

PROJECT FACT SHEET

How Can We Help NS Children with Autism Succeed in School?

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Educating children with autism in Nova Scotia is addressed under the umbrella of “special education.” New research has explored the need for teachers to have more information on this condition.

Educational policies for addressing the needs of children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) should be developed with current knowledge and proven best-practices in mind. Penny Corkum, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Dalhousie University, and Susan Bryson,

Professor and Craig Chair in Autism Research, Departments of Pediatrics and Psychology, Dalhousie University and the IWK Health Centre; and Isabel Smith, Associate Professor, Pediatrics and Psychology, Dalhousie University and IWK Health Centre, conducted focus groups and surveys in a school board within Nova Scotia and discovered a need for information about autism that is timely, accessible, and of direct relevance to educational practice.

“The primary goal of our research was to develop and foster a collaborative research alliance between health researchers and educators in order to enhance the educational outcomes of children with autistic spectrum disorders,” says Dr. Corkum.

The research team conducted a comprehensive policy review, collecting information from the seven school boards that make up the Nova Scotia Department of Education, to determine the current status of educational practices relating to children with autism. The researchers also held focus groups with resource teachers, student services support staff, and school administrators; and conducted a survey that included 225 teachers and educational assistants across 13 schools in the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board.

“Results from the focus groups indicated that there is a great need to increase knowledge about autistic spectrum disorders, to enhance skill in programming for children with ASD, and to reduce barriers to educating these children,” says Dr. Bryson.

“The survey results showed that teachers and teaching assistants need more information, skill and experience in programming for children with ASD,” adds Dr. Smith. “Workshops and hands-on activities were identified as the most effective ways to help educators develop in this area.”

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