

Autism Grant Program: Annual Progress Report

July 2025

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Agency Purpose

Our purpose is to strengthen Texas through higher education. By making higher education accessible to a wide range of people, we can ensure Texas remains one of the world's most innovative, valuable educational systems. By bringing together data, policymakers, and institutions, we can inform sensible policies that make a difference and make education beyond high school available to every person in our state. When we do that, we will improve lives, communities, and our shared economy.

Agency Vision

The THECB will be recognized as an international leader in developing and implementing innovative higher education policy to accomplish our mission.

Agency Philosophy

The THECB will promote access to and success in quality higher education across the state with the conviction that access and success without quality is mediocrity and that quality without access and success is unacceptable.

The THECB's core values are:

Accountability: We hold ourselves responsible for our actions and welcome every opportunity to educate stakeholders about our policies, decisions, and aspirations.

Efficiency: We accomplish our work using resources in the most effective manner.

Collaboration: We develop partnerships that result in student success and a highly qualified, globally competent workforce.

Excellence: We strive for excellence in all our endeavors.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.

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Introduction: Autism Grant Program

The 84th, 85th, and 86th Texas Legislatures appropriated \$8.1 million to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to make competitive grant awards to Texas public and private general academic institutions that conduct research and/or provide treatment to children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The 87th and 88th Texas Legislatures, Regular Sessions, continued support for the program by each appropriating \$7.41 million to the THECB and expanding eligibility by authorizing the participation of Texas health-related institutions and independent universities. The 89th Texas Legislature appropriated \$7.41 million for the Autism Grant Program (AGP). The 2023 General Appropriations Act, House Bill 1, Article III, Rider 40, directed the THECB to offer the following three categories of funding to eligible institutions:

- Parent-directed Treatment – \$2,055,000 total available in each fiscal year for research centers serving a combined total of at least 750 children with ASD annually through Parent-directed treatment methods. The amount available represents a 5% reduction from Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, 2017, and 2019 appropriations.
- Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) Training for Teachers/Paraprofessionals – \$950,000 total available in each fiscal year to autism research centers that serve a combined total of at least 2,547 children with ASD per year by training teachers and/or paraprofessionals. Teachers and paraprofessionals may be in public or private institutions, teaching prekindergarten through 12th grade.
- Research, Development, and Evaluation of Innovative Autism Treatment Models – \$700,000 total available in each fiscal year to one or more autism research centers to research, develop, and evaluate innovative autism treatment models that provide treatment to the greatest number of children with ASD.

THECB administers the AGP through a competitive grant application process. Grant recipients provide treatments through multiple approaches: conventional treatments (behavioral analysis), innovative treatments, treatments in the public school system, and treatments in the home environment with parents and caregivers.

Since the start of the program in FY 2016, AGP grants have served a total of 82,438 children over seven rounds of grant awards to institutions, more than 2.78 times the minimum target of 29,673. Over this period, the AGP has undertaken the following activities:

- The initial AGP grant awards were made in all three funding categories in FY 2016. Grant recipients treated 17,229 children with ASD in the first grant cycle (2016-2018), which ended in June 2018.
- A second round of awards was made to support Parent-directed Treatment in FY 2017. The initial AGP grants ended in June 2018, and the second set of grant awards for the Parent-directed Treatment ended in June 2019. An additional 917 children with ASD were treated during this second grant period (2017-2019).

- A third round of AGP grant awards was made in all three funding categories in FY 2018, ending in June 2020. This third grant cycle (2018-2020) allowed for the treatment of an additional 23,331 children with ASD.
- A fourth round of AGP grant awards was made to support Parent-directed Treatment in FY 2019. The fourth round ended in December 2020 and served 6,380 additional children with ASD.
- A fifth round of AGP grant awards was made in all three funding categories in FY 2020. This fifth grant cycle served an additional 17,504 children with ASD.
- A sixth round of AGP grant awards was made in all three funding categories in FY 2022. The sixth round ended in 2024 and served an additional 10,116 children with ASD. Individual grants received no-cost extensions of various lengths, depending on the circumstances and unexpended grant funding, particularly as it pertains to delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the statewide freeze storm in February 2021.
- A seventh round of AGP grant awards was made in all three funding categories in FY 2024. Since March 2025, this seventh grant cycle has served 6,961 additional children with ASD for a combined total of 82,438 children with ASD served since the program began in 2016.

The AGP has a target for its recipients to serve a combined 9,891 children with ASD for grants awarded in FYs 2022, 2023, and 2024, or 29,673 children since the program began in 2016. Table 1 shows that the program is exceeding its targets for the Parent-directed Treatment (minimum 750 each FY) and Behavior Analyst Training for Teachers/Paraprofessionals (minimum 2,547 each FY).

Unexpended funds from the previous AGP cycle can be reissued as an award increase to current AGP grantees.

Table 1. Autism Grant Program Categories and Service, March 2024 through March 2025

Autism Grant Program Category	Biennium Amount Awarded	Children Served	Teachers/ Paraprofessionals
Parent-directed Treatment	\$4,110,000	1,936	n/a
Behavior Analyst Training for Teachers/Paraprofessionals	\$1,900,000	7,823	1,058
Innovative Autism Treatment Models	\$1,400,000	237	n/a

Source: AGP grantee required reports

The AGP also included \$150,000 per fiscal year for administrative costs, which the THECB may use to support staff salaries, external reviewers, and other related administrative costs.

Program Development

Rules for the AGP were established using the THECB's negotiated rulemaking process in 2015 with input from stakeholders, including representatives from Texas public universities, the Texas Autism Research and Resource Center, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, and the Texas Council on Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders. Following the negotiated rulemaking process, the THECB adopted rules for the program in April 2016. Rules are codified in Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Chapter 6, Subchapter K. The THECB maintains a [webpage for the Autism Grant Program](#) is on its website.

Review, Assessment, and Selection Process

The AGP is a competitive grant, and applications are reviewed by THECB staff and external expert reviewers. To assist in the selection process, the THECB contracted with four external reviewers with primary expertise in parent-based treatment and/or teacher/paraprofessional training. Applications were reviewed by a multi-member team comprised of the THECB grant administrator and external content expert reviewers.

Proposals were assessed based on criteria described in the request for applications (RFA), including the projected number of children with ASD to be served, feasibility of the timeline, attainability of the goals, long-term influence of the project past the grant period, management structure, plans for evaluation, sufficiency and economy of the budget, and qualifications of the directors and key staff. The THECB staff compiled the assessment results and made recommendations for funding to the commissioner of higher education. The commissioner reviewed the information and finalized award selection for funding.

Fiscal Years 2022-2023

An RFA with funding available for all three categories of the grant program was published April 2022 for FY 2022. Seven applications were received for Parent-directed Treatment, and seven were awarded. Seven applications were received for Teacher/Paraprofessional Training, and four were awarded. Seven applications were received for Innovative Treatment models, and three were awarded. An award increase from previous cycle unexpended funds was offered in 2023 if allocation acceptance was deemed manageable by grantees. Award increases were processed for 12 of the 14 grantees. This grant cycle ended May 31, 2024. One no-cost extension grant remained active until May 2025 in the Parent-directed Treatment category at the University of Houston-Clear Lake.

Parent-directed Treatment

In the Parent-directed Treatment category, the THECB funded the following seven applications:

1. Texas A&M University, Center on Disability and Development

The project, Coach to Communicate: Parent Partnerships Supporting English Learners and Adolescents, provided online instructional modules and coaching for parents to elicit communication from their children with ASD. The project served parents of school-aged children with autism and involves the development and delivery of strategies and materials aimed at addressing the communication needs of adolescents, those with more complex communication skills, and English-language learners. Two new online modules were developed (adolescent intervention and complex communication instruction), while current modules and parent coaching materials were translated into additional languages spoken in Texas (i.e., Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Hindi, and Bengali). The project built upon a THECB-funded (2016-22) Parent-directed Treatment project.

Development of new training modules for parents was completed and made available to parents. Six modules were made available in Spanish. The Coach to Communicate module was also translated into Thai. The project website was updated (autism.tamu.edu) to provide ease of information access to for parents with English as a second language.

Total award: \$500,000

Expenditures: \$449,737.90

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 190

Parent/children pairs served: 291

2. Texas Tech University, Burkhart Center for Autism Education and Research

The Mobile and Telehealth Outreach Clinic for Autism was an amalgamated initiative for addressing disparities for ASD in families with restricted access to services. This model combined two previous models to better serve families who have a child with ASD. This allowed the Burkhart Center to continue its goal of decreasing the disparities sometimes present in rural communities by providing high-quality intervention services and training to parents

across all areas of Texas as well as families who do not have the resources available to receive services.

Parent training presentations occurred via collaboration with multiple Education Service Center Regions throughout Texas, including Regions 8, 9, 11, 13, and 15. Multiple training workshops were conducted.

In a social validity feedback survey, 100% percent of families responses that they believe training was very applicable, and they were somewhat to very likely to use the behavior strategies and tools provided with their children. Ninety-six percent of families believe that their knowledge of behavior principles, including functions and antecedent interventions, improved or greatly improved as a direct result of the training.

The positive family testimonials included: “We are very grateful to have received these services and hope many others can benefit in the same way our family has.”

Total award: \$437,701 (original award) + \$22,676 (award increase) = \$460,377

Expenditures: \$460,354.64

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 190

Parent/children pairs served: 485

3. Texas Woman’s University, Speech, Language & Hearing Clinic

The project aimed to train parents to provide language intervention to children diagnosed with ASD to increase reciprocal imitation, the number of verbalizations, the variety of sounds, and words produced by the child.

The project used a specific treatment approach, “Imitation Therapy” (IT), that has proven successful in clinical settings and trains parents to apply IT in a home setting for their children. A major advantage of this approach is that parents/caregivers from a variety of linguistic backgrounds can provide intervention in their home language. After receiving appropriate training, the parents will continue to serve as the interventionists. The intervention was conducted for 30 minutes, five times a week, for a total of two weeks.

Project staff reported significant positive feedback on how it is benefiting children from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Some participating parents expressed interest in implementing the training received with a comorbidity, such as autism with hearing loss. Although not part of the official project data, it is noteworthy to the project’s progress that participants have reported success with such conditions as well.

Total award: \$450,508 (original award) + \$22,676 (award increase) = \$473,184

Expenditures: \$313,315.82

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 200

Parent/children pairs served: 419

4. The University of Texas at Austin Speech and Hearing Center

This project, Skills and Knowledge of Intervention for Language Learning Success 2.0, provided evidence-based parent training to caregivers of autistic children. The project offered five semesters of training in evidence-based intervention for enhancing language skills in young

autistic children through continuation of existing successful parent-mediated intervention services.

Data showed that participants displayed gains in their receptive and expressive language skills. A positive change in language skills after project participation remains anticipated.

Participants indicated that they gave increased attention to their child's communicative acts and felt more comfortable in their responses. They reported success with empowering their child to lead, using animation and imitation strategies as they progressed through training.

Written testimonials from participating parents included: "[Child's name]'s language has really exploded in the last six months and I am incredibly thankful to know how to best support that in a way that made me feel successful too. He's been counting to 10 and even points to the correct numbers and says them. His teacher told me that they have a PALS student come in there weekly and he told her 'Goodbye Kate!' several times. Normally it's just 'Bye.' He has also been saying "no no" a lot more when he doesn't want something. I'm just so proud of his progress and his hard work and had to send you an update."

Total award: \$460,683 (original award) + \$22,676 (award increase) = \$483,359

Expenditures: \$474,808.69

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 400

Parent/children pairs served: 381

5. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, College of Education, Special Education Research

The goal of the project was to improve the behavior of children with ASD by providing culturally adapted, evidence-based strategies through a parent-directed training support program for their families.

UTRGV is the second-largest Hispanic-Serving Institution in the United States and in a region that is comprised of more than 90% Hispanic individuals. This project partnered with 12 school districts that serviced more than 20 cities in South Texas.

Participants shared that the small group sessions provided them with additional support to apply acquired strategies and discuss their coping responses in a safe and judgment-free space. One parent shared the following experience, "the first thing that is most important is the bond, yes... I think that she [parent leader] generated a lot of confidence in me... I think that the simple fact that she can understand me... is something very wonderful." Another parent offered a similar experience regarding the structure and support among parent leaders who had firsthand experiences as parents with children with autism. She shared, "As my teacher and parent leader, ...I can say the simple fact that she is the one who put the message almost every day in the group that we have a good morning... You wake up with that power that yes I can do this and I'm not alone. Let's give it a try and I think it's also the same because they also have children who have autism."

Total award: \$500,000 (original award) + \$22,676 (award increase) = \$522,676

Expenditures: \$512,743.57

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 240

Parent/children pairs served: 351

6. The University of Texas at San Antonio, Child and Adolescent Policy Research Institute

Project FIESTA (Family Intervention and Education Services to Treat Autism) aimed to serve child-caregiver dyads through a progressive service model, including Brief Outpatient Autism Therapy, and short-term and long-term severe behavior outpatient intervention with caregiver coaching as a pillar of the intervention approach.

When an increase of more severe cases registered for the project, a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) was hired to work with the participants in person. Of caregivers served through the project, 100% demonstrated mastery in implementing the intervention with their child, and the children that participated in the project demonstrated an average of 86.5% decrease in challenging behavior.

Participants communicated with project therapists to provide positive feedback about the grant's services. One family informed project representatives that their personal family advocate asked them to share the names of the project resources they used to decrease their child's problem behavior, given that he was doing so well, and said they wanted to share the project contact information with other clients. Another family stated they were pleased given that their child's crying had decreased to 0% by the end of the study – a substantial difference from the first session. Additionally, a family's teacher emailed the project coordinator for program information to share with her other students' families due to one of her student's parents recommending the project.

Total award: \$500,000 (original award) + \$22,676 (award increase) = \$522,676

Expenditures: \$522,676

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 250

Parent/children pairs served: 264

7. University of Houston-Clear Lake, Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities

The project expands the established Parent-directed Treatment program, Connecting the Dots. The goal of the project is to provide communication and behavior management assessment and training to caregivers of individuals diagnosed with ASD. The participants with ASD range in age from 2-18. Participants are referred to the program through various sources from the Houston metropolitan area and surrounding counties. Children who have language or social skills deficits and mild-to-moderate problem behavior will be referred to the project based on scheduling availability and proximity. Services are available in person or via telehealth to expand the reach of services to a greater number of families.

Services were provided in other locations when family participants shared that they would require assistance to take their son to church as well as other events (e.g., sister's graduation). Project staff joined the family at one event to implement treatment. The family were very thankful this was offered, stating that he had not been able to join them at church since he was much younger.

Total award: \$500,000 (original award) + \$22,676 (award increase) = \$522,676

Expenditures to date: \$394,701.61

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 190
Parent/children pairs served to date: 125

Teacher/Paraprofessional Training

The THECB awarded four grants in the Board-Certified Behavior Analyst Training for the Teachers/Paraprofessionals category:

1. Sam Houston State University, Low Incidence Disabilities and Autism Program

The goal of the project was to provide high-quality professional development to special education teachers with ongoing support to improve the quality of instruction provided to children with ASD, leading to better outcomes for children with autism in Texas. The project worked collaboratively to conduct the project with regional Educational Service Centers (ESCs).

Recruitment for this project focused on teachers with less than five years of experience and with positions in Title 1 schools (teachers were not excluded if they did not fit this criteria) to increase the probability of serving a variety of student populations. If teachers reported a range of students served, the lower end of the range was utilized for a conservative measure.

ESC presenters provided positive feedback and showed continued interest in participating in the project. ESC Region 11 led sessions for consecutive semesters. The ESC Region 12 specialist reported that this project allowed her to make additional connections with teachers in her region and to gather materials over topics that can be utilized in the future. Many participants also expressed their gratitude regarding the program and resources provided. Participants that reluctantly had to withdraw also expressed the value of the information shared despite unforeseen competing obligations impeding their completion.

Total award: \$359,000
Expenditures to date: \$283,678
Children projected to be served: 1,800
Children served: 1,438
Teachers projected to be served: 180
Teachers served: 205

2. Texas State University, The Clinic for Autism Research, Evaluation, and Support

The goal of the project was to provide Board-Certified Behavior Analyst Training for teachers. The project formed partnerships with five counties/school districts: (1) Round Rock, (2) Pflugerville, (3) San Marcos, (4) Comal ISD, and (5) La Verna ISD. Trainees learned to implement focused Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) interventions.

After completing the project that included incorporation of an iPad for intervention and data collection, a teacher participant successfully secured additional iPads for her classroom via a non-related grant to persist in delivering the project's behavioral intervention and extend the intervention to more students with ASD. Teachers actively engaged in recruiting their colleagues to participate in the training program, with past participants referring new ones. This was evidence of the social validity and acceptability of the project's approach to training

and teachers' perception of the outcomes of training as beneficial. Teacher participants reported extending the project's impact by training the parents of their students, empowering parents to play an active role in supporting their children's development. This collaborative effort between teachers and parents displayed the practicality and effectiveness of the training program in fostering a holistic and inclusive approach to education.

The positive reception and effectiveness of the training program was evident through the proactive actions taken by the administration at project partner schools, given their initiative to share project information with other school districts. This word-of-mouth endorsement sparked interest and garnered attention from other school districts, empowering them to approach project representatives to join the project.

The project exceeded the original project goal by serving more than the projected number of children at a lower than initially estimated cost per child.

Total award: \$312,000 (original award) + \$22,795 (award increase) = \$334,795

Expenditures: \$315,497.28

Children projected to be served: 1,150

Children served: 1,865

Teachers projected to be served: 120

Teachers served: 87

3. The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), San Antonio Applied Behavior Analysis Research Consortium

The goal of the project was to help teachers become Board-Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) and incorporate Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) into their teaching practices and classroom management. The project aimed to recruit 10 teacher participants who reflected the population of San Antonio, which is 65% Hispanic. For the child participants in the project (not including those participating from the teachers' classrooms), recruitment was achieved through community partnership with the Autism Treatment Center. Additionally, recruitment information was disseminated via flyers through other ABAs at UTSA community partnerships, including local ABA clinics, school districts, the Children's Hospital of San Antonio, and the Multi-Assistance Center at Morgan's Wonderland™, all of which are located in San Antonio and serve children and families from around the city, as well as through social media.

The program team completed comprehensive training using Behavior Skills Training on key areas for supporting children with autism that teachers implemented in the classroom. Reporting provided data that illustrated teacher outcomes for implementing the interventions within their classroom.

Total award: \$400,000 (original award) + \$22,795 (award increase) = \$422,795

Expenditures: \$422,795

Children projected to be served: 1,050

Children served: 938

Teachers projected to be served: 10

Teachers served: 10

4. University of Houston-Clear Lake, Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities

The project goal was to increase the number of Texas school teachers who are prepared to provide evidence-based ABA approaches in classrooms that serve students with ASD and related disorders. The project trained teachers who serve students with ASD by providing initial cross-district group training, with added opportunities to experience more in-depth training with 1:1 flexible meeting time scheduled by teachers at their convenience. Training afforded teachers the knowledge of basic ABA strategies shown to be effective in helping students with ASD learn in school and classroom environments. Teachers who worked in the greater Houston area as well as rural and underserved Texas school districts located beyond driving distance of the University of Houston-Clear Lake were targeted for recruitment. The inclusion of virtual training options assisted with recruiting and served a greater number of underserved areas of the state.

Because certified teachers now serve in mentorship, leadership, and coaching roles within their districts, more students received instruction or support compared to those taught exclusively in self-contained classrooms.

Positive comments demonstrating project success that were provided by teacher and paraprofessional training completers include: "Solid information - more teachers need to know. I am entering this school year with more confidence and a bag of extremely useful tools gathered from this training; I have already reached out to several peers to ensure they sign up for the next training. It elaborated and identified the importance of the function of the behavior and not the behavior itself when determining strategies and plans for behavior replacement. Being able to identify behaviors, track them, and determine what is causing them and replace them with positive behavior. It helped me to look at behavior in a different manner and learn new ways to efficiently collect data to help aid in correcting behaviors. The training gave the teachers so much more knowledge and strategies to use with difficult situations in the class. It also allowed them to go back and 'revisit' what they were currently doing, break it down, look for the cause, and find a viable solution. Excellent training! I really wish more from our district would have attended."

Total award: \$400,000 (original award) + \$22,795 (award increase) = \$422,795

Expenditures: \$354,013.81

Children projected to be served: 1,020

Children served: 2,919

Teachers projected to be served: 204

Teachers served: 293

Innovative Treatment Models

The THECB awarded three grants in the Research, Development, and Evaluation of Innovative Autism Treatment Models category:

1. Baylor College of Medicine with Texas Children’s Hospital Neurological Research Institute

Developing effective treatments for anxiety and depression is a top priority for adolescents with ASD, as these disorders contribute to suicidality, family stress, and social impairment. Research in typically developing youth has shown that transdiagnostic cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has broader and more durable benefits than disorder-specific CBT and can be more easily learned by community clinicians. Given the minimal efforts to develop transdiagnostic interventions for anxiety and depression in adolescents with ASD, this population is at higher risk for suicide, more complex clinical presentations, and poorer outcomes as they transition into adulthood without effective treatments. The project directly addressed this service gap by building off evidence-based practice in typically developing adolescents to develop and test streamlined, transdiagnostic CBT for anxiety and depression in adolescents with ASD.

Parent participant feedback was positive: “My son participated in your study over the summer. It has completely changed his whole trajectory. He uses his tools daily. He struggles from time to time but he has not had a panic attack since May! My daughter has learned so much from the sessions and is putting the learned skills to work daily. School is going well so far. It is like night and day from the last time we were doing in-person school!”

Total award: \$833,147 (original award) + \$29,462 (award increase) = \$862,609
Expenditures: \$445,557.15
Children projected to be served: 112
Children served: 87

2. Baylor University, Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities

The goal of the project was to develop a service model in which siblings of children with autism were invited to collaborate and participate as vital members of intervention teams. The project provided three levels of training and support related to including siblings within behavioral interventions. Level 1 was an extended program targeting the reduction of challenging behavior and the increase of prosocial behaviors. Level 2 was a four-week program promoting positive interactions between siblings. And Level 3 was a one-day workshop to teach siblings to use basic behavioral tools to enhance the quality of interactions with their siblings with autism. In addition to these direct services, a professional development workshop on collaborating with siblings with 60 practitioners working with children with autism also transpired within the project.

Total award: \$893,410 (original award) + \$29,462 (award increase) = \$922,872
Expenditures: \$756,405.19
Children projected to be served: 125
Children served: 84

3. The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD), Callier Center for Communications Disorders

This project built on and extended previous AGP-funded UTD research. The project encountered unforeseen circumstances of participant and staff illnesses and staffing changes that negatively influenced project progress. The challenge of locating and retaining qualified assessors also impacted the project. The project goal was to evaluate the efficacy of the entire Pathways program on: (a) the development of social orienting, joint attention, and social language in autistic children; and (b) relieving their parents' stress. Recruitment of families was conducted through local infant-toddler programs, community centers, advocacy groups, physicians' offices, social media, and past participant referrals. Many of the community referral sources served low-income Hispanic children and their families (e.g., Catholic Charities, The Lumin Bachman Lake Community School, and Center for Children and Families). Community referral sources were provided to low-income Hispanic children with quarterly in-service training on the signs and symptoms of autism, how to screen children for autism, how to talk to parents about autism, and the necessity of early intervention. Inherent in executing/implementing the project, it aimed to simultaneously minimize cultural, economic, and social barriers to clinical care for Hispanic autistic children in families experiencing low income.

Total award: \$854,000 (original award) + \$29,462 (award increase) = \$883,462

Expenditures: \$875,939.19

Children projected to be served: 150

Children served: 58

Fiscal Years 2024-2025

An RFA with funding available for all three categories of the grant program was published in January 2024 for FY 2024. Seven applications were received for Parent-directed Treatment, and six were awarded. Nine applications were received for Teacher/Paraprofessional Training, and five were awarded. Nine applications were received for Innovative Treatment models, and three were awarded. This grant cycle ends March 31, 2026.

Parent-directed Treatment

In the Parent-directed Treatment category, the THECB funded the following seven applications:

1. Baylor University, Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities

The goal of the project is to provide high-quality training and support for parents to deliver evidence-based practices for their child. At least 50% of families will have low incomes or live in rural areas. The project will develop a parent training specifically designed to teach parents how to integrate training into their daily routines. The training would be delivered on-site across Texas, prioritizing rural and low-income regions. Following training, parents will be offered two ongoing virtual support options: (a) short-term coaching for four weeks with small group and one-on-one coaching, and (b) long-term coaching with one-on-one coaching for eight weeks. Both will facilitate maintenance of a parent's newly acquired skills that will ultimately result in their child's acquisition of individualized goals.

Based on parent feedback, training duration was adjusted from four hours to three hours to accommodate parents' schedules and avoid overlapping with mealtimes. This has improved the frequency of cancelling trainings due to lack of registrants. Since February 2025, three trainings have been completed: in Waco, Georgetown, and Austin. The following is a selection of social validity parent survey feedback: "[I enjoyed] learning strategies; [this helped me] know that I'm not just incompetent," and "[I enjoyed] the information and being able to talk to other parents."

Total award: \$457,000

Expenditures to date: \$108,073.62

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 300

Parent/children pairs served to date: 19

2. Texas A&M University, Center on Disability and Development

The project, Coach to Communicate: Parent Partnerships Supporting Individuals with Autism, provides online instructional modules and coaching for parents to elicit communication from their children with ASD. The project builds upon a THECB-funded (2016-24) Parent-directed Treatment project. The project continues to serve parents of birth-to-school-aged children with autism and develops and delivers strategies and materials aimed at addressing communication needs of adolescents, those with more complex communication skills, and English learners. A new online module will be developed (adolescent interventions), and current modules and materials will be translated into additional languages spoken in Texas. Bi-monthly

synchronous and face-to-face parent strategy webinars will be provided to parents who have children with ASD in Spanish and English.

A single-case experimental design, titled "Parent Coaching Interventions and Cultural Variations in Preference of Implementation - A Single Case Study Involving Diverse Parents of Minimally and Non-speaking Children with Autism," is currently in progress. The project was presented at a statewide disability conference and resource fair in February 2025.

Total award: \$457,000

Expenditures to date: \$119,769.05

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 240

Parent/children pairs served to date: 125

3. Texas Tech University, Burkhart Center for Autism Education and Research

The East Lubbock Mobile and Telehealth Outreach Clinic for Autism (ELMO) will address disparities for ASD in families with restricted resources and services. By offering parent education services, the ultimate goal of ELMO is to provide parent training services to caregivers with children with ASD in underserved and low-socioeconomic areas while working to improve the overall quality of life for both caregivers and children. ELMO will address a critical need for caregivers in underserved areas of East Lubbock as well as provide similar services via telehealth to underserved and rural areas throughout Texas.

Recent community events highlighted the program's growing reach and engagement, and project representatives are encouraged by positive feedback. Project representatives were invited to provide informational sessions with families in Lubbock and East Lubbock in collaboration with a community organization. These sessions will focus on parent training topics, including effective parent-child interaction strategies and autism awareness. Two graduate research assistants will submit research presentations related to the services that have been offered to families under the grant.

The positive family testimonials thus far include: "We appreciate everything that you all did for us and our family! The Burkhart Center has truly been a blessing!" At the conclusion of one training, one father said, "The biggest skills that I learned was how to speak to her. I didn't know how to communicate with her before, and I didn't realize there was a different way." Another family shared, "We are very grateful to have received these services and hope many others can benefit in the same way our family has."

The project is progressing as planned and is exceeding the original project goal by having served more than the projected number of children.

Total award: \$472,000

Expenditures to date: \$118,348

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 190

Parent/children pairs served to date: 286

4. Texas Woman’s University, Speech, Language & Hearing Clinic

Teachers, speech language pathologists, and other professionals will be trained to use Imitation Therapy to teach parents/caregivers how to implement it in their own home and home language. This project will determine if training parents (by trained professionals) to conduct therapy in the home of children with ASD who are minimally verbal will increase the instances of reciprocal imitation, the number of verbalizations, and the variety of sounds/words produced by the child. The project builds upon a THECB-funded (2020-24) Parent-directed Treatment project.

Feedback from parents and trainees has been encouraging thus far. Project representatives presented at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association’s annual national convention in December 2024. Audience members indicated that the project was well-conceived and very easy to implement, especially with implementation in the families’ primary language.

Total award: \$489,000

Expenditures to date: \$167,039

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 200

Parent/children pairs served to date: 60

5. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, College of Education

The goal of this project is to improve the social skills and communication of children from Latin American descent with ASD. The project builds upon a THECB-funded (2018-24) Parent-directed Treatment project. In an informal community needs assessment, parents requested support in identifying and implementing evidence-based strategies to improve their children’s behavior and communication. Four cohorts will be formed to foster community building among parents of children with ASD.

Parent participants have shared the benefits of using the project’s training. One parent leader said, “A mommy was sharing among her stories how ABA therapy helped her son, and how she worked in tandem with school and therapy and noticed how terms/language she has learned in our trainings have helped her and him so much.” Another parent leader provided a similar story: “One parent watched the (training) video with her son during the session and was amazed at how engaged he was. She had never seen him so focused during a learning activity. Inspired by his response, she became excited to try video modeling as a strategy to teach him new skills at home. She shared that this approach gave her a fresh, practical tool she felt confident using—and that seeing her son so attentive gave her real hope for progress.”

Further, “A parent shared that she used to feel overwhelmed and sad after receiving phone calls from her child’s teacher about his behavior. However, after attending the small group meetings and learning about the function of behavior, she recently felt more confident during a conversation with his teacher. She said it felt empowering to better understand her child’s needs and to advocate for him in a way that felt supportive and productive.” Another parent leader provided a similar perspective: “A parent shared that she had been feeling unsure and unprepared for her son’s upcoming Individualized Education Program/IEP meeting. During the meeting, she was able to talk about her son’s strengths and share the goals she felt were

important for his growth. She said the experience was much more positive than she expected and that she felt confident and as an active part of her child's IEP team.”

Total award: \$499,000

Expenditures to date: \$147,551.12

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 200

Parent/children pairs served to date: 114

6. University of Houston-Clear Lake, Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities

This project expands the established Parent-directed Treatment program, Connecting the Dots. The goal of the program is to provide communication and behavior assessment and management training to caregivers of individuals diagnosed with ASD. Participants with ASD will range in age from 2-18 years. Participants are referred to the program through various referral sources from the Houston metropolitan area and surrounding counties. Children who have language or social skills deficits and mild-to-moderate problem behavior will be referred to the project based on scheduling availability and proximity. Services are available in person, via telehealth, and through educational lecture series programs. The goal is to expand the reach of services to more families. A licensed and Board-Certified Behavior Analyst, along with graduate therapists and undergraduate therapist assistants, will provide the services.

Initial participation challenges were due to lack of transportation and discontinuing self-participation. The project reports that families are on their waitlist and active recruitment of families continues by providing program information through community connections. A Spanish version of the educational lecture series program is being created to expand training access to more families.

The majority of families that have completed services are meeting their skill acquisition and/or behavior reduction goals. Caregivers are provided with a knowledge assessment before and after services containing multiple-choice questions related to verbal and problem behavior and effective teaching strategies. The average correct score for quizzes before services was: 79%, while the average correct score for quizzes following services was 90%, indicating successful services implementation.

Finding quality service providers for individuals impacted by severe and challenging behavior has presented a challenge to effective assessment and treatment services for those behaviors; however, project representatives have the capacity to provide these services safely and effectively and are one of the only providers in the Houston area that can do so. One project participant is not vocal-verbal and needed assistance with establishing communication skills. This individual also engaged in aggression to meet their wants and needs. Following multiple treatment sessions, the family reported that their child was independently requesting the items they wanted to play with, and the participant's father said their child was “almost a completely different kid” compared to when they started the program.

Total award: \$500,000

Expenditures to date: \$148,644.71

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 210

Parent/children pairs served to date: 38

Teacher/Paraprofessional Training

The THECB awarded four grants in the Board-Certified Behavior Analyst Training for the Teachers/Paraprofessionals category:

1. Sam Houston State University (SHSU), College of Education

The goal of this project is to improve educational personnel's knowledge and application of behavior analytic strategies for teaching students with ASD. The project builds upon a THECB-funded (2016-24) Teachers/Paraprofessionals project. The project will expand the goals and reach of a workshop series in multiple ways to serve educators who work with children diagnosed with ASD. Educators will be provided with resources about the topics, attend professional development sessions, and complete various application exercises and assessments to integrate behavioral techniques into the educational setting with their students. Educators will also be expected to complete pre- and post-test measures to evaluate changes in knowledge, performance, and perceptions.

The BCBA lead has finalized the spring/summer workshops series and scheduled three different formats for participants. All three workshops were completed by the end of May 2025. An additional, advanced workshop series is being developed to address evidence-based practices for behavior and will be released in the fall of 2025. The resources and training video website through SHSU was published initially in May 2025.

Total award: \$389,000

Expenditures to date: \$56,760

Children projected to be served: 1,500

Children served to date: 0

Teachers projected to be served: 300

Teachers served to date: 0

2. Texas A&M University, Center on Disability and Development

The purpose of the project is to prepare practitioners (general education teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, specials teachers who teach subjects like art, music, and physical education) working in rural settings to implement academic and behavior-based interventions grounded in ABA to students with ASD. The project builds upon a THECB-funded (2020-22) Teachers/Paraprofessionals project. Students diagnosed with ASD will be supported through a tiered training model on the foundations and applications of ABA for practitioners, with a new emphasis for those employed in rural settings who serve students with ASD. Further, the project will incorporate, maintain, and update as needed the asynchronous training developed in the previous iteration of this project. To achieve project goals, project leaders will engage in high-impact recruitment strategies, update and reformat workshops to support school-based practitioners in the acquisition of ABA interventions skills and conduct regular evaluation and continuous improvement.

Project representatives report significant interest in the project workshops, which required delivering several more trainings earlier in the year than originally anticipated, resulting in more teachers and students with ASD served. Project leaders delivered a presentation in

November 2024 at the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children Conference.

The project is progressing as planned and is exceeding the original project goal by having served more than the projected number of children.

Total award: \$399,000

Expenditures to date: \$79,392.66

Children projected to be served: 1,020

Children served to date: 3,770

Teachers projected to be served: 255

Teachers served to date: 509

3. Texas State University, The Clinic for Autism Research, Evaluation, and Support

The faculty and staff of the Clinic for Autism Research Evaluation (CARES) at Texas State University has delivered ABA services since 2009 and routinely contracts with schools and state agencies to provide training in ABA. The project builds upon a THECB-funded (2016-24) Teachers/Paraprofessionals project. For this project, CARES has formed partnerships with five school districts: (1) Round Rock, (2) Pflugerville, (3) San Marcos, (4) Lago Vista, and (5) Medina Valley across Williamson, Travis, Wilson, and Hays counties. The goal of the project is to provide BCBA Training to implement focused ABA interventions identified as evidenced-based practices for students with ASD by the National Research Council and the National Professional Development Center. Before and after training, trainees will complete quantitative and qualitative measures focused on evaluating skill acquisition, student progress, and social validity.

As part of ongoing grant work, CARES partnered with Pflugerville Independent School District (PFISD) to pilot a new Para-Educator training initiative designed to strengthen autism intervention capacity within the district. The project involved developing a specialized Para-Educator role that includes Registered Behavior Technician training and ongoing professional development. Based on the success of this pilot, PFISD plans to expand the training districtwide next school year and is exploring the creation of a formalized Para-Educator role that includes a pay incentive for staff who complete and maintain the required training.

Project leaders report that Hays ISD has joined the project as its seventh public school district partner. The addition of a new school district will allow services to a wider geographic region and may increase the total number of trainees/children served. Hays ISD will begin referring teachers who serve students with ASD to the project in 2025.

Total award: \$384,000

Expenditures to date: \$149,915.50

Children projected to be served: 1,500

Children served to date: 684

Teachers projected to be served: 90

Teachers served to date: 18

4. The University of Texas at San Antonio, Child and Adolescent Policy Research Institute

The ultimate goal of the project is to train special educators in evidence-based practices and strategies to support the social-emotional and behavioral needs of their students diagnosed with ASD. The project is a multilevel training model for educator training and coaching in strategies and evidence-based practices to support the social-emotional and behavioral needs of students with autism in inclusive settings in schools. Specifically, educators will receive training in non-invasive response strategies, practice-based coaching in evidence-based practices, and sustainability training. The project builds upon a THECB-funded (2016-2024) Teachers/Paraprofessionals project.

The project is based on research that suggests that early career special educators are more likely to leave than those with tenure and certification in special education. One of the main reasons for educator attrition is student behavior and lack of knowledge and competency in classroom behavior management. Students with autism are increasingly being included in general education classrooms. However, special and general educators often lack effective strategies to manage the unique needs of students with autism.

Project leaders are collaborating with district partners and have plans to conduct multiple trainings in the upcoming periods, particularly in the summer when teachers are available for professional development. The positive family testimonials thus far include: "Thank you for making my child feel safe and for myself feeling safe in your care, keep up the enthusiasm, the support and the kindness you have for the children, my daughter really loves the time there. I love most that they tell me they feel heard and supported when they do or don't want to do something. My boys loved it and didn't want to leave - that is a A+++ in our book! Please keep doing this as I feel many of us really need this!"

Total award: \$400,000

Expenditures to date: \$99,363

Children projected to be served: 1,020

Children served to date: 277

Teachers projected to be served: 132

Teachers served to date: 30

5. University of Houston-Clear Lake, Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities

The project will facilitate training for educators who serve students with ASD through remote Tier 1 multidistrict group trainings, with added opportunities to experience more in-depth trainings with 1:1 flexible meetings scheduled by teachers at their convenience in Tiers 2 and 3. Two BCBA's with at least three years of experience providing behavior analytic services to children with ASD and at least two years of experience training stakeholders in ABA methodologies will train teachers, paraprofessionals, and district leaders. The approaches targeted by our program are among the core competencies listed in the fifth edition of the Behavior Analysis Certification Board's Task List.

Paraprofessionals will be offered separate training that focuses on ABA within their specific job responsibilities throughout the duration of the program. The project builds upon a THECB-

funded (2016-2024) Teachers/Paraprofessionals project. To date, participants from 15 districts across the state have enrolled in one of the Tier 1 trainings that have or will be hosted through the project (Clear Creek ISD, Brownwood ISD, Fort Bend ISD, Aldine ISD, Galena Park ISD, Galveston ISD, Dickinson ISD, Pearland ISD, Texas City ISD, Klein ISD, Boerne ISD, Goose Creek ISD, Hamlin ISD, Pasadena ISD, and Danbury ISD). Project leaders continue to reach out to rural districts outside of driving distance from the university to impact as many rural areas as possible.

A uniquely personalized presentation of information and materials, along with individualized discussions, modeling, roleplay, and feedback, are some of the tools that will support the teacher in meeting their goals. Performance and knowledge-based criteria will be used to determine when a participant has mastered a skill. The BCBA will help trainees write a training plan on the "Guide to Effective Training" worksheet to use in their final assessment with a BCBA as well in the future in their classrooms. Finally, the trainee will select a colleague on their campus and will demonstrate how to train them using Behavior Skills Training either live, while a BCBA observes, or via a video submission for BCBA feedback. The BCBA will collect data during the training and will provide written and verbal feedback.

Positive comments demonstrating project success provided by teacher and paraprofessional training completers include: "The training helped me to better understand the preventative steps we can take to minimize problem behaviors before they happen. The training provided me with a wide variety of tools and options to use, especially with students or situations in which I felt like I was hitting a brick wall. I feel confident that the tools and guidance given to me in this training will continue to help me grow as I further my career in education! This training was amazing. I am talking about how great it is to every staff member in the district and encouraging teachers to sign up for it."

The project is progressing as planned and is exceeding the original project goal by having served more than the projected number of children.

Total award: \$400,000

Expenditures to date: \$169,697.11

Children projected to be served: 1,020

Children served to date: 1,519

Teachers projected to be served: 200

Teachers served to date: 289

Innovative Treatment Models

The THECB awarded three grants in the Research, Development, and Evaluation of Innovative Autism Treatment Models category:

1. Baylor College of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is an effective treatment for anxiety in youth with and without autism. CBT access is limited due to cost, practicalities of attending in-person sessions, and limited availability of trained therapists. Internet-delivered CBT (iCBT) is a promising method to improve treatment access, given its reach (e.g., rural/underserved communities) and ability to minimize practical barriers (e.g., travel, time, cost). The project builds upon a THECB-funded (2020-2024) Innovative Treatment Models project.

An important treatment access gap for autistic adolescents with anxiety exists. Without effective treatment, this population is at higher risk for suicidality, more complex presentations, and poorer transitional outcomes. This project directly addresses this service gap by expanding previous work to develop and evaluate an iCBT protocol developmentally tailored for autistic adolescents with anxiety. The project will develop an iCBT for anxiety protocol for autistic adolescents, LUNA-Adolescent, and conduct a randomized clinical trial comparing LUNA-Adolescent with standard-care CBT (n=98).

Parent participant feedback has been positive: “I feel like we've done different talking therapies through [Zoom] with him...and I feel like this is the most engaged he has been. And even just with the materials...he's very interested in it. I got to learn a whole lot as well. I learned how he operates or why he operates and how to not continue to negatively reinforce that.”

Total award: \$897,000

Expenditures to date: \$79,959

Children projected to be served: 110

Children served to date: 10

2. The University of Texas at Dallas, Callier Autism Treatment Research Center

This project builds on and extends a previous THECB-funded (2016-2024) Innovative Treatment Model project by examining whether Pathways Early Autism Intervention's mutual gaze procedure is the key factor for improving core social challenges and adaptive functioning in very young, culturally and linguistically diverse children diagnosed with ASD. The project goal is to evaluate the efficacy of the entire Pathways program on: (a) the development of social orienting, joint attention, and social language in autistic children; and (b) relieving their parents' stress.

Recruitment of families is conducted through local infant-toddler programs, community centers, advocacy groups, physicians' offices, social media, and past participant referrals. One project activity includes the launch of social media platforms on Facebook and Instagram, reaching out to a wider audience to allow for enhanced project visibility. Another activity was the initiation of a door-to-door recruitment effort, which resulted in a notable increase in referrals. A final example of a project activity is the creation of a resource list for parents, providing them with additional, often unknown, resources to support their needs.

Project leadership was invited to present the project virtually at the April 2025 Texas Autism Conference: Collaborative Pathways in Autism, and virtually at the October 2025 Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Intervention Connections Conference.

Total award: \$847,000
Expenditures to date: \$242,429.35
Children projected to be served: 80
Children served to date: 17

3. The University of Texas at San Antonio, Child and Adolescent Policy Research Institute

This project aims to develop and evaluate a novel technology, the BehaviorBuddy app, designed to improve the sustained use of evidence-based ABA practices by caregivers. For this initial pilot, project leaders will build on several evidence-based practices including: (1) telehealth models to reach diverse populations, (2) incidental teaching intervention to improve child communication, (3) behavioral skills training to teach caregivers intervention implementation, and (4) programming for generalization and maintenance of caregiver implementation of interventions.

To evaluate the dosage of support provided by the BehaviorBuddy application, the app will collect data on app usage including how often caregivers log onto the app, how often sessions are conducted, if caregivers access the video model supports, etc. This data will be used in correlation with the caregiver outcomes to identify the effectiveness of the treatment package.

Caregiver fidelity data for the 42 caregivers that have been served to date showed a 188% increase in implementation fidelity, indicating that the telehealth training was successful in increasing caregiver performance of incidental teaching.

Parent participant feedback has been positive: "If this app happens, it's going to be a gamechanger. I'm surprised how much [the training] has already changed how I see things."

Total award: \$740,000
Expenditures to date: \$260,764
Children projected to be served: 120
Children served to date: 42

Fiscal Years 2025-2026 awards announcement will be forthcoming. The THECB maintains information about the AGP online at www.highered.texas.gov/grants/autism-grant-program-agp.

Appendix A: Annual Reporting Requirement

General Appropriations Act for the 2024-25 Biennium, 88th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, 2023. Article IX – General Provisions, Health-Related Provisions

Section 10.05. Funding for Autism Services. (IX-59).

(a) Appropriated elsewhere in this Act for autism services is \$21,073,084 in General Revenue Funds for the 2024-25 biennium, which is allocated to the following agencies for the following purposes:

(1) Health and Human Services Commission: General Revenue Funds totaling \$13,663,084 for the biennium for focused Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) treatment services. This amount does not include funding provided for autism services within Goal A, Medicaid Client Services.

(2) Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB): General Revenue Funds totaling \$7,410,000 for the 2024-25 biennium to distribute to autism research centers at institutions of higher education that currently provide evidence-based behavioral services and training, in the amounts and for the purposes as follows:

(A) Parent-directed Treatment: \$2,055,000 per fiscal year to serve 750 children per year;

(B) Board-certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA) Training for Teachers/Paraprofessionals: \$950,000 per fiscal year to serve 2,547 children per year. The research centers may contract with educational service centers to provide this training;

(C) Research, development, and evaluation of innovative autism treatment models: \$700,000 per fiscal year;

(D) Administrative support of the programs in Subsections (a)(2)(A) through (a)(2)(C): \$150,000 per fiscal year may be expended by the THECB;

(E) If monies appropriated under Subsections (a)(2)(A),(B), or (C) exceed the monies that can be expended in accordance with the requirements of that subsection, THECB may expend the excess monies on any purpose described in Subsections (a)(2)(A), (B) or (C); and

(F) Any unexpended balances on hand at the end of fiscal year 2024 are appropriated for the same purpose for fiscal year 2025.

(b) THECB shall gather data on the above programs from each institution's autism research center and submit an annual report on the effectiveness of each program, including the number of children served, the number of parents and/or teachers/paraprofessionals trained, and the results of the research on innovative treatment models. The report shall be submitted no later than September 1 of each year to the Legislative Budget Board, Office of the Governor, the Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, Speaker of the House, and Lieutenant Governor.

**Texas Higher
Education**
COORDINATING BOARD

This document is available on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board website:
<https://highered.texas.gov>.

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