



# Advancements in Autism Education and Employment at Innova Preparatory School

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ADHD & Related Concerns Conference

# What is Autism?

Difficulty with understanding others

Differences in how they communicate and understand others' communication;

Difficulty understanding social rules and situations

Difficulty imagining things

Difficulty understanding relationships and how they function

Sensory sensitivities and preferences

Fixed ways of thinking and behaving; dislike of change.

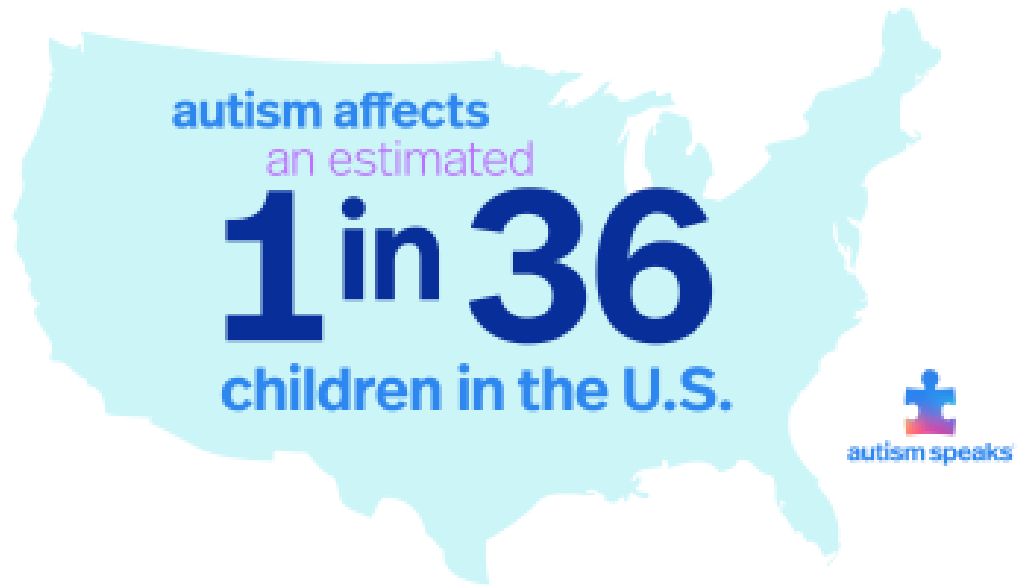
Special interests and hyper focusing

# What Autism might look like

## **Difficulties/Differences in:**

- Friendships – making, keeping, understanding
- Understanding the social context”, overwhelmed by social demands, not understanding social rules
- Unusual ways of talking or communicating; Difficulty listening, taking turns, having conversations; differences in use of non-verbal communication
- Understanding what people mean and what people’s motivations are; not understanding how others think and feel.
- Understanding and communicating about emotions
- Imagination - predicting what is going to happen, what could happen, what the options are; the future
- Unusual, intense or excessive interests
- Fixed routines and ways of doing things; “my way”
- Sensory interests or sensitivities – noises, lighting, feelings of clothes, busy places

# Commonly cited statistics: ASD Prevalence



\* The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention autism prevalence estimates are for 8-year-old children in the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network in 2000.

- ASD Prevalence in Children: 1 in 36
- ASD Prevalence in Adults: 1 in 40

Commonly  
cited statistics:  
ASD  
Postsecondary  
education

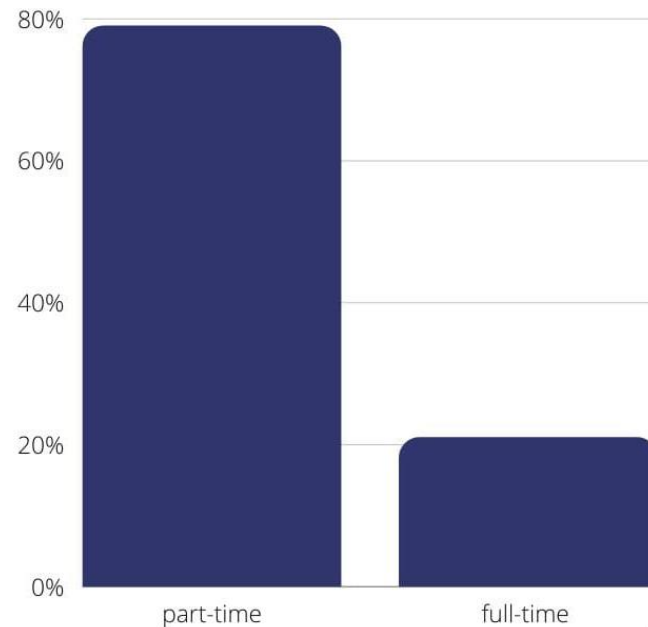
- Graduate college: Only 14% of High School grads with ASD go on to graduate from college. This includes 2 year colleges, vocational programs, and 4 year colleges.
- Attend college: 33% of High School grads with ASD but they are less likely to graduate than their classmates.

# Commonly cited statistics: ASD and disability employment

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- Only 21% of young adults with ASD work full time.
- 79% work part-time only or are on disability (or a combination of the two)

LENGTH OF THE LONGEST JOB HELD BY  
YOUNG ADULTS WITH AUTISM



MyDisabilityJobs.com

# Introduction

## Overview of Innova Prep's Mission

1. Inclusive, neurodiverse education model
2. Commitment to innovation in learning for all students
3. Focus on Neurodiverse Education
4. Tailored instruction for students
5. Whole-child approach, including academic, social, and emotional support

# Inclusive, neurodiverse education model

Emphasis on creating an environment that supports both neurotypical and neurodiverse students.

Encourages collaboration and understanding among all students.



# Neurodiverse Classroom Model



SMALL CLASS SIZES AND  
TEACHER-TO-STUDENT  
RATIO



PERSONALIZED ATTENTION  
AND DIFFERENTIATED  
INSTRUCTION



COLLABORATIVE TEAM  
APPROACH



TEACHERS, THERAPISTS,  
AND STAFF WORKING  
TOGETHER



USE OF TECHNOLOGY



DATA-DRIVEN METHODS TO  
TRACK PROGRESS

# Autism-Specific Interventions

## Dyslexia Therapy Team

- Integration of dyslexia therapy into overall support for neurodiverse learners

## Use clear language:

- Use simple, direct instructions and break tasks into smaller steps.

## Speech and Occupational Therapy

- In-school services for speech and motor skills development

## Use social narratives:

- Help students understand rules and expectations by explaining why they exist.

## Change in plan alert

- Alert the students to changes in routine, staffing, etc., in advance, whenever possible

**Commitment  
to innovation  
in learning  
for all  
students**

Utilizes cutting-edge educational tools and methodologies.

Continuously adapts teaching strategies to meet diverse learning needs..

# Autism-Specific Technology and Aids

## Sensory aids

- These can include noise-canceling headphones, weighted vests, or sensory balls

## Wait cards

- A simple card that tells them a specific amount of time they must wait for a request. These can help teach the abstract concept of waiting.

## Game style play

- Autistic children often interact better from behind a screen than they do in real life. This stems from their inability to read human emotions effectively.

## Modeling:

- Help students rehearse social interactions beforehand or learn new skills.

## Tailored Instruction for Autistic Students

We offer personalized learning plans to cater to individual needs and learning styles.

We incorporate flexibility to adjust to the evolving needs of students.



# Measuring Success and Progress

## Individualized Learning Plans

- Goals include post-secondary success
- Planning includes school, family, and related service members.
- Academic and Personal/social goals included.

## Data-driven assessments and regular reviews


- Quarterly benchmarks are given and used to measure growth.
- All ILP's are reviewed each year based on growth, and if needed can be modified throughout the year if a student is not growing.

# Success Story- Kendall Woods



My name is Kendall G. Woods, and I graduated from Innova Prep. I have been so pleased with everything I have seen on social media with enrollment and growth with IPS. When I enrolled, I was a shy high schooler who had no intention of being able to complete high school or college. I got my associate's at PRCC and then received my bachelor's from Colorado Christian University in Lakewood, Colorado. Since then, I have been obtaining my Master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at Denver Seminary, from which I will graduate in 2025.

I have started to look at furthering my education in Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) through a PhD program post-graduation. I say all of this to encourage IPS students with their education. Completing school with a learning disability is challenging, but it is so worth it.



# Whole- Child Approach

Prioritizes not only  
academic achievement  
but also social and  
emotional well-being.



Provides  
comprehensive support  
systems to foster  
holistic development.



# Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Integration

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## SEL Programs

- Development of emotional regulation, empathy, and communication skills

## Mentorship Programs

- Pairing neurodiverse students with peers and mentors for social development

## Extracurricular Activities

- Growing arts, band program, and sports, fostering a sense of belonging

# Community and Family Engagement



Partnership with  
Families

Regular communication  
and involvement in  
students' learning plans

Staff Development and  
Training

Ongoing professional  
development in autism,  
SEL, and inclusive  
practices

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## Research and Collaboration

- Partnerships with  
Universities and Experts
    - Collaboration on  
neurodiverse education  
research
  - Conference Presentations
    - Sharing findings and  
practices with the wider  
educational community
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# Future Directions

Expansion of Autism-Specific Programming

Plans for growth in therapeutic and academic support services



Neurodiverse Employment Initiatives

Preparing students for post-school employment and self-sufficiency

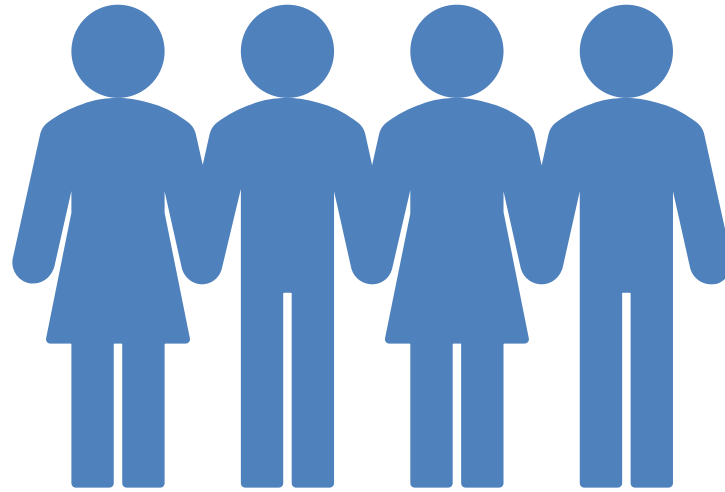


Building the Next Generation of Inclusive Education

- Inclusive workplace environment
  - Integration of neurotypical staff with neurodiverse individuals
  - Benefits of a diverse workforce
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Employment  
Model at  
Innova Prep

A supportive and inclusive workplace designed to accommodate diverse needs that emphasizes collaboration, respect, and understanding among all employees.



- Description of Workplace Environment

Includes four neurodiverse staff members in full-time positions and one part-time employee.  
Fosters mutual learning and cooperation between neurotypical and neurodiverse individuals.

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Integration of Neurotypical Staff with Neurodiverse Staff

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Enhances creativity and problem-solving with diverse perspectives.

Promotes a culture of inclusivity and acceptance.

Improves employee satisfaction and retention by valuing diverse contributions.

Students see representation of individuals like themselves.

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Benefits of a  
Diverse work staff



## Conclusion and Q&A

- Final Thoughts on Autism Education at Innova Prep
  - Continuous innovation and dedication to student success
  - Hiring Neurodiverse Staff members
  - Open for Questions
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