

ABSTRACT
Project Common Ground:
Preparing Highly Qualified Speech-Language Pathologists to Meet
the Communication Needs of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Diverse Settings
84.325K, Focus Area C

The number of children identified with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) has been increasing at alarming rate. The latest estimated prevalence of ASD by the Centers for Disease Control is one child out of 110. In California, there has been a 273 percent increase in the reported cases of children with ASD over the last decade. Furthermore, the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of families seeking ASD-related services are now remarkably diverse. It is widely acknowledged that children with ASD need intensive, comprehensive, and coordinated services. Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) play a critical role in the screening, diagnosis, and treatment of children with ASD because communication is a core – and often profound – challenge. Over 80 percent of school-based SLPs work with children with ASD; however, most report having inadequate knowledge about ASD, insufficient training in working with children with ASD, a lack of skills to counsel families of children with ASD, and a lack of preparation to work in a coordinated manner with their educational team. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association’s (ASHA) current data, only 8 out of the over 200 ASHA accredited Communication Sciences and Disorders programs offer specialized training in ASD.

The Communicative Disorders (CD) Program at San Francisco State University proposes *Project Common Ground*, a Master’s degree program with a focus on working effectively with children with ASD from birth to 21 years across home, school and community settings. The training also places a particular emphasis on supporting minority families. The training for each scholar will include: 1) a partnership experience with a family of a child with ASD; 2) three courses in addition to the Master’s curriculum – two ASD-specific courses and one augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) course; 3) a practicum with infants and toddlers with ASD; and 4) a school internship with school-aged children with ASD.

The proposed program will address the IDEA mandate for family-centered support and access to the general curriculum. The program will be guided by the standards and guidelines established by ASHA for SLPs working with individuals with ASD, with a focus on the following:

- Understanding and identifying the core characteristics and challenges of ASD
- Collaboration with families and other team members for assessment and intervention
- Prioritization of naturalistic, ecologically-valid and developmentally-appropriate learning
- Use of Evidence-based practice through the evaluation of scientific evidence

Toward these ends, the proposed personnel preparation program will train 16 students in each year, yielding a total of 80 highly qualified professionals, with targeted recruitment among underrepresented minorities. 65 percent of requested funding would support trainees. Graduates will meet the requirements for an ASHA-accredited Master of Science degree in communicative disorders, the California Credential in Speech-Language Pathology Services, and the California state license in SLP. Formative and summative evaluation activities will focus on the quality of the program, trainee competencies, and associated outcomes for children and families.