

Autism Grant Program: Annual Progress Report

July 2026

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Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board



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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 THECB 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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Executive Summary

The Autism Grant Program provides funding to autism research centers at eligible institutions of higher education to support services, training, and research related to autism spectrum disorder. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2024–2026 grant cycle included projects in three funding categories: Parent-directed Treatment, Board-Certified Behavior Analyst Training for Teachers/Paraprofessionals, and Research, Development, and Evaluation of Innovative Autism Treatment Models.

This report provides a summary of the information reported by funded autism research centers through the required grantee progress reporting process. Reported information includes the number of children served, the number of parents/caregivers and/or teachers/paraprofessionals trained, project implementation information, reported outcomes, expenditure information, and available research findings for innovative treatment model projects.

During the FY 2024–2026 grant cycle, funded projects served 20,544 children with autism spectrum disorder, exceeding the cycle service target of 9,891 children established in rider. Since the grant program began in FY 2016, projects have served a cumulative total of 96,021 children with autism spectrum disorder.

Grantees reported training 1,655 parents/caregivers and 2,445 teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school-based personnel through activities such as workshops, coaching, online modules, behavioral skills training, caregiver instruction, and related project supports. Reported outcomes varied by project and included increased participant knowledge; use of behavior, analytic, or related intervention strategies; expanded access to services; and child-level progress in areas such as communication, behavior, anxiety, individualized goals, and participation.

Projects funded under the Innovative Autism Treatment Models category reported research and evaluation activities that included intervention development, pilot or feasibility work, randomized controlled studies, data analysis, dissemination of findings, and preparation of manuscripts or publications. Available research results varied by project status and included both completed findings and ongoing analyses.

This report is submitted pursuant to the annual reporting requirement in the General Appropriations Act, Senate Bill 1, 89th Texas Legislature, directing the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to gather data from each funded institution's autism research center and report on the effectiveness of each program.

Introduction: Autism Grant Program

The 84th, 85th, and 86th Texas Legislatures appropriated \$8.1 million to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to administer the Autism Grant Program (AGP), a competitive grant program supporting Texas public and private general academic institutions conducting research and/or providing 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 to include Texas health-related institutions and independent universities. The General Appropriations Act, Senate Bill 1, 89th Texas Legislature, Rider 34 (III-71-72), 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.

Grant recipients provide treatments through a variety of approaches, including conventional therapies such as behavioral analysis, innovative treatment models, interventions provided within the public school system, and home-based services that actively engage parents and caregivers.

Since its inception in Fiscal Year 2016, the AGP has enabled grant recipients to serve 96,021 children with ASD through seven grant award cycles, surpassing the cumulative minimum service target established in rider by more than threefold.

The initial phase of the program included the first four rounds of funding between FY 2016 and FY 2019. During this period, AGP awarded grants across all three funding categories and conducted two additional parent-directed treatment competitions. Collectively, these first four rounds served 47,857 children with ASD and established the foundation for statewide autism treatment, training, and research initiatives.

The fifth and sixth rounds of AGP funding continued support for all three funding categories and served an additional 27,620 children with ASD. These grant cycles expanded access to evidence-based treatment, teacher and paraprofessional training, and innovative treatment models for children with ASD across Texas.

The seventh round of AGP grant awards was made in all three funding categories in FY 2024 and concluded on March 31, 2026. During this grant cycle, recipients served 20,544 children with ASD, exceeding the cycle service target of 9,891 children.

Consistent with Rider 34, unexpended funds from previous AGP grant cycles were redistributed as award increases to current grantees. During the FY 2024–2026 grant cycle, 9 of the 14 funded projects received award increases supported by unexpended balances from prior grant cycles.

Table 1 summarizes statewide service and training outcomes for the FY 2024–2026 AGP cycle by funding category, including the number of children served and the number of parents/caregivers and teachers/paraprofessionals trained, as required by the annual reporting requirement.

Table 1. Autism Grant Program Categories and Service, March 1, 2024, through March 31, 2026

Autism Grant Program Category	Biennium Amount Awarded	Children Served	Parents/Caregivers Trained	Teachers/Paraprofessionals
Parent-directed Treatment	\$4,110,000	1,703	N/A	N/A
Behavior Analyst Training for Teachers/Paraprofessionals	\$1,900,000	18,575	1655	2,445
Innovative Autism Treatment Models	\$1,400,000	266	N/A	N/A
Total	\$7,410,000	20,544	1,655	2,445

Source: AGP grantee required progress reports

Data Collection and Methodology

THECB collected data from each funded institution’s autism research center. Reported data included award and expenditure data, project implementation status, numbers of children served, numbers of parents/caregivers and/or teachers/paraprofessionals trained, progress toward projected service targets, reported outcomes, implementation challenges, and available research findings for innovative treatment model projects.

THECB reviewed grantee-reported information to summarize program outcomes and assess effectiveness based on each project’s stated goals, reported service levels, training participation, outcome measures, implementation progress, and available research results. Where final research findings were not yet available, this report identifies the status of implementation and distinguishes preliminary findings from final outcomes.

Review, Assessment, and Selection Process

AGP applications submitted in response to the FY 2024 request for applications (RFA) were reviewed by THECB staff and external subject matter experts. To support the review process, the THECB contracted with external reviewers possessing expertise in autism treatment, parent-directed interventions, and teacher/paraprofessional training.

Proposals were evaluated using the criteria outlined in the RFA, including the projected number of children with ASD to be served, feasibility of the proposed timeline, attainability of project goals, potential for long-term impact beyond the grant period, management structure, evaluation plans, budget appropriateness, and the qualifications of project directors and key personnel.

THECB staff reviewed the applications and compiled reviewer assessments and scoring results. Funding recommendations were submitted to the Commissioner of Higher Education for review. The Commissioner of Higher Education reviewed the recommendations and approved the final award selections.

To ensure continuity of the AGP, THECB issued a new RFA in January 2026 for the FY 2026–2028 grant cycle. Following a competitive review process, new grant awards were made to continue supporting autism services, training, and innovative treatment research throughout Texas.

Fiscal Years 2024-2026

The information contained in this report reflects activities and outcomes during the second year of the FY 2024–2026 AGP cycle, covering the period from March 2025 through March 2026. Grants awarded under the FY 2024 RFA included six Parent-directed Treatment projects, five Teacher/Paraprofessional Training projects, and three Innovative Treatment Model projects. This reporting period captures the final year of project implementation and the conclusion of the FY 2024–2026 grant cycle, which ended on March 31, 2026.

The funded projects served a total of 20,544 children with ASD during the FY 2024–2026 grant cycle, exceeding the cycle service target of 9,891 children. Grantees also reported training parents/caregivers, teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school-based personnel through structured training, coaching, workshops, modules, and related instructional activities.

Reported outcomes varied by project and included changes in caregiver knowledge, educator knowledge and application of behavior analytic practices, access to services for underserved and rural communities, and child-level progress in communication, behavior, individualized goals, anxiety, and participation. The following sections summarize project activities and outcomes by funding category, including projected and actual parents, children, and teachers served.

Parent-directed Treatment

The Parent-directed Treatment category included projects designed to provide training and coaching to parents and caregivers of children with ASD. Grantees reported activities focused on increasing caregiver knowledge, confidence, and use of evidence-based strategies in home and community settings. Reported child-level outcomes included progress related to communication, behavior, individualized goals, and family participation.

Several projects met or exceeded their projected service goals, while others served fewer families than originally projected. For projects that did not meet projected service counts, grantees reported participant-level outcomes and implementation factors that provide additional context for assessing program effectiveness. Overall, the category reflects continued support for parent and caregiver training, including efforts to reach families in rural and economically disadvantaged communities.

1. Baylor University, Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities

The Family CARE project provided high-quality training and support to parents of children with ASD to help them implement evidence-based practices within everyday family routines. The project developed and validated a parent training and coaching program, exceeding its goal of training 300 caregivers by providing 34 in-person and virtual training sessions that served 303 caregivers across Texas. The project also exceeded its goal of reaching underserved families, with 59% of participants being economically disadvantaged and/or residing in rural areas. A total of 346 children with ASD were directly served through training and coaching activities. Based on family feedback, training sessions were shortened to 2-2.5 hours, and coaching services were adapted to include a one-on-one short-term coaching option, which increased participation and better met family needs. Parent satisfaction with both training and coaching

components was high. Among families who completed coaching services, 90% of children demonstrated improvement on at least one individualized goal, and 80% improved on two of three targeted goals. Parents also demonstrated strong implementation of intervention strategies, reflecting the project's success in strengthening caregiver capacity and improving outcomes for children with ASD.

Total award: \$650,000 (\$457,000 original award + \$193,000 award increase)

Expenditures: \$610,758.65

Parents/children projected to be served: 300

Parents/children served during the grant period: 346

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

Coach-to-Communicate: Parent Partnerships Supporting Individuals with Autism successfully provided online training modules, live webinars, and individualized coaching to help parents support the communication and behavioral development of their children with ASD. The project exceeded its goal of serving 240 parent-child dyads, reaching 295 families through webinars and training and providing individualized coaching to 28 families. A key project objective of serving multilingual families was also achieved, with more than 61% of participating families speaking a language other than English at home. New training modules addressing complex communication needs were developed, and materials were offered in multiple languages, including Spanish and Thai. Through intensive and targeted coaching, parents learned evidence-based strategies to increase their children's communication skills, while ongoing evaluation and supervision ensured high-quality implementation. Overall, the project expanded access to parent-directed autism support and successfully met or exceeded its major program goals.

Total award: \$543,000 (500,000 original award + \$43,000 award increase)

Expenditures: \$414,774.18

Parents/children projected to be served: 240

Parents/children served during the grant period: 295

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

The East Lubbock Mobile and Telehealth Outreach Clinic for Autism (ELMO) addressed disparities in ASD services by providing parent education, training, and individualized support to families in underserved, low-socioeconomic, and rural communities throughout Texas. Through a combination of telehealth and community-based services, ELMO worked to improve the quality of life for both caregivers and children with ASD by increasing caregiver knowledge, confidence, and access to evidence-based strategies. Over the life of the grant, the project directly served 296 children with ASD and indirectly impacted more than 3,140 children through parent, caregiver, and educator training. Community engagement remained a priority through partnerships with local school districts, participation in autism awareness events, and caregiver-focused trainings addressing behavior management, communication, and family well-being. Families consistently reported positive experiences and meaningful benefits from the program. One caregiver shared, "We appreciate everything that you all did for us and our family! The Burkhardt Center has truly been a blessing!" Another parent stated, "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." The project successfully exceeded its original service goals and demonstrated the value of increasing access to autism supports for families who might otherwise face significant barriers to care.

Total award: \$472,000

Expenditures: \$471,245.11

Parents/children projected to be served: 190

Parents/children served during the grant period: 296

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

Teachers, speech-language pathologists, and other professionals were trained to use Imitation Therapy and teach parents and caregivers how to implement these strategies within their homes and in their primary language. The project was built upon a previous THECB-funded Parent-directed Treatment project and focused on increasing reciprocal imitation, verbalizations, and the variety of sounds and words produced by minimally verbal children with ASD. During the grant period, 457 professionals received training and 104 children with ASD were directly served, while trained professionals continued to apply these strategies with additional children and families in their communities. Feedback from parents and trainees remained highly positive throughout the project, with participants reporting encouraging outcomes and increased confidence in supporting communication development. All project activities, including training, recruitment, data collection, and final analysis, were successfully completed, and the project team continues efforts to disseminate findings through presentations and publications to expand the reach of evidence-based intervention practices for children with ASD.

Total award: \$489,000

Expenditures: \$299,362.60

Parents/children projected to be served: 200

Parents/children served during the grant period: 104

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

The goal of this project was to improve the social skills and communication of children from Latin American descent with ASD through a culturally adapted parent-directed training program. Building upon a previous THECB-funded Parent-directed Treatment project, the program expanded to serve 456 parents and 541 children across eight cohorts. Parents participated in large-group workshops, small-group sessions led by trained parent leaders, social events, and autism symposiums designed to strengthen their knowledge, confidence, and advocacy skills. Families reported meaningful benefits from the program, including improved understanding of their children's strengths and needs, increased confidence in supporting communication and behavior, and stronger participation in educational planning.

One parent shared that learning about the function of behavior helped her feel empowered when speaking with her child's teacher, while another reported feeling more confident and prepared to participate in her child's Individualized Education Program meeting. Parents also valued the opportunity to connect with other families facing similar experiences, helping to build a supportive community throughout the Rio Grande Valley. The project successfully met its service goals and demonstrated the positive impact of support for families of children with ASD.

Total award: \$684,455 (\$499,000 original award + \$185,000 award increase)

Expenditures: \$665,571.85

Parents/children projected to be served: 400

Parents/children served during the grant period: 541

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

Connecting the Dots expanded access to evidence-based communication and behavior intervention services for children with ASD and their caregivers through individualized training, single-target intervention, and its Educational Lecture Series. Over the grant period, the program directly served 121 children and their caregivers, providing both in-person and telehealth services. Families who completed services demonstrated strong outcomes, including significant reductions in problem behavior, increases in communication skills, and high levels of caregiver implementation accuracy.

The Educational Lecture Series broadened the program's reach through asynchronous learning opportunities, with materials enhanced to include practical, caregiver-friendly strategies and expanded access through a new Spanish-language version. Knowledge assessments showed caregiver understanding increased substantially following participation, with average scores rising from 82% before services to 97.2% after services. Through direct intervention, caregiver education, and expanded community outreach, the project successfully strengthened caregiver skills, improved child outcomes, and increased access to autism services for families throughout the Houston metropolitan area and beyond.

Total award: \$607,000 (\$500,000 original award + \$107,000 award increase)

Expenditures : \$546,066.73

Parent/children projected to be served: 210

Parent/children served during the grant period: 121

Teacher/Paraprofessional Training

THECB awarded five grants in the Board-Certified Behavior Analyst Training for Teachers/Paraprofessionals category. These projects were designed to train teachers, paraprofessionals, specialists, and other school-based personnel in evidence-based behavioral services and training, including applied behavior analysis, behavior analytic strategies, and related support for students with autism spectrum disorder.

Grantees reported training activities delivered through workshops, coaching, online modules, behavioral skills training, individualized support, and related professional development models. Reported outcomes included increased participant knowledge, improved confidence in applying behavior analytic strategies, development of training and implementation resources, and use of strategies in classroom and school settings.

Several projects exceeded projected training and child impact targets. Reported implementation factors included recruitment challenges, staffing transitions, and continued demand for training

and coaching supports. Overall, the category reflects continued support for building school-based capacity to serve students with ASD.

1. Sam Houston State University, College of Education

The goal of this project was to improve educational personnel's knowledge and application of behavior analytic strategies for teaching students with ASD. Building upon a previously funded Teachers/Paraprofessionals project, SHARE 2.0 expanded the reach of professional development opportunities by offering synchronous, asynchronous, and face-to-face training formats to educators across Texas. Participants received training on evidence-based practices, functional behavior assessments, behavior intervention planning, skill acquisition strategies, and other behavioral techniques, while also completing assessments and application activities designed to support implementation in educational settings.

Over the course of the project, 313 educators completed the workshop series, exceeding the goal of serving 300 educators and positively impacting an estimated 4,349 students with ASD. Results demonstrated meaningful improvements in educator knowledge, confidence, and application of behavioral strategies. The project also developed more than 22 hours of training content and an online resource hub containing training videos and implementation tools to support continued learning beyond the grant period. Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with educators reporting that the workshops provided practical, evidence-based strategies they could immediately apply in their classrooms and expressing a strong desire for continued training and mentorship opportunities.

Total award: \$389,000

Expenditures: \$298,418.24

Children projected to be served: 1,500

Children served during the grant period: 4,349

Teachers projected to be served: 300

Teachers served during the grant period: 313

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

The purpose of this project is to prepare practitioners (general education teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and specials teachers) working in rural settings to implement academic and behavior-based interventions grounded in applied behavior analysis for students with ASD. The project builds upon a THECB-funded (2020–22)

Teachers/Paraprofessionals project and continues to support students with ASD through a tiered training model, ongoing coaching, and asynchronous professional development resources.

During the grant period, project leaders expanded workshop offerings, individualized coaching, implementation guides, and monthly support resources to increase educators' use of evidence-based practices in school settings.

The project exceeded its original participation goals, directly impacting 7,645 students with ASD and serving 1,121 educators from rural districts. Despite challenges associated with recruiting participants from smaller rural communities, the project successfully expanded access to high-quality autism training and support services across Texas. Project leaders report continued

interest in workshops and coaching opportunities, demonstrating the ongoing need for professional development that equips educators to effectively support students with ASD.

Total award: \$399,000

Expenditures: \$265,075.57

Children projected to be served: 1,020

Children served during the grant period: 7,645

Teachers projected to be served: 255

Teachers served during the grant period: 1,121

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 have delivered applied behavior analysis services since 2009 and continue to build upon a THECB-funded Teachers/Paraprofessionals project. Through partnerships with multiple school districts across Central Texas, the project provided Board-Certified Behavior Analyst training to teachers, paraprofessionals, and specialists to support the implementation of evidence-based practices for students with ASD. Participants received both online and individualized behavioral skills training focused on classroom behavior management, data collection, progress monitoring, and instructional strategies.

Over the two-year grant period, the project exceeded its goals by training 153 educators and specialists and supporting 2,181 students with ASD. Participant feedback indicated high levels of satisfaction with the training, and educators reported successfully implementing strategies such as visual supports, communication interventions, behavior intervention plans, and positive reinforcement techniques in their classrooms. Despite staffing transitions during the grant period, project leaders successfully expanded resources and support for participating classrooms, contributing to meaningful improvements in educator practice and student outcomes while strengthening the sustainability of evidence-based autism services in partnering school districts.

Total award: \$575,000 (\$384,000 original award + \$191,000 award increase)

Expenditures: \$558,816.85

Children projected to be served: 1,500

Children served during the grant period: 2,181

Teachers projected to be served: 90

Teachers served during the grant period: 153

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

This project addresses the growing need for educator preparation and retention by providing a multi-level training and coaching model focused on supporting the social-emotional and behavioral needs of students with autism in inclusive school settings. Project RETAIN trained educators in non-invasive response strategies, practice-based coaching, and sustainability methods designed to improve classroom behavior management and increase educator confidence and competency.

Over the grant period, the project exceeded its training goals by serving 178 educators through Level 1 trainings, 38 educators through hands-on coaching and community-based experiences, and four educators through sustainability training. Educator feedback was continuously used to refine training content and coaching supports, resulting in high satisfaction ratings and strong implementation fidelity. The project directly served students through school-based coaching, Caregiver Night Out events, and Camp Durango, reaching a total of 2,116 children across project activities. Outcomes demonstrated substantial improvements in educator knowledge, implementation of evidence-based practices, and improvements in student behavior, while caregiver surveys reflected overwhelmingly positive experiences and strong interest in continued participation. The project successfully advanced evidence-based supports for educators and students with autism while promoting long-term sustainability of training efforts.

Total award: \$436,384 (\$400,000 original award + \$36,384 award increase)

Expenditures: \$436,384

Children projected to be served: 1,020

Children served during the grant period: 2,116

Teachers projected to be served: 132

Teachers served during the grant period: 211

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

This project provided a tiered training model to equip teachers, paraprofessionals, and district leaders with evidence-based applied behavior analysis (ABA) strategies to better support students with ASD. Building upon a previously funded Teachers/Paraprofessionals project, the program offered Tier 1 group training, individualized Tier 2 coaching, and advanced Tier 3 leadership training designed to help participants implement and share effective ABA practices within their schools.

Over the grant period, the project far exceeded its original goals, training 647 educators through Tier 1, 256 through Tier 2, and 52 through Tier 3, while positively impacting more than 2,200 students with ASD across Texas. Participants demonstrated significant gains in knowledge, preparedness, and confidence in applying behavioral strategies, and satisfaction ratings remained consistently high across all training levels. Additional funding allowed for expanded in-person consultation and coaching in school districts, further strengthening educator capacity and increasing access to high-quality autism supports. Educators frequently reported that the training provided practical, effective tools that immediately improved their ability to support students with ASD and collaborate with colleagues to implement evidence-based practices.

Total award: \$500,976 (\$400,000 original award + \$100,976 award increase)

Expenditures: \$490,361.37

Children projected to be served: 1,020

Children served during the grant period: 2,284

Teachers projected to be served: 200

Teachers served during the grant period: 647

Innovative Treatment Models

THECB awarded three grants in the Research, Development, and Evaluation of Innovative Autism Treatment Models category. These projects supported the development, implementation, and evaluation of innovative treatment approaches designed to expand access to autism services and improve outcomes for children with ASD.

Grantees reported activities that included intervention development, participant recruitment, caregiver training or education, treatment delivery, data collection, randomized controlled or feasibility studies, dissemination activities, and preparation of manuscripts or publications. Reported research outcomes varied by project status and included preliminary findings, completed pilot or feasibility work, ongoing data analysis, and reported changes in caregiver implementation, child communication, anxiety symptoms, or other project-specific outcome measures.

Several projects continued research and dissemination activities beyond direct service delivery. Overall, this category reflects support for research, development, and evaluation activities related to innovative autism treatment models, including models designed to expand access through technology-supported, internet-delivered, telehealth, caregiver-mediated, and early intervention approaches.

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 often limited due to cost, practical barriers associated with attending in-person sessions, and a shortage of trained providers. Internet-delivered CBT (iCBT) offers a promising approach to increasing access to evidence-based treatment by reducing barriers related to travel, time, and cost while expanding reach to rural and underserved communities. Building on prior THECB-funded work, this project addresses a significant treatment gap for autistic adolescents with anxiety through the development and evaluation of Learning to Understand and Navigate Anxiety for Adolescents (LUNA-Adolescent), an iCBT program tailored to the unique developmental needs of autistic teens.

During this reporting period, development of the LUNA-Adolescent intervention was completed, and all participants enrolled in both the pilot study and randomized controlled trial (RCT) completed treatment and assessments. Results from the pilot study demonstrated significant reductions in anxiety severity and overall psychopathology, high levels of family satisfaction, and positive treatment outcomes, leading to acceptance of the findings for publication. The RCT successfully enrolled and randomized participants, with the majority completing treatment and follow-up assessments. Data analysis is currently underway, and manuscripts reporting the primary outcomes are in preparation. Preliminary findings also suggest that LUNA-Adolescent may provide a more cost-effective alternative to standard CBT by requiring substantially less therapist time while maintaining positive clinical outcomes. The project continues to demonstrate promise in expanding access to effective anxiety treatment for autistic adolescents and their families.

Total award: \$897,000

Expenditures: \$690,096.57

Children projected to be served: 110
Children served during the grant period: 69

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

This project advances prior THECB AGP funding by examining whether mutual gaze, a core component of the Pathways Early Autism Intervention, serves as an active ingredient for improving social communication and adaptive functioning in young autistic children. The primary goal of the project was to evaluate the efficacy of the Pathways intervention in promoting social orienting, joint attention, social communication, language development, and adaptive functioning in autistic children aged 16-30 months. Project activities included recruitment through community organizations, healthcare providers, social media outreach, and family referrals; autism screening and assessment; caregiver training; and delivery of intervention services.

During the grant period, 61 children received full or partial intervention services, 263 caregivers received education and support, and hundreds of children and families participated in screening, referral, and assessment activities. The project also supported extensive dissemination efforts through professional presentations, community outreach, and peer-reviewed publications, contributing to the advancement of evidence-based autism interventions and increasing awareness of strategies that support early social development.

Total award: \$889,624 (\$847,000 original award + \$42,624 award increase)

Expenditures: \$824,618.07

Children projected to be served: 80

Children served during the grant period: 61

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

This project aimed to develop and evaluate the BehaviorBuddy app, an innovative technology designed to improve the sustained use of evidence-based applied behavior analysis practices by caregivers of children with autism. The project integrated telehealth service delivery, incidental teaching interventions, behavioral skills training, and strategies to promote the generalization and maintenance of caregiver skills, the project evaluated the app's role in supporting long-term intervention implementation while reducing reliance on ongoing coaching from Board-Certified Behavior Analysts. The project completed usability, feasibility, and randomized controlled studies, serving 136 children and their caregivers through telehealth and in-person services.

Data collected through the app were used to evaluate caregiver engagement, intervention maintenance, and treatment effectiveness. Caregiver fidelity data demonstrated a 444% increase in the correct implementation of incidental teaching strategies following telehealth training, while child communication data showed a 111% increase in target vocalizations. Project findings were disseminated through professional presentations, manuscripts in preparation, and media coverage highlighting the potential of technology-supported interventions to expand access to autism services. Parent participant feedback was 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: \$931,000 (\$740,000 original award + \$191,000 award increase)

Expenditures: \$930,223.70

Children projected to be served: 120

Children served during the grant period: 136

Research Results Summary for Innovative Treatment Models

[Table 2](#) summarizes the reported research status and available results for projects funded under the Research, Development, and Evaluation of Innovative Autism Treatment Models category.

Reported results vary by project design, implementation status, and available data at the close of the FY 2024–2026 grant cycle.

Table 2. Research Results Summary for Innovative Treatment Models

Institution	Innovative Model	Children Served	Reported Research Status	Reported Results
Baylor College of Medicine	LUNA-Adolescent internet-delivered cognitive behavioral therapy program	69	Pilot study completed; randomized controlled trial completed with data analysis underway	Pilot study results indicated reductions in anxiety severity and overall psychopathology, high family satisfaction, and potential for reduced therapist time compared to standard CBT.
The University of Texas at Dallas	Pathways Early Autism Intervention	61	Intervention services, caregiver education, assessment, dissemination, and related research activities conducted	Project activities focused on social orienting, joint attention, social communication, language development, and adaptive functioning. Reported outputs included children receiving full or partial intervention services, caregiver education and support, professional presentations, community outreach, and peer-reviewed publications.
The University of Texas at San Antonio	BehaviorBuddy app	136	Usability, feasibility, and randomized controlled studies completed	Reported findings included increased caregiver implementation of incidental teaching strategies and increased child target vocalizations following telehealth training.

Source: AGP grantee progress reports submitted in accordance with RFA reporting requirements. Research results reflect grantee-reported findings available at the close of the FY 2024–2026 grant cycle and may include preliminary findings, completed analyses, dissemination activities, or manuscripts in preparation, as applicable by project.

Conclusion

During the FY 2024-2026 grant cycle, the AGP supported projects in three funding categories established by the Texas Legislature: Parent-directed Treatment, Teacher and Paraprofessional Training, and Innovative Autism Treatment Models. Collectively, these projects served 20,544 children with ASD, exceeding the grant cycle's service target and bringing the program's cumulative impact to 96,021 children served since its inception in FY 2016. Across the three funding categories, grantees reported improvements in caregiver training, educator preparation, and research activities designed to improve services for children with ASD. Parent-directed Treatment projects supported families through caregiver training and intervention services. Teacher and paraprofessional training projects provided educators with evidence-based practices to support students with ASD. Innovative Treatment Model projects advanced research in telehealth, technology-assisted interventions, caregiver-mediated approaches, and early intervention.

These efforts reflect the program's ongoing role in supporting a range of evidence-based approaches to improving services for children with ASD and their families across Texas.

Appendix A: Annual Reporting Requirement for Autism Services

General Appropriations Act, Senate Bill 1, 89th Texas Legislature, Rider 34 (III-71-72)

The following provisions establish the funding allocation and annual reporting requirement applicable to the Autism Grant Program activities summarized in this report.

34. Autism Grant Program. Out of funds appropriated above to Strategy G.1.1, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) shall distribute to autism research centers at public and private 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; and
- d. Administrative support of the programs in Subsections a through c: \$150,000 per fiscal year may be expended by the Higher Education Coordinating Board.
- e. If funds appropriated under Paragraphs a, b, or c exceed the funds that can be expended in accordance with the requirements of that paragraph, the Higher Education Coordinating Board may expend the excess funds for any purpose described in Paragraphs a, b, or c.
- f. Any unexpended balances on hand at the end of fiscal year 2026 are hereby appropriated for the same purpose for fiscal year 2027.

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.

General Appropriations Act, Senate Bill 1, 89th Texas Legislature, General 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 2026-27 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 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 2026-27 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 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 2026 are appropriated for the same purpose for fiscal year 2027.

(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

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For more information, contact:

Cristine Ayala
Academic and Health Affairs
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
P.O. Box 12788
Austin, TX 78711
PHONE 512-427-6454
Cristine.Ayala@highered.texas.gov