Title: Using School-Home Communication to Decrease Off-Task Behavior for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Introduction: Although parent involvement in school is mandated in IDEA, the types of involvement for parents of students with disabilities focus more on parent advocacy and IEP meetings, rather than aligning with the types of parent involvement often seen for typically developing students. One type of involvement, parent-school communication, is hypothesized to be important for all students, and is expected to improve parent-school partnership as well as child outcomes. Although parent-school communication is a highly valued type of involvement for parents of children with ASD, parents continue to report poor communication as a barrier to working with the schools on behalf of their children (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). Though sometimes informally addressed using school-home notes, no prior research has examined the effects of such home-school communication interventions in decreasing problem behaviors that interfere with opportunities for learning for children with ASD (Zhang et al., 2011).

Method: This study used a multiple-baseline across participant design to evaluate the effectiveness of school-home notes with home-based contingent reinforcement in reducing off-task behavior at school for students with ASD. Participants included four students with ASD in grades K-8, along with their parent and teacher. The primary outcome, child off-task behavior, was measured daily by the teacher using momentary-time-sampling during the target class activity. To evaluate the secondary effects of this home-school communication intervention on parent involvement, parents and teachers self-reported on their number of weekly interactions and completed the Parent-Professional Partnership Scale (Summers et al., 2005) as well as the Family-Involvement Questionnaire (Benson, 2015) before and after the intervention was implemented.

Results: Results of this study showed decreases in off-task behavior for two students following the introduction of a parent- and teacher-implemented school-home note intervention package. Although quantitative measures did not indicate changes in parent communication, partnership, and involvement following the intervention, parents and teachers reported benefits of this intervention in terms of improved partnership and communication. Additionally, parents and teachers rated this intervention highly in terms of feasibility and social validity.

Discussion: We found that, for participants with certain characteristics, a school-home note with home-based contingent reinforcement may be effective in reducing student off-task behavior at school and increasing opportunities for learning. Knowing that this intervention has high levels of acceptability across stakeholders, researchers should continue to evaluate its effectiveness specifically for students with ASD.

References: