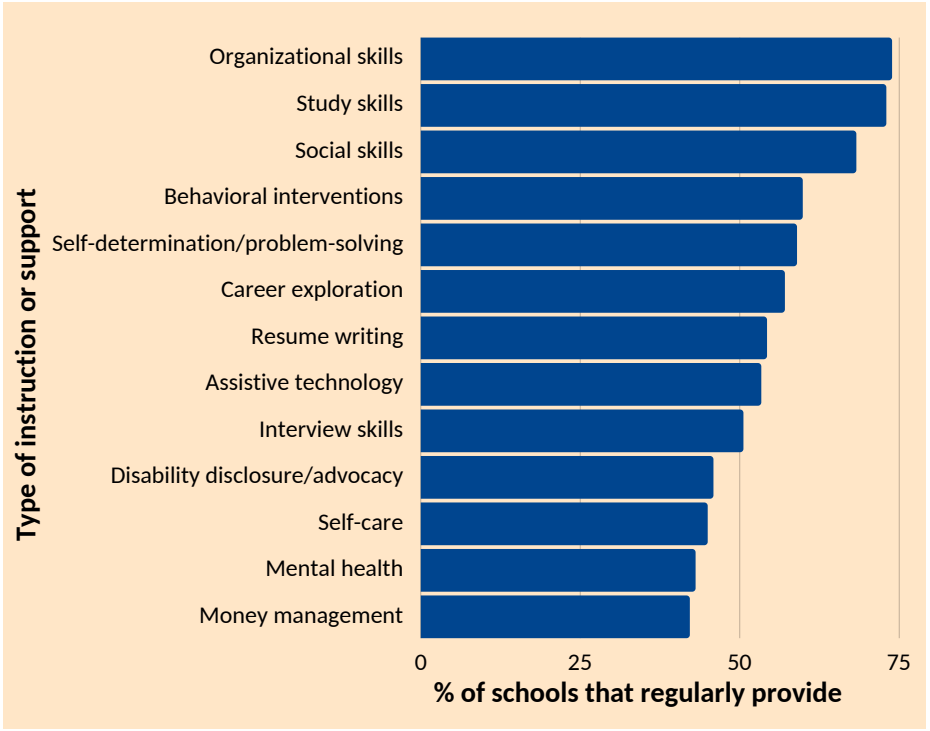
What did we find?

65.4% of diploma-track students **have an Individualized Education Plan**, on average.

>65% of diploma-track students spend the **majority of their day in general education classes**. 

 Only half of providers reported that schools had a **specific, clear approach for providing services and supports** to diploma-track students on the autism spectrum.

20% of school providers reported that these students **delayed receiving their diplomas**. Of these students, most did so because they were enrolled in a specialized transition program.



Special education teachers, general education teachers, and school counselors provided most supports and services.

Most provided supports: academics (organizational and study skills)

Least provided supports: disability disclosure, self-care, mental health

What does this mean for school personnel?


There is a **large variety** of supports and services currently provided to this population. Administrators may want to **develop guidelines** to ensure a balance between general education classes and time needed for additional supports or services.

Educators and school personnel should consider including **supports outside of the general education** curriculum that may help students on the autism spectrum after they have graduated, such as disability disclosure or advocacy, self-care, and mental health symptom management.

What does this mean for researchers?

Researchers need to evaluate the **long-term effects** of these supports and services on youth outcomes to **determine best practices** for diploma-track students on the autism spectrum.

For more information: <http://bu.edu/autismconnections/>

 <https://www.facebook.com/buroadahead/>

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