

# Preparing for Adulthood: Parent and School Personnel Perspectives on the Needs of Transition-Age Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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World Federation of Occupational Therapists Congress  
May 24, 2018



# Background

- 1 in 59 children is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018)
- Researchers have reported underachievement of adult outcomes for individuals with ASD (Roux et al., 2015)
- Emerging understanding of how to best support this population in the transition to adulthood process
  - School personnel and parents play critical roles

**Objective:** To describe the perspectives of parents and school personnel in preparing students with ASD for success in adulthood



# Methods

## Managing Daily Responsibilities

- Spring 2014 – Spring 2017
- $N = 18$ ; 6 focus groups, 3 interviews
- **Aim:** To understand parent perspectives of successful adult outcomes for their son/daughter with a disability

## ROAD Ahead

- Fall 2016 – Spring 2017
- $N = 23$ ; 5 focus groups
- Focused on diploma-track students with ASD
- **Aim:** To understand how school personnel prepare high school students with ASD for adulthood

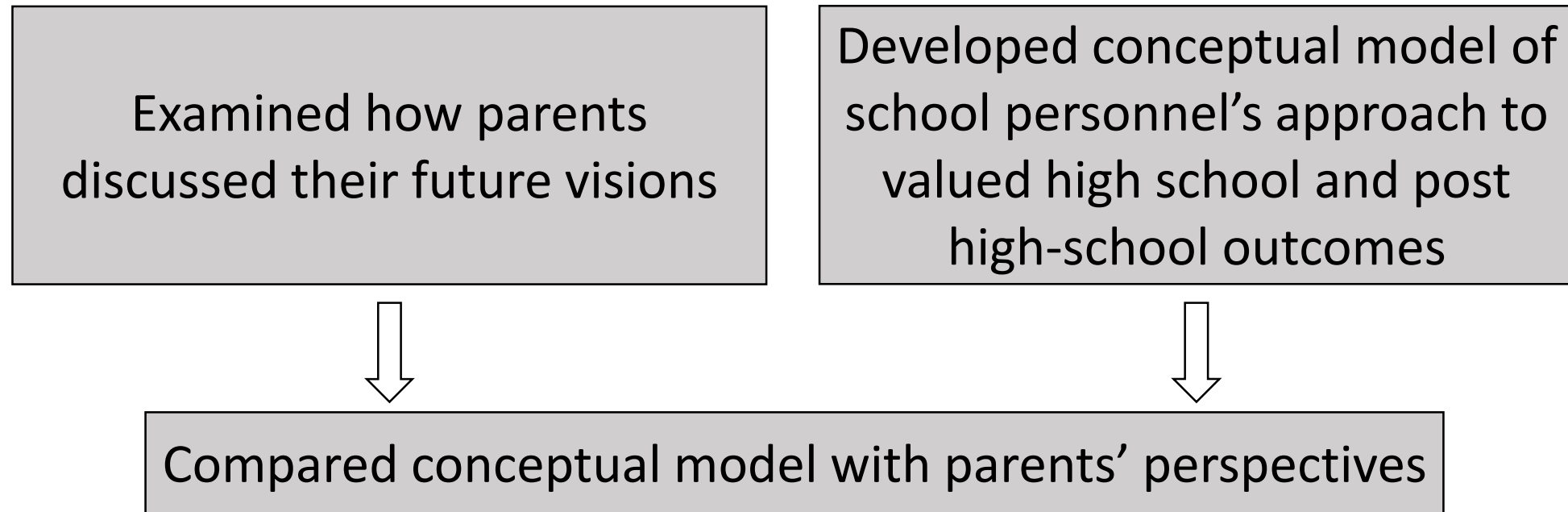


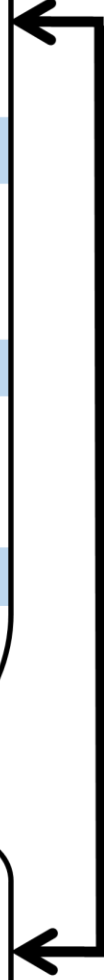
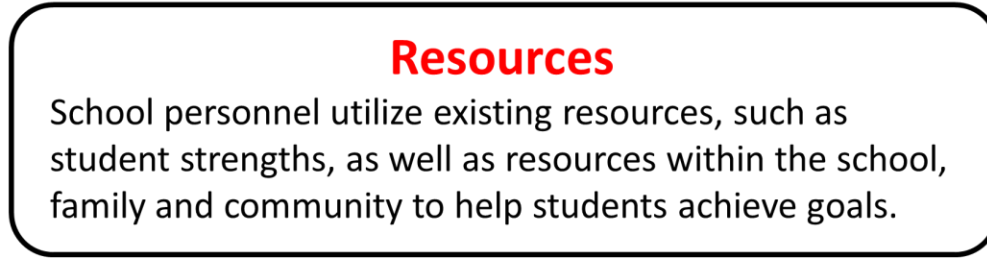
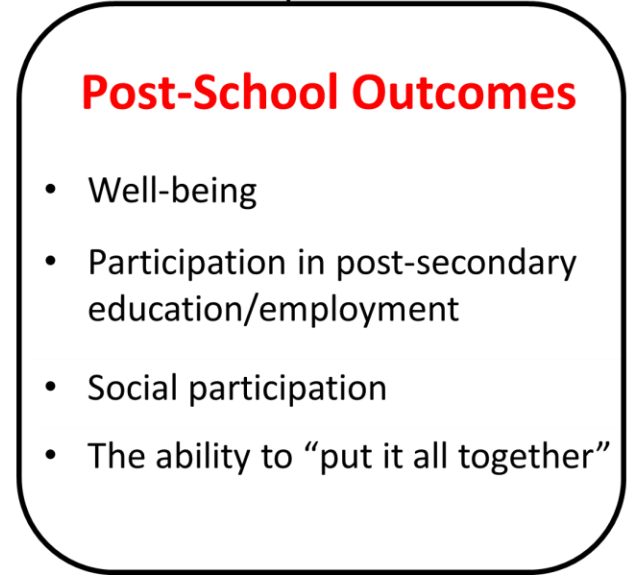
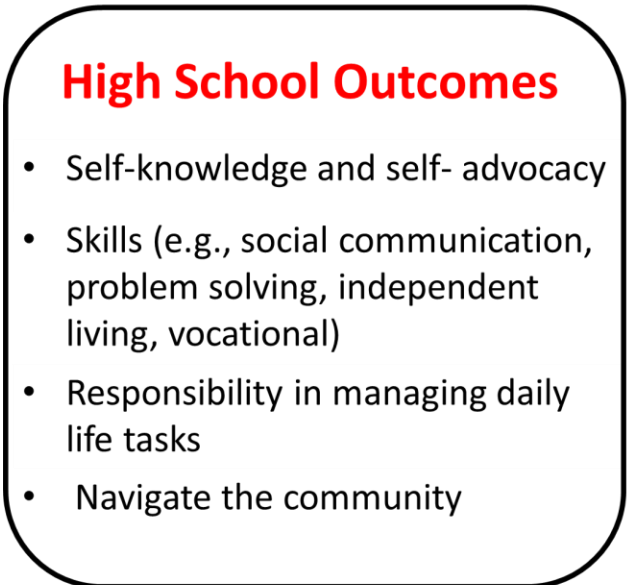
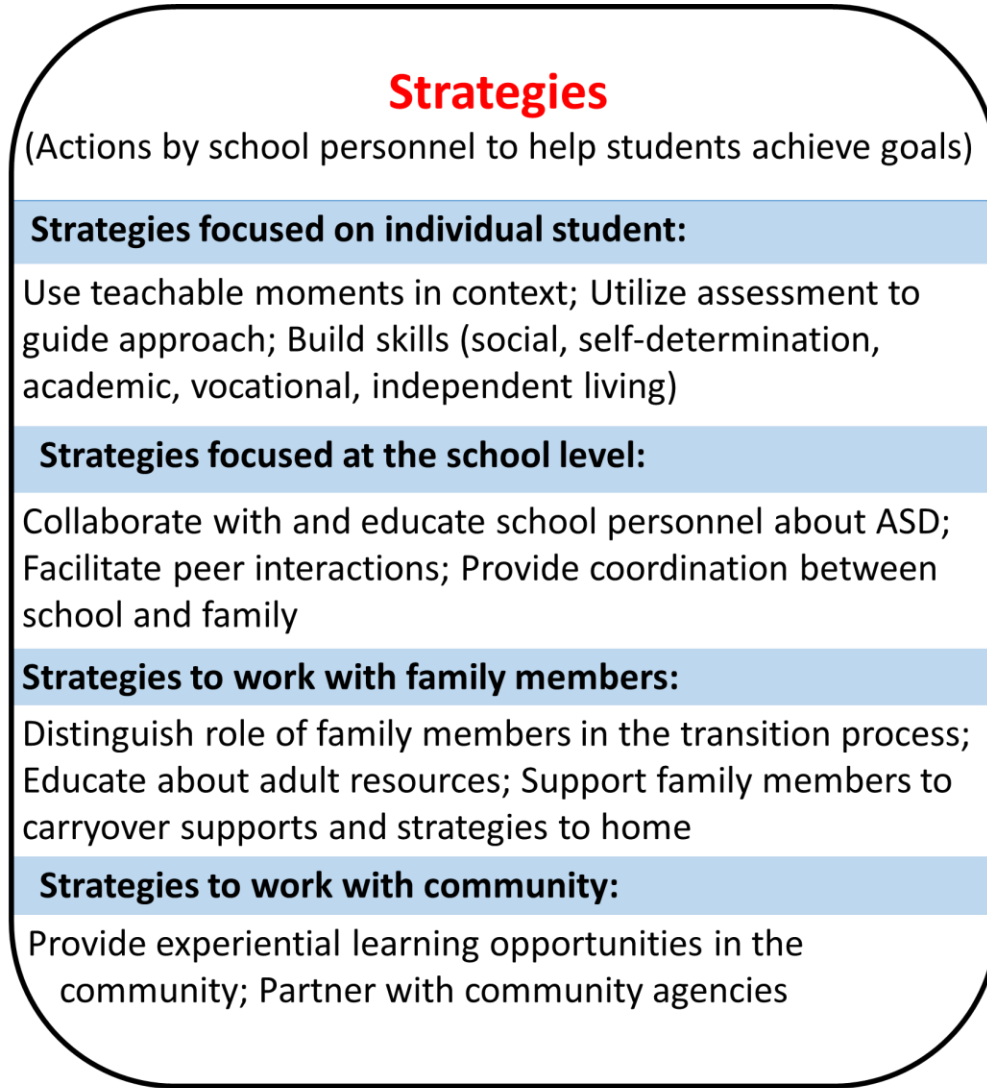
# Participants

	Parents ( <i>N</i> = 18)	School Personnel ( <i>N</i> = 23)
<b>Participant Characteristics</b>	Mothers (16) Fathers (2)	Females (2) Males (3)
		Director of Special Education (7) Special Education Teacher (7) Vocational Counselor (3) Speech Language Pathologist (3) Transition Coordinator (2) Assistive Technology Specialist (1)
<b>Youth Characteristics</b>	High school students with ASD Ages 14-21 ( <i>M</i> = 17.4)	High school students with ASD receiving a high school diploma
<b>School Characteristics</b>	Public (11) Private (6)	Public (11) Private (2)
	General education Inclusive classrooms Substantially separate classrooms Transition programs	Rural (3) Suburban (11) Urban (4)

# Data Analysis

- Both analyses guided by thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006)





## Strategies

(Actions by school personnel to help students achieve goals)

### Strategies focused on individual student:

Use teachable moments in context; Utilize assessment to guide approach; Build skills (social, self-determination, academic, vocational, independent living)

### Strategies focused at the school level:

Collaborate with and educate school personnel about ASD; Facilitate peer interactions; Provide coordination between school and family

### Strategies to work with family members:

Distinguish role of family members in the transition process; Educate about adult resources; Support family members to carryover supports and strategies to home

### Strategies to work with community:

Provide experiential learning opportunities in the community; Partner with community agencies

“I'd like to see him **branch out in more ways**. I try to push him to **try new things**. **But , I feel like he needs a routine to help him feel like he's comfortable**... It's a slow growth process... I think he should try to get better at a variety of things that he's interested in. He really likes writing. He wants to write web comics but I haven't been able to convince him to spend 15 minutes a day just writing. “

-- Parent of 14-year-old son

## Resources

School personnel utilize existing resources, such as student strengths, as well as resources within the school, family and community to help students achieve goals.

education/employment

- Social participation
- The ability to “put it all together”

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“Fading can be scary because sometimes the student might stumble a little bit and maybe a grade drops, or they have a really awkward interaction with the teacher. We try to **emphasize that teachable moment, while the staff is still here**. We can help problem solve. **If we don’t fade support, then all of the sudden graduation comes and have we haven’t students to independently do these things**. But that can be a tough sell, sometimes.”

-- Transition Coordinator

- Well-being
- Participation in post-secondary education/employment
- Social participation
- The ability to “put it all together”



## Strategies

(Actions by school personnel to help students achieve goals)

“...We're actually going to go to [a community college] tonight for their transition program open house to get to know what they do. But , I'm not really sure he's quite ready for that yet... because he's not doing enough of that critical component of preparing for independent living. We don't have opportunities. One of the things that has been lacking for him is having a cooking class at school. There are more things besides cooking that are part of daily living that he probably needs some more of.”

-- Parent of 17-year-old son

community; Partner with community agencies

## Resources

School personnel utilize existing resources, such as student strengths, as well as resources within the school, family and community to help students achieve goals.

## High School Outcomes

- Self-knowledge and self- advocacy
- Skills (e.g., social communication, problem solving, independent living, vocational)
- Responsibility in managing daily life tasks
- Navigate the community

## Post-School Outcomes

- Well-being
- Participation in post-secondary education/employment
- Social participation
- The ability to “put it all together”

## Strategies

(Actions by school personnel to help students achieve goals)

“Organization skills comes to mind first for me. Just the ability to **navigate lots of different things** that are requirements; timelines and **trying to put all that together**... if our students are equipped to do that, they're going to be more successful.”

-- Special Education Administrator

### Strategies to work with family members:

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# Conclusion/Implications

- School personnel and families describe similar desired outcomes for transition-age youth with ASD
- Yet, they have slightly different perspectives
  - School personnel focused on skills supporting functioning in school context
  - Parents focus on post-high school outcomes in the community
- Need for communication between school personnel and families to negotiate shared goals

# Acknowledgements

**Principle Investigators:** Dr. Gael Orsmond & Dr. Wendy Coster

**Co-Investigators:** Dr. Ellen Cohn, Dr. Donna Lehr, Dr. Timothy Brown

**Project managers:** Elin Teutsch, Becky Chisholm

**PhD Students:** Jennifer Chen, Elizabeth Munsell, Jasin Wong

**OTD Research Assistants:** Colleen Hogan, Jade La Rochelle

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*The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant # R34A160113 to Boston University. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.*

