



Identifying Trends and Supports for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder Transitioning into Postsecondary

By: Susan Alcorn MacKay

This paper has two goals: 1) to identify the numbers of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who will be graduating with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma and entering postsecondary studies in 2009, 2010 and 2011, and 2) to perform a gap analysis comparing the services provided in secondary schools with those currently provided in postsecondary education. The hope is that the findings will assist postsecondary institutions in planning and preparing services and supports for students with ASD.

The report finds that there are 5,800 students identified with ASD currently in Ontario's publicly funded secondary schools. School staff expect that approximately 1,100 of these students will seek to enter college or university between 2009 and 2011.

The report makes a number of suggestions for postsecondary institutions to support students with ASD based on successful practices at the secondary school level. These include:

- more specialists and staff who are trained in meeting the needs of students with ASD working in postsecondary institutions, especially in institutions where there are large numbers of students identified with ASD;
- active partnerships with parents where designated disability service staff, students and their families can work together to build an effective support plan;
- adjustments to the learning environment to make it more accommodating to students with ASD,
- close monitoring of social-emotional needs particularly during transitions periods; and,
- training for staff at postsecondary institutions in ASD-specific learning strategies and flexibility for support personnel to work more intensively with students during transition periods.

Enrolment numbers and recommendations from the report are garnered from a survey of publicly funded school boards and school authorities and colleges and universities in Ontario. Of school boards and school authorities 86 per cent responded to the survey along with 15 of Ontario's 19 universities and all 24 of Ontario's colleges.

About the Author

Susan Alcorn MacKay is the Director of Northern Ontario Assessment & Resource Centre and is a past member of the executive of the Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Post-Secondary Education (CADSPPE). Susan is the vice chair of the provincial College Committee on Disability Issues (CCDI) and also serves on the Provincial Advisory Committee on Disability Issues.