

## Autism, Service Delays, and Educational Outcomes

*Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-Link Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.*

*In this issue, we examined the effects of delayed starts in early intensive behavior intervention (EIBI) on later educational outcomes for Medicaid-enrolled children who were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder between the ages of three and five. In particular, we were interested in whether a delay in early intensive behavioral intervention services for children with ASD impacted later educational outcomes, and whether average delay to start early intensive behavioral intervention differed by region within Minnesota. Overall, findings showed that delays in starting EIBI services were observed for 70% of children. The average delay was approximately nine months and significantly differed by Minnesota region. A delay of five months or more was associated with more restrictive instructional placement settings for some children.*

### Discussion on Practice Implications

1. With delays in starting EIBI services observed for 70% of children diagnosed with ASD and delays associated with more restrictive placement settings for some children, earlier referrals may counteract negative effects. In working with or observing children, what signs can alert you that an ASD screening is appropriate? How do you differentiate what is within the wide range of normal as compared to what may be of concern? What kinds of additional training might be helpful and appropriate for you in your current role?
2. As a professional working with children diagnosed with ASD, being knowledgeable and informed is imperative. What ASD services are available in your community? Where should a family turn if there is a concern? How can you support families who are seeking assistance?

### Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. Formal and informal relationships between schools and county social services agencies, and within county social services agencies, can serve to provide awareness and improve information available. What kinds of relationships like this exist within your community? For example, does your county have a conferencing relationship between child welfare and children's mental health that can be easily accessed by practitioners and educators seeking information about ASD? What barriers exist within your community in accessing information? What could organizations (including schools and social service agencies) do to improve the availability of information?
2. With such high occurrence of ASD diagnoses in Minnesota, what training is available to you and your colleagues to support your work with children diagnosed with ASD? What can your agency do to lessen the delay between diagnosis and receipt of EIBI? What connections and networks exist to raise the issue?