

Autism Grant Program: Annual Progress Report

July 2021

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Agency Mission

The mission of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) is to provide leadership and coordination for Texas higher education and to promote access, affordability, quality, success, and cost efficiency through *60x30TX*, resulting in a globally competitive workforce that positions Texas as an international leader.

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 Coordinating Board'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.

Please cite this report as follows: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2021). Autism Grant Program: Annual Progress Report. Austin, TX.

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The Autism Grant Program

In 2015, 2017, and 2019, the 84th, 85th, and 86th Texas Legislatures appropriated \$8.1 million to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB or Coordinating Board) 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). In 2021, the 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, continued support for the program and expanded eligibility by authorizing the participation of Texas health-related institutions and independent universities. The General Appropriations Act, Senate Bill 1, Article III, Rider 44, 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.
- **Board-Certified Behavior Analyst 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.

The THECB administers the Autism Grant Program (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 at home with parents and caregivers.

Since the inception of this program, the AGP grants have served a total of 41,631 children over five rounds of grant awards, more than twice the minimum target. Over this time, the AGP has undertaken the following activities:

- The initial ASD grant awards were made in all three funding categories in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016. Grant recipients have 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).
- The third round of ASD grant awards was made in all three funding categories in FY 2018, and a fourth round of awards was made to support Parent-Directed Treatment in FY 2019. The third round of AGP grants ended in June 2020. This third grant cycle (2018-2020) allowed for the treatment of an additional 12,985 children with ASD.
- The fourth round of AGP grant awards for the Parent-Directed Treatment ended in December 2020. This fourth round served 5,968 additional children with ASD.
- A fifth round of ASD grant awards was made in all three funding categories in FY 2020, ending June 2022. As of May 2021, this fifth grant cycle has served 4,532 additional children with ASD for a combined total of 41,631 children with ASD served since the program began in 2016. Individual grants have 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.

Table 1. Autism Grant Program Categories and Service for May 2020 through May 2021

Autism Grant Program Category	Amount Awarded	Children Served	Teachers/ Paraprofessionals
Parent-Directed Treatment	\$4,500,000	1,515	n/a
Behavior Analyst Training for Teachers/Paraprofessionals	\$1,900,000	8,241	987
Innovative Autism Treatment Models	\$1,400,000	106	n/a

Source: THECB AGP grantees required reports

The AGP has a target for its recipients to serve a combined 8,094 children with ASD for grants awarded in FYs 2019 and 2020, or 20,235 children since the program began in 2016. The program is currently exceeding its targets for the Parent-Directed Treatment (minimum 750 each FY) and Behavior Analyst Training for Teachers/Paraprofessionals (minimum 2,547 each FY).

The AGP also included \$150,000 per fiscal year for administrative costs, which the THECB uses 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 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 webpage for the Autism Grant Program is www.highered.texas.gov/AGP.

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 two external reviewers, one with primary expertise in parent-based treatment, and one with primary expertise in teacher/paraprofessional training. Another external reviewer from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission with expertise in ASD grant projects volunteered and participated in the review process.

Each application was reviewed by a three-member team comprised of the THECB grant administrator, an additional THECB staff member, and an external content expert reviewer.

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 made the final award selection for funding.

Fiscal Years 2018-2020 Autism Grant Program Awards

An FY 2018 RFA with funding available for all three categories of the grant program was released in May 2018 and the following projects were selected for funding by category. Due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, 10 of the 12 awards were granted a no-cost extension of various lengths according to their activities and unspent money to continue grant activities up to one year past the original grant end date, two of which remain active (Baylor University, Parent-Directed Treatment; and Texas A&M University, Teacher/Paraprofessional Training).

Parent-Directed Treatment

In the Parent-Directed Treatment category, the THECB funded the following six projects:

Baylor College of Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine/Texas Children's Hospital Autism Center. The project offered implementation of a parent-led, flexible, individually tailored cognitive-behavioral treatment intervention for children with autism and anxiety and examines the effectiveness of stepped-care behavioral interventions for anxiety in children with autism.

Project accommodations included conducting baseline assessments remotely to allow families to enroll without increasing their risk of COVID-19 exposure. Transitioning to telepsychiatry addressed many COVID-related challenges. The success of recruitment efforts allowed a large number of families to receive treatment during the most recent reporting period. A significant number of families responded positively to treatment, and outcomes at post-treatment assessments tended to generally reflect improvement among participants over corresponding scores at baseline and mid-treatment assessments.

Total award: \$500,000

Expenditures to date: \$473,990

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 120

Parent/children pairs served to date: 96

Baylor University, Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities. The project provides high-quality parent training in evidence-based practices to rural families through a six-week program, for a total of 12 visits and 18 hours consisting of frequent visits with a parent coach.

Project progress was presented at the Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities Consortium in January 2020, the Association for Behavior Analysis International Autism Conference in February 2020, and at the Texas Association of Behavior Analysis

Regional Conference in April 2020. The project continues to receive tremendous community support. Numerous partnerships with service providers have been facilitated by project leaders to assist with family recruitment.

Total award: \$278,456
Expenditures to date: \$274,269
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 100
Parent/children pairs served to date: 74

Texas A&M University (TAMU), Center of Disability and Development. The project offers a program in homes and online to train parents in communication strategies for their children with ASD. The program expanded its reach to recruit and prioritize families from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, rural areas, and children with severe autism spectrum disorder.

The project has thus far serviced families in 42 Texas counties. Recruiting initiatives include flyers in Spanish and updated virtual recruitment materials via social media as well as distribution to independent school districts (ISDs), organizations, parent/family support groups, early childhood intervention services programs, and ASD service providers throughout Texas to recruit more widely across the state. Recruiting efforts have included an emphasis on rural and border areas that may not otherwise have access to high-quality services.

Total award: \$500,000
Expenditures to date: \$483,267.68
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 168
Parent/children pairs served to date: 202

University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL), Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities. The project built upon a prior THECB autism grant and offered communication and behavior management assessment training to Houston-area caregivers of individuals diagnosed with ASD with six components to the program: 1) Behavior over Breakfast, 2) Connecting the Dots, 3) Verbal Behavior Clinic, 4) Severe Behavior Disorders Research Clinic, 5) Texas Children's Hospital Behavior Analysis Program, and 6) UHCL Verbal Behavior Clinic Telehealth.

Project leaders developed a handbook and research programs due to the project's success. Family participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive, citing the knowledge, friendliness, and understanding nature of project representatives.

Total award: \$497,996
Expenditures to date: \$497,677.25
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 165
Parent/children pairs served to date: 169

The University of Texas at Dallas, Development of Social Cognition Laboratory, School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences. The project investigated two mechanisms of social impairment in older adolescents with autism that current

psychosocial programs fail to address: 1) exclusionary social environments and 2) underactive neural responses in the “social brain.” The goal is to address these mechanisms to assist with real-world future functioning to secure and maintain employment, succeed in college, and develop satisfying personal and professional relationships.

The project achieved documented and anecdotal success. Several typically developing participants expressed increased interest in autism after their participation completed and asked many follow-up questions, speaking to one of the project’s goals of improving autism understanding and acceptance in typically developing peers. One of many of the project’s published papers detailing real-world social interaction between autistic and non-autistic adults received tremendous attention, both among researchers and community members. The project also received significant favorable feedback from participants, demonstrating anecdotal progress.

Total award: \$305,130
Expenditures to date: \$241,744.24
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 154
Parent/children pairs served to date: 84

The University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley, College of Education Special Education Research Consortium. The project delivered evidence-based training to help develop parent capacities (including Individualized Education Program knowledge), connections, cognition, and confidence to generate a community of autism resources and support.

The project was accepted for a prestigious opportunity to present at the Center for Applied Special Technology, which has long been recognized as the center for accessible learning. Parent participants reported that they felt project participation helped to prepare them for the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Parent participants also cited the importance of project representative support in helping to improve the transition to shelter-in-place orders.

Total award: \$500,000
Expenditures to date: \$410,107.31
Parent/children projected to be served: 190
Parent/children served to date: 265

Teacher/Paraprofessional Training

In the Teacher/Paraprofessional Training Category, the Coordinating Board funded four applications:

Sam Houston State University, Low Incidence Disabilities and Autism Program. The project offered a training model for educators who work with children with autism and who are interested in learning to write and implement a behavior intervention plan derived from the results of a functional behavior assessment to avoid non-prescriptive, blanket treatments that result in costly, improper interventions that

delay or prevent positive outcomes.

Project representatives trained representatives from each of the 20 Education Service Centers (ESCs) across the state. A "Trainer of Trainers" model was used to allow ESC representatives to train educators in their respective regional public school districts. Training materials were continuously revised as feedback was obtained from ESC specialists in the field. Pandemic-related restrictions caused significant delays in serving students and teachers, and in expending grant funds.

Total award: \$305,366
Expenditures to date: \$211,648.39
Children projected to be served: 4,200
Children served to date: 1,620
Teachers projected to be served: 820
Teacher served to date: 162

Texas A&M University, Center on Disability and Development. The project provides an introductory online learning management training and will develop intermediate and advanced training for Texas professionals in private and public educational institutions who provide services to children with autism.

Project representatives are placing additional targeted ads on Facebook and Instagram to expand project reach to underserved areas. Training materials are in the process of being translated into Spanish. Various email and social media platform outreach efforts have resulted in reaching over 12,600 people, namely educators, including 33 school districts to date. In the most recent reporting period, 4% of users originated from social media ads, 66% from word of mouth or email campaign, 24% via their graduate program coursework or their school district, and 4% from project modules via search engines.

Total award: \$475,000
Expenditures to date: \$331,626.72
Children projected to be served: 2,935
Children served to date: 3,924
Teachers projected to be served: 308
Teachers served to date: 387

Texas Tech University (TTU), Burkhart Center for Autism Education and Research. The project offered initial training of multiple Education Service Center autism specialists as part of a Trainer of Trainers program during a three-day, intensive workshop alongside TTU faculty and staff to learn skills specific to training teachers.

Scheduling for overwhelmed ESC personnel remained a challenge to project implementation, namely due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. An extended virtual training model across three days was created to avoid educators having to interrupt their instruction time, which was a significant challenge with COVID-19 restrictions for schools. Project teacher participants shared their intent to increase their knowledge regarding behavior analysis and addressing problem behavior in the classroom, and several have applied to graduate programs for an advanced degree.

Total award: \$475,000
Expenditures to date: \$333,589
Children projected to be served: 8,000
Children served to date: 5,444
Teachers projected to be served: 400
Teachers served to date: 302

University of Houston-Clear Lake, Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities. The project was an extension and modification of a 2016 THECB autism grant that offers teachers and paraprofessionals training and classroom consultation services on effective practices for students with autism, with a particular focus on understanding and managing problem behavior.

Satisfaction surveys indicated participants were highly satisfied with the trainings and overall program. Consistency was observed across comments indicating that this training should be available for all special education teachers and paraprofessionals. Data indicated all participants demonstrated what they learned at the trainings with high integrity, increasing the likelihood of correctly implementing the procedures and effectively managing problem behavior in their classrooms.

Total award: \$173,300

Expenditures to date: \$171,566.97
Children projected to be served: 450
Children served to date: 487
Teachers projected to be served: 100
Teachers served to date: 202

Innovative Treatment Models

In the Innovative Treatment category, the THECB provided funding for two awards:

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

The project offered research on the effectiveness of visual-based early intervention strategies to improve social interaction, attention, and play skills in economically/culturally diverse children, younger than age 5 up to preschool.

The project reported strong results, with students displaying measurable improvement in eye contact, social engagement, and verbal reciprocity. Project leaders shared findings in national and international peer-reviewed journals and conferences. As a result, the project had an enormous impact on early intervention programs across the state.

In the most recent report, the project trained a total of 563 early childhood intervention therapists from 20 early childhood intervention programs across the state to implement the program. In addition, a total of 4,563 parent manuals were accessed by early childhood intervention agencies.

Total award: \$882,261
Expenditures to date: \$882,261

Children projected to be served: 400
Children served to date: 425

The University of Texas at San Antonio, Psychological Assessment and Consultation Center (San Antonio Applied Behavior Analysis Research Consortium). The purpose of the project was to pilot an innovative evaluation and treatment procedure to facilitate early identification and intervention of infants (0-18 months) and toddlers (18-36 months) "at-risk" for autism.

As a result of robust enthusiasm for the project, a second site was opened to allow all project participants to be centrally located. The original site was also relocated to allow for an additional treatment room, larger research workspace, and a caregiver training room in a newly renovated university building. Multiple local media releases led to increased interest in the program.

Parents reported the project's impact: "Without you all, I could not imagine how behind they would be right now. I'm forever grateful to each and every one of you," and "Words can't express how grateful we are to you and everybody there that helped with our daughter in her diagnosis process..." Many participants reported that they were given project contact information by previous participants who were greatly impacted by the project and were excited to recommend it to their friends and family members. During Autism Acceptance Month festivities, a participant's older brother prepared a tremendously impactful speech thanking the project team for providing support, acceptance, and care of his younger sibling.

Total award: \$1,251,063
Expenditures to date: \$ 1,165,882
Children projected to be served: 75
Children served to date: 113

Fiscal Years 2019-2020 Autism Grant Program Awards

In FY 2019, \$1,787,269 was available to make additional awards under the Parent-Directed Treatment category. A second RFA was issued in December 2018. Ten applications were received for Parent-Directed Treatment, and seven were recommended and selected for awards.

Parent-Directed Treatment

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

Baylor College of Medicine, Center of Disability and Development. The project aims to improve access to anxiety-focused parent-led therapist-assisted (PLTA) cognitive behavioral therapy for parents of youth with ASD. Key goals include evaluating the effectiveness of two models of telehealth PLTA treatment delivery, determining for whom each treatment option works best, understanding parental treatment preferences, and examining cost-effectiveness of the interventions.

Project representatives have received significant program interest from continued recruitment efforts and increasing encouraging feedback from participants in the program. The project received a no-cost extension until December 2021 to use funds that experienced expending delays in part due to COVID-19.

Total award: \$300,000
Expenditures to date: \$213,674
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 190
Parent/children pairs served to date: 61

Baylor University, Center for Developmental Disabilities. The project provides parent coaching in evidence-based interventions to families using telehealth technology. A key goal is to recruit families living in rural areas (at least 75% of total participants).

Project representatives report elevated interest among graduate students to serve on the project as graduate research assistants, receiving more applications than expected for those positions. The project received a no-cost extension until December 2021 to use funds that experienced expending delays in part due to COVID-19.

Total award: \$212,409
Expenditures to date: \$122,429
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 80
Parent/children pairs served to date: 30

Texas A&M University, Center of Disability and Development. The project serves Spanish-speaking families, trains community service providers serving Spanish-speaking families, improves parent emotional well-being, and increases language and literacy skills of Spanish-speaking children with ASD.

The project uses evidence-based strategies of story-based instruction, augmentative and alternative communication, conversation expansion, and positive behavior supports. The project received a no-cost extension until August 2021 to serve more families and children in the intended modalities that were interrupted with restrictions caused by COVID-19.

Total award: \$191,161
Expenditures to date: \$147,444.42
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 115
Parent/children pairs served to date: 310

Texas Tech University, The Burkhart Center for Autism Education and Research. The project is a mobile outreach unit, allowing service to parents across all areas of West Texas, with a specific focus on rural and migrant families, as well as families who do not have the resources available to receive services (low socioeconomic, children in foster care, etc.).

The project continues to attract statewide and national recognition. The project received a no-cost extension until September 2021 to use funds that experienced expending delays due to COVID-19.

Total award: \$300,000
Expenditures to date: \$210,727
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 1,100
Parent/children pairs served to date: 4,885

University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL), Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities. The project built upon a prior THECB autism grant to provide communication and behavior management assessment and training to caregivers of individuals diagnosed with ASD, with two components to the proposed program: 1) Behavior over Breakfast and 2) Connecting the Dots.

Project representatives were invited by Houston ISD, the largest school district in Texas, to their "World Autism Day" in April 2020 as speakers and a resource to highlight the project. The waiting list continually grew and included parents referred by other parents, highlighting the value of the project to the community. Families expressed gratitude for the services received and the progress their children made.

Total award: \$252,525
Expenditures to date: \$252,525
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 158
Parent/children pairs served to date: 66

University of North Texas, Kristin Farmer Autism Center. The project was an implementation of an evidence-based training program to increase the knowledge and skills of parents of children with ASD in a statewide school readiness collaboration.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted activities, however adjustments were made as necessary and appropriate. The project included a partnership with the Texas Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY) to expand and improve effective in-home training and support to families with a child with ASD.

Total award: \$217,022
Expenditures to date: \$165,639.65
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 80
Parent/children pairs served to date: 84

The University of Texas at Austin, Center for Disability Studies. The project provided evidence-based parent training to caregivers of children with ASD across five semesters of training in evidence-based intervention for enhancing language skills in young children with ASD. Socioeconomically, culturally, and linguistically diverse families were offered a cultural adaptation to meet their needs.

The project received multiple referrals through various agencies in Austin. In addition, families across Texas self-referred by contacting project representatives with training

availability inquiries. The project exceeded its goals and reported overwhelmingly positive response from participating families.

Total award: \$299,903

Expenditures to date: \$253,387

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 510

Parent/children pairs served to date: 532

Fiscal Years 2020-2021 Autism Grant Program Awards

A FY 2020 RFA with funding available for all three categories of the grant program was published January 31, 2020. Eight applications were received for Parent-Directed Treatment, and seven were awarded. Eight applications were received for Teacher/Paraprofessional Training, and six were awarded. Six applications were received for Innovative Treatment models, and four were awarded.

Parent-Directed Treatment

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

Texas A&M University, Center on Disability and Development. The project involves online, self-paced instructional modules and coaching of parents to identify their and their children's needs and priorities related to communication deficits via a multimodal communication intervention. The proposed project builds upon a THECB-funded (2016-2020) parent-directed treatment project.

The project has been featured on two different local news channels. To address pandemic challenges, meetings were planned with public school districts with high proportions of at-risk students to provide multiple live workshops to train bilingual and diverse educators more intensively.

Total award: \$499,861

Expenditures to date: \$53,860.88

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 300

Parent/children pairs served to date: 104

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

The project provides a telehealth autism outreach clinic directed at parent/family-mediated interventions that expand on services available to rural and migrant families in the West Texas region, with a focus on providing families in underserved areas the same high-quality services available in urban or largely populated areas. Training and support for parents is offered locally as well as via a mobile clinic to reach a greater number of parents across regions of Texas.

Given the outreach limitation restrictions due to COVID-19, contact with each regional ESC autism specialist has been accomplished, and information regarding the project has been shared on social media platforms. Current findings when interviewing families

during initial intake indicate 98.9% of families are unaware of the waitlist for services such as “Community Living Assistance and Support Services” and other long-term care providers that are part of statewide Texas Health and Human Commission Services.

Total award: \$456,000

Expenditures to date: \$93,871

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 300

Parent/children pairs served to date: 14

Texas Woman’s University, Speech and Language Clinic. The project applies imitation therapy in a home setting. Following training, parents serve as the interventionists, and data will be collected via a tool that automatically records and quantifies the interactions exchanged between adults and children. The major objective of the project is to determine the increase in the sound and imitation repertoire of the participating children.

Pandemic restrictions created unforeseen challenges regarding efforts to contact and screen potential participants for the study while practicing all the appropriate state, federal, and CDC guidance safety guidelines. Additionally, many families were unable to participate due to the statewide winter storm in February 2021 and hospitalizations associated with COVID-19.

Total award: \$291,847

Expenditures to date: \$114,674.26

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 300

Parent/children pairs served to date: 19

The University of Texas at Austin, Speech and Hearing Center. The project provides evidence-based parent training to caregivers of children with ASD. For socioeconomically, culturally, and linguistically diverse families, a cultural adaptation is used to meet their needs face to face, on demand, and via workshop opportunities.

The project continues to exceed projected numbers, in part due to the robust referral process by professionals and referrals from participating families.

Total award: \$399,044

Expenditures to date: \$159,388

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 480

Parent/children pairs served to date: 248

The University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley, Department of Human Development & School Services. The project aims to assist parents who have children or adolescents with autism improve their psychological flexibility, confidence, and psychological well-being via opportunities to connect and support each other while learning evidence-based strategies.

Parent success stories indicate that parents are not only developing knowledge about evidence-based strategies but also applying what they learn to help their children. Parents report application of project training when advocating for their child’s inclusion

through public school participation provided under federal and state laws. The participants are gaining confidence in engaging in social interactions with their peers and parents and repeatedly share appreciation for the program on social media. The network of parent groups continues to grow, with the Upper Valley area now included to expand program impact.

Total award: \$499,265
Expenditures to date: \$174,659.84
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 320
Parent/children pairs served to date: 238

Baylor University, Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities. The goal of this project is to provide rural community parent training to parents of children with autism via telehealth technology to increase children's access to evidence-based practices to decrease reliance on professionals and resources required for lifespan support. This project aims to lead to the generation of new knowledge with the dissemination of findings yielding improvements in the standard of care.

Despite the decrease in response to advertisement of the program relative to the response rate from previously funded parent-directed projects, as an indirect effect of the pandemic with significant upheaval of family routines, the children served are making great strides in meeting their goals, and caregivers are reporting high satisfaction with the program. The program has the remaining year of the grant period to fulfill their goals toward projected numbers of children served.

Total award: \$369,699
Expenditures to date: \$36,650
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 180
Parent/children pairs served to date: 4

University of Houston-Clear Lake, Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities. The project is an expansion of an established funded program that provides communication and behavior management, assessment, and training to caregivers of individuals diagnosed with autism. Children who have language or social skills deficits and mild-to-moderate problem behavior are referred to the project. Services are available in person or via telehealth.

Families on the waitlist continue to opt for in-person services over telehealth services during the COVID-19 pandemic, citing internet fatigue per school and work use, and a lack of interest in receiving telehealth services. Hurricane Laura threatened the location of services, causing additional project delays, and the statewide freeze in February 2021 forced university operations to close. Additionally, some therapists are unable to work in the clinic based on the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the aforementioned project obstacles, in-person services returned in late spring 2021, and the project is expected to fulfill its goal of children served.

Total award: \$366,811
Expenditures to date: \$131,951.10

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 210
Parent/children pairs served to date: 36

Teacher/Paraprofessional Training

The Coordinating Board awarded six grants in the Board-certified Behavior Analyst Training for the Teachers/Paraprofessionals category:

Baylor University, Center for Developmental Disabilities. The goal of the project is to provide high-quality professional development to special education teachers with ongoing support to improve the quality of instruction provided to children with autism, leading to better outcomes for children with autism in Texas. The project works collaboratively with regional educational service centers to conduct the project.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the teacher training format to adapt to function entirely online, creating a one-month delay. The project is expected to fulfill its goal of parent/children served. Teachers trained under the project that are pursuing and receiving their Registered Behavior Technician certification is cited as further evidence that the project will improve the quality of services delivered to children with autism in Texas.

Total award: \$474,843
Expenditures to date: \$126,243
Children projected to be served: 850
Children served to date: 958
Teachers projected to be served: 240
Teachers served to date: 119

Texas A&M University, Center on Disability and Development. The project supports students with autism via a tiered training and coaching model on the foundations and applications of behavior analysis for paraprofessionals in public and charter schools with ongoing access to continuing education training videos.

Increased interest in the program has facilitated continued scheduling of workshops throughout summer 2021 and into fall 2021.

Total award: \$471,662
Expenditures to date: \$89,148.35
Children projected to be served: 850
Children served to date: 665
Teachers projected to be served: 170
Teachers served to date: 124

Texas State University, Clinic for Autism Research, Evaluation, and Support. The project provides training on evidence-based practices for students with autism to certified teachers and teaching assistants (paraprofessionals) that provide direct education and intervention services to students with autism in Texas public schools via one of two possible training paths.

The school's restrictions on in-person training, due to COVID-19, hindered recruitment, contributed to attrition, and complicated the project service delivery process. Despite hinderances caused by COVID-19, the project increased recruitment and recaptured delays during Year 2 of the project. It is anticipated that continued easing of COVID-related restrictions during Year 2 will result in the ongoing increase in training and children served.

Total award: \$286,701
Expenditures to date: \$103,793.12
Children projected to be served: 1,025
Children served to date: 694
Teachers projected to be served: 114
Teacher served to date: 6

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

The project is focused on providing training to educators by incorporating a coaching and feedback model with focus on generalization of skills in the classroom setting. The project goal is to provide assessment teams and educators the knowledge and resources necessary to provide a high-quality assessment in the school setting, with additional resources to develop function-based interventions founded on evidence-based practices to address problem behavior in the classroom setting.

COVID-19 restrictions proved problematic regarding implementation of the project, with hiring delays, limited availability to create new or access existing work materials due to remote work/closure of campus, and challenges with extreme teacher online burnout. Additionally, the statewide freeze interfered with participants having access to the internet and time to complete the project goals in a timely manner. Project representatives addressed these unforeseen challenges by speaking with special education directors or leads in districts to facilitate good turnout of participants in training.

Total award: \$460,000
Expenditures to date: \$148,359
Children projected to be served: 850
Children served to date: 766
Teachers projected to be served: 174
Teacher served to date: 159

The University of Texas at San Antonio, Educational Psychology. The widespread lack of access to applied behavior analytic-based education for children with autism in San Antonio focuses this project to address this systemic problem by helping special education teachers become Board Certified Behavior Analysts. The project incorporates applied behavior analysis into teaching practices and classroom management to more effectively meet educational reform law targets, such as equity, reliance on evidence-based interventions and accountability, and demonstration of mastery of data-based decision making.

The statewide freeze caused a loss of approximately two weeks of treatment and supervision. Project representatives recovered with additional services and increasing production of the severe behavior lab and the outpatient summer clinics to provide intensive services and supervision this summer. Collected teacher and caregiver feedback have thus far rated their supervision experience as "excellent" (88%) or "very good" (13%).

Total award: \$474,921
Expenditures to date: \$101,981
Children projected to be served: 850
Children served to date: 408
Teachers projected to be served: 12
Teachers served to date: 14

University of Houston-Clear Lake, Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities. The project targets public school teachers and paraprofessionals who instruct students with a primary diagnosis of autism in the Houston Metropolitan Area to receive training and classroom consultation services on effective practices, with particular focus on understanding and managing problem behavior.

Due to the pandemic, the project was completely revamped to provide it via a virtual platform (e.g., Zoom™) and to accommodate complicated teacher schedules. Although trainers were unable to visit teachers in their classrooms, follow-up emails were continually sent to all teachers and paraprofessionals as they progressed through the training, and they were provided with additional in-vivo support via virtual meetings. Satisfaction surveys indicate participants are highly satisfied with the trainings and overall program, demonstrating what they learned with high integrity, increasing the likelihood of them correctly implementing these procedures and effectively managing problem behavior in their classrooms.

Total award: \$466,593
Expenditures to date: \$201,607.26
Children projected to be served: 850
Children served to date: 308
Teachers projected to be served: 288
Teachers served to date: 107

Innovative Treatment Models

The Coordinating Board awarded four grants in the Research, Development, and Evaluation of Innovative Autism Treatment Models category:

Baylor College of Medicine with Texas Children's Hospital Neurological Research Institute. The goal of the project is to develop and evaluate a parent-led internet-delivered CBT (iCBT) treatment model consisting of an interactive website with treatment materials that parents can work through with their child, provided in English and Spanish. The project will evaluate the clinical and cost-effectiveness of two different

models of brief therapist support to enhance iCBT utilization and outcomes and inform sustainability.

Project leaders developed intervention materials and recruitment for stakeholders for the stakeholder-engaged research and have reached out to many providers of autism research in Texas to develop statewide referral networks. The project has received inquiries from school support personnel and families, indicating strong interest for when full enrollment can begin for participants. Project leaders plan to submit a no-cost extension request to allow sufficient time for all study activities.

Total award: \$690,963

Expenditures to date: \$0

Children projected to be served: 140

Children served to date: 0

Baylor University, Baylor Speech, Language, and Hearing Clinic. The project will investigate and quantify effects of multitasking organic motion stimulus as an intervention to benefit children with autism. The intervention involves stimulating the body with organic motion through riding on a mechanical horse-riding simulator, while simultaneously engaging the rider with motor and cognitive activities.

The project will determine the extent to which the intervention affects various autism symptoms including core behavior, balance, motor coordination, and speech and language. The project aims to reveal neural changes associated with the intervention and the extent to which these changes may provide predictive biomarkers of therapeutic response.

The primary challenge of participant recruitment was addressed by adapting to a compressed protocol schedule and seeking to complete each participant in 15 weeks rather than the previous plan of two 12-week periods. The project has maintained session count via two sessions per week per participant, rather than one per week. Recruitment efforts, recruitment flyer upgrades, and keeping communications active with the community and with clinic recruitment partners were also completed. Given the shorter overall commitment, increased dosage frequency can be accomplished. The completion of new participants through the first half of the project has been reported as a major accomplishment given that it provides the first sets of pre- and post-assessments data.

Total award: \$599,209

Expenditures to date: 273,566

Children projected to be served: 30

Children served to date: 8

Texas Woman's University, School of Occupational Therapy. This project creates established high school-level autism rating teams and protocols to evaluate the autism-friendliness of community venues and events. The goal of this research is to create an innovative, sustainable approach to promoting community participation for students, schools, and venues impacted by autism spectrum disorders via the development of the Community Participation curriculum, teaching activities, and tools.

Pursuit of relationships with local school districts has continued to be non-committal due to the need for further guidance from the Texas Education Agency regarding the 2021-2022 school year. Relationships will continue to be established with the intent of providing training, obtaining feedback, and accessing students in public schools. Restrictions at community facilities has prohibited visitors and outings. Full reopening plans by August 2021 will allow the project to access more participants, staff, and volunteers.

As communities and school districts continue to open in the summer and fall of 2021, the projection is to increase the number of individuals served and to continue efforts to build groups throughout area agencies/school districts. Project leaders report that it remains possible to approach the total target goal for this upcoming school year.

Total award: \$267,477
Expenditures to date: \$60,350.12
Children projected to be served: 250
Children served to date: 21

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

The project is an autism-specific, parent-mediated naturalistic developmental behavioral intervention that blends developmental and applied behavioral analysis techniques. It differs from other interventions in its innovative protocol to facilitate mutual gaze by coaching parents to use implicit teaching with contingent natural reinforcement during motivating face-to-face routines. The aim is that the focus on mutual gaze may adjust brain activity toward a more typical trajectory.

The project is currently serving fewer families than originally projected due to the slower roll out of the program due to COVID-19 barriers, including the switch to telehealth that impacted family readiness for intervention. Community outreach to increase awareness of the project and increase referrals continues to occur to improve participation. Project leaders provided an in-service in Spanish to approximately 50 parents and educators in a Dallas Independent School District meeting. Project status was presented in a webinar as part of the UT System Early Childhood Scholars Series. Approximately 125 people attended the lecture live and, to date, 56 people have viewed the webinar on YouTube. See <https://sites.utexas.edu/utsystem-ec/relational-health-from-research-to-practice-with-families-of-children-with-autism-or-hearing-differences/>. The project is expected to fulfill its goal of children served.

Total award: \$863,926
Expenditures to date: \$343,929.32
Children projected to be served: 200
Children served to date: 41

The THECB maintains information about the AGP online at www.highered.texas.gov/agp.



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

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