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Original Article

School-Based Universal Screening for Autism

Published in the Peer-reviewed Journal

School Psychology Review

The full article can be found here:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2372966X.2025.2503135?af=R>

Key Terms

Universal screening involves testing all individuals in a certain category as compared to targeted screening, which involves only testing individuals considered to be at higher risk.

Adaptive functioning is a set of age-appropriate skills necessary to live independently.

Why was this study conducted?

- Many autistic individuals are missed by early identification efforts and go undiagnosed until school age or later.
- Individuals who are not evaluated for autism until school-age or later miss the benefit of early intervention and educational support services.
- The primary aim of this study was to partner with primary and secondary schools across Phoenix to implement a novel school-based universal screening program designed to identify students who may benefit from an autism evaluation.
- A secondary aim was to examine adaptive functioning and cognitive abilities in students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) through the screening program.

What did the study involve?

Charter schools were recruited between 2019 and 2023 to participate in the study.

Students in 2nd, 4th, and 8th grades were screened using the Social Challenges Screening Questionnaire.

Families of students who scored in the concern range were offered an autism evaluation.

What were the main study findings?

151
TEACHERS
PARTICIPATED

STUDENTS
SCREENED
7960

- Of **278 students** who flagged the **SCSQ**, parents of **115** agreed to be contacted by the research team.
- Parents of **55 students** declined, and the remaining **60 students** were evaluated.



78% of children who
were evaluated
**MET DIAGNOSTIC
CRITERIA FOR ASD**

Students who received an ASD diagnosis though the screening program had:

- Average to above average intellectual abilities
- Significant adaptive functioning disadvantages relative to intellectual abilities.

What were the study's conclusions?

- School-based universal screening for ASD adds value to existing screening models by increasing the likelihood of identifying students who may be missed at younger ages.
- Universal screening in schools can help identify students when services and supports are more readily available, which will help improve functional outcomes for autistic students and increase their opportunities for success.

Original Article Citation

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