

# BUILDING A STRONG NETWORK OF SUPPORT FOR AUTISM

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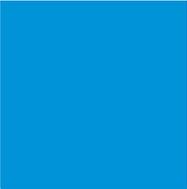
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Creative Strategies for Special Education (CSSE), an educational consulting firm, partners with schools and businesses to drive systemic change, and launch initiatives in special education that result in high quality staffing, evidence-based instruction, and improved outcomes. CSSE brings a fresh perspective to strategic planning, staffing challenges, professional development, and program design. For more information please visit [www.CSSSEconsult.com](http://www.CSSSEconsult.com).



**Creative Strategies  
for Special Education**

## A BUMPY ROAD ON THE WAY TO SUCCESS

Martin and Susan were devastated when they were told their son, Adam, was autistic. The doctor said he would never succeed at school and his ability to develop relationships would be severely impaired. Adam never liked being touched and he didn't speak a word until age 4. Martin and Susan frantically searched high and low for someone who could help with Adam's special needs. At every turn they felt frustrated, exhausted, and confused. Adam's problems with communication and social behavior impacted him in all areas of life. It was frightening to think about the challenges he faced.

Refusing to let autism become an excuse for Adam to fail, Martin and Susan knew they had to find those with autism training to understand Adam's unique learning and interaction style. They kept searching until they discovered a wonderful school program where the staff understood their roles in Adam's success. With the collaboration of his teachers, aides, specialists, office staff, kitchen, and custodial staff, Adam graduated when he was 18. As Adam threw his graduation cap in the air, there were no dry eyes in the audience and among his fellow graduates. Everyone was so proud of Adam and it was an amazing feeling to know this is just the beginning as he reaches for his goals.



## ASTOUNDING GROWTH AND FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no doubt, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is on the rise. Autism has moved from being a relatively unrecognized disability to having a position of notoriety as the fastest growing developmental disability. ASD affects all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups.

### Incidence & Prevalence

**1%** of the world population

**1** in **68** US Births

**5** times more common in boys

ASD in US children increased by **119.4%** from **2000** to **2010**

### Cost Impact

- Autism services cost U.S. citizens **\$236-\$262** billion annually
- Cost over the lifespan ranges from **1.4 to 2.4 million** depending on presence of intellectual disability
- Annual cost of therapies and treatments can exceed **\$40K to \$60K**
- Many autism treatment options are not covered by insurance
- Estimates of underemployment among adults with autism exceed **90%**
- **35%** of young adults (ages 19-23) with autism have not had a job or received postgraduate education
- **\$8,600** extra per year to educate a student with autism. (The average cost of educating a student in the US is about \$12,000)

## THE CHALLENGE: CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

There is overwhelming evidence that the most significant challenge resulting from the growth and financial impact of ASD is the critical shortage of qualified personnel. We consistently hear about the difficulty families and organizations experience in their quest to locate service providers who understand this complex disability. They search for practitioners who know how to care for, teach, employ, and protect them. Fear and frustration levels escalate as families weave their way through a myriad of settings and services seeking answers, effective intervention, and support. The critical shortage of qualified professionals and support personnel crosses professional disciplines and setting boundaries.

A radical shift is needed in personnel preparation and validation of credentials to foster a significant increase in the number of qualified professionals available in every environment – home, school, health care, work, and community.

## THE IBCCES SOLUTION

The International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education (IBCCES) is proactively tackling this personnel shortage challenge by building a strong community of professionals and organizations who possess the specialized knowledge and tools required to meet the diverse needs of individuals with autism and their families.

## 5 KEY STRATEGIES

A comprehensive review of the IBCCES programs and processes shows consistent adherence to five key strategies to ensure high quality standards that reflect current research and comply with laws and regulations.

1. Identify 10 critical areas of autism competency that address the broad and diverse needs of the ASD population.

Autism overview	Emotional awareness and bullying
Behavior	Sensory awareness
Communication	Program development
Social skills	Motor skills
Environmental	Medical and health considerations

2. Support alternative academic and continuing education routes for acquiring knowledge and skills aligned to the needs.
3. Make certification accessible to professionals and support personnel from multiple disciplines.
4. Engage in outreach and partnerships with organizations, schools, clinics, universities, and insurance companies.
5. Hold high expectations for individuals awarded the certificate.

## EMPOWERING PROVIDERS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Four distinct constituent groups can benefit from the IBCCES Certified Autism Specialist (CAS) and Autism Certificate (AC) programs: (1) individual providers, (2) schools, (3) clinical and health care organizations, and (4) public sector. The benefits the certificates bring enables each group to resolve the challenges they face in their effort to serve the needs of the growing and aging autism population and their families.

CONSTITUENT GROUPS	BENEFITS OF THE CAS & AC CERTIFICATES
<b>Individual Providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prepare for difficult roles and responsibilities in all settings</li><li>• Validate time and effort spent advancing knowledge</li><li>• Confirm a standard level of skills, experience, and expertise</li><li>• Gain recognition and influence as an expert in autism</li><li>• Serve more clients and families</li><li>• Increase opportunities to utilize talents, experience, and skills</li></ul>
<b>Schools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Offer the least restrictive learning environment in special and regular education settings</li><li>• Improve collaboration among all educators and support personnel for planning, instruction, and intervention</li><li>• Confirm that school personnel are current in best practices to treat ASD</li><li>• Build parent confidence and trust in education team</li><li>• Decrease the risk of litigation</li></ul>
<b>Clinical &amp; Health Care Organizations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Broaden scope of services</li><li>• Stand out in comparison with competitor organizations</li><li>• Attract high quality professionals</li><li>• Reach new client populations</li><li>• Improve access to needed services</li><li>• Increase market share and drive revenues</li></ul>
<b>Public Sector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase autism awareness and sensitivity within a local community</li><li>• Facilitate coordination among community agencies</li><li>• Improve safety and quality of life</li><li>• Implement best practice strategies for communication and behavior management</li></ul>



## INDIVIDUAL PROVIDERS: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Providers in health care, education, therapy, and social disciplines encounter children and adults with ASD. The diverse and complex nature of autism requires a unique skill set. Many practitioners take courses as part of their degree programs or complete continuing education courses to improve their expertise and capability. Unfortunately most universities and professional associations do not offer a specialty certificate to acknowledge their focused study and training. Therefore, the providers' expertise and potential contributions may go unrecognized and under-utilized.

**Seven hundred and forty nine (749) speech-language pathologists** who hold the CAS were surveyed to gain information and insights about their roles and responsibilities. The majority of the respondents work in the school setting:

- Approximately **43%** spend **6-20 hours a week** on activities related to autism including training and collaborating with others
- **26%** of the students on their caseload are on the autism spectrum
- **21%** of those students need assistive technology to access the school curriculum

A follow-up written survey was completed by 18 CAS holders representing a mix of disciplines including therapists, educators, an architect, psychologist, school administrator, attorney/child rights advocate, and life coach. Work settings included public and private schools, clinics, health care settings, and private practice. Everyone surveyed indicated that they love their jobs and are passionate about working with the ASD population. Here are some examples of the positive impact of certification:

- Acknowledges and affirms dedication to learning more about autism
- Builds trust through increased respect for expertise
- Focuses on best practices and achieving positive outcomes
- Strengthens collaboration and leadership
- Encourages training of paraprofessionals, staff, families, and community
- Supports program growth
- Fosters a network for a more inclusive environment for people with ASD
- Yields job satisfaction

## FEATURED CERTIFIED AUTISM SPECIALISTS

### Helen Obiageli Oshikoya

CEO, Nobelova Gradani  
PsychoEducational Service, Nigeria



"With my CAS credentials, I have been able to break the boundaries in mental health care in Nigeria." Being the first CAS in Nigeria enables Helen to lead the way to help children with ASD in Nigeria. She works closely with the Nigerian government and health care system. Focusing on early detection, she established developmental screening in Nigerian hospitals. Over 2000 children have already been screened for developmental disorders, including ASD.

### Catherine Purple Cherry

Architect, Purposeful Architecture,  
Annapolis, MD



"I enjoy successfully completing the design and seeing the immediate impact on quality of life". Catherine provides a very unique and needed service as a special needs architect. Having the CAS validated her expertise and strengthened her position in her professional community. It has enabled her to influence national policy, align strategic partners, and contribute to a greater body of knowledge at conference presentations and publications.

### Andrea White

Speech-Language Pathologist &  
Special Educator, Williamstown, MA



"My credential as a CAS has firmly established my role in schools as the person to train and consult with teachers working with the autism population". With the training she took to prepare for the CAS, Andrea is confident that she is providing quality, evidence-based practice for language and behavioral development. She strives to teach others about ways to teach students on the spectrum and how to consider each individual's unique qualities and potential.

**Visit the IBCCES website to read about featured CAS holders.**  
<http://www.certifiedautismspecialist.com/category/featured-cas/>

## SCHOOLS: CREATING A SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

It takes a team to provide the best education and care for students with ASD. In a school setting kids encounter countless people. Some have daily contact, others only occasional interactions. That's why it is critical that the entire school community recognize the characteristics of ASD. All school-related personnel including teachers, bus drivers, therapists, psychologists, nurses, recess supervisors, and lunch servers should understand the typical and unique needs of students with ASD. Learning evidence-based strategies for responding to those students on the spectrum reinforces effective team collaboration and sets the foundation for planning and joint problem solving.

Training school staff is a proactive strategy that will lead to better support and positive outcomes for students with ASD. IBCCES is partnering with two school organizations that are investing in training and certification to increase the number of staff with expertise in ASD. As a result of training their teams, these school communities will help students achieve their potential as they progress through school and transition beyond school into postsecondary experiences.

### Bayes Achievement Center

Residential and Day Treatment Center in Huntsville, Texas

Interview with Mitchell Bayes, Founder and Owner

#### The Challenge

Mitchell Bayes and Daniel Bayes lead the team of this highly respected residential and treatment center in Texas. Eighty percent of their referrals are from school districts. About 50% of their student population are on the autism spectrum. Bayes' multi-disciplinary staff stay current through Bayes' robust professional development program. Michael and Daniel were committed to their staff earning certification in autism to:

- Meet an objective certification standard beyond their own internal training process
- Ensure best practices in teaching and student support
- Strengthen their reputation with schools and other agencies
- Gain the families' trust and confidence

#### The Solution

Bayes Achievement Center partnered with IBCCES to train and certify their entire staff to meet their challenge for outside validation. Earning the CAS and AC credentials exemplify the core values and professionalism upheld by the Bayes Achievement Center and is recognized by school organizations in Texas. Baye's internal professional development program was reviewed by the IBCCES certification review team and fully approved. The Bayes Achievement Center is initially obtaining certification for special education teachers and home teachers after which they will certify other teachers and coordinators. In addition they plan to certify house and shift supervisors, coordinators, and assistants.



# Calhoun County Independent School District (CCISD)

Calhoun County, Texas

Interview with Jeana Bethany, Special Education Director/504 Coordinator

## The Challenge

CCISD serves 350 special education students out of which 23 are on the spectrum. Jeana Bethany saw the clear and immediate need for all of their teachers and support staff to be prepared to have students with ASD in their classroom. Her rationale is based on her observation of the huge number of faculty and staff who encounter students with ASD as they progress through school and get ready to transition into postsecondary experiences. For example, 3 students with autism begin high school in fall 2015 and will each have 8 different teachers throughout the day – a total of 24 that need training. There are 70 teachers at this particular high school. Any one of them could have a student with autism in homeroom, class, study hall, or extra-curricular activities. Students need support and understanding from their regular education teachers and others staff.



## The Solution

Jeana worked with IBCCES to launch a pilot training program in Fall 2015 to prepare 274 staff members throughout the district. The goal is for 155 teachers and administrators to earn their CAS and 119 to earn their AC. This professional development program has been enthusiastically received by the Board of Education, administrators, teachers, para-professionals, related services, and parents. The training is being offered in a variety of ways including guest speakers, online coursework modules, and a full day in-service training. Everyone must meet the IBCCES requirement of 14 hours of training. This creative and robust program is partially funded by Medicaid reimbursement for the professional training for treating students that qualify.

*Everyone is confident that this training will make a huge difference!*



## CLINICAL AND HEALTH CARE ORGANIZATIONS: SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES

As families travel their journey seeking information and assistance, they visit many community clinical and health care organizations. They value organizations that have staff who understand how to work with clients with autism. Clinical and health care organizations can demonstrate their commitment to quality assurance by having certified staff available to meet the diverse needs. The investment in highly qualified personnel can bring a great return on the investment as a stronger reputation may result in business growth.

### Jacksonville Speech & Hearing Center, Jacksonville, FL Interview with President and CEO, Michael Howland

#### The Challenge

Jacksonville Speech & Hearing Center in Florida, treats patients of all ages for speech, language, and hearing issues. There are nearly 20 staff members, including 7 speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and audiology assistants. Approximately 20% of their staff's caseloads are on the autism spectrum. Everyone who works in the clinic has some contact with clients. Michael believed the center would be able to serve their patients more effectively by increasing his full staff's knowledge and awareness of autism.

#### The Solution

Howland partnered with IBCCES to implement a creative plan for improving the center's services to their patients. The entire staff participated in a structured training program to receive certification through IBCCES. They participated in IBCCES approved online learning modules at their own pace and schedule. The training was ideal because everyone had the opportunity to qualify for either the CAS or AC credential depending on their education and experience. The certification for the entire staff demonstrates a high focus on knowledge, sensitivity, and client support. The IBCCES certification process differentiates Jacksonville Speech and Hearing Center as a clinic that has a specialized staff who are able to provide patients on the spectrum with evidence-based services.



### The Challenge

The growing number of children and adults with ASD means that people in all walks of life will inevitably come into contact with someone on the spectrum. This presents a gap in community support. Our communities can take steps to fill the ongoing need for community members who are familiar with autism. First responders, caregivers, and others should learn the best strategies for helping, communicating with, and caring for individuals with ASD. For example, it would be helpful for first responders, caregivers, store personnel, and co-workers to understand that people with ASD may have difficulty following verbal commands, reading body language, forming relationships, noting social cues and behaving as expected.



Adults with autism have significantly higher than average incidents of every medical and psychiatric condition. Without stronger community support, they will continue to have poor access to the services they require for physical health, mental health, education, employment, and daily living needs. A survey of nearly 1000 primary care physicians and other healthcare professionals in the United States showed that most have no training in caring for adults with autism.

### The Solution

IBCCES is willing to assist community agencies interested in taking the steps to help the ASD population in their community. It is recommended that groups within the public sector learn to recognize the behavioral symptoms and characteristics of a child or adult who has autism, and learn basic response and communication techniques.

- Physicians and their entire staff would benefit from training in autism to improve preventative and ongoing healthcare maintenance.
- Dentists can treat patients more effectively if they take steps to desensitize their patients with autism to the noise, lights, and sensations of equipment.
- Law enforcement agencies should proactively train their workforce, especially trainers, patrol supervisors, and school resource officers.
- Family and caregivers who spend large amounts of time with children or adults will benefit from knowing what to expect and how to deal with situations that arise.

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- National Center for Education Statistics, 2014

## PASSION BEHIND THE MISSION

It is IBCCES' mission to ensure the highest level of education and care for individuals with special needs worldwide by setting standards for professionals to stay current in content related to autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Myron Pincomb, IBCCES Board Chairman, is personally committed to improving the lives of individuals with autism by reinforcing the value of specialized training. His passion is based on his experiences as a parent of a child with a hearing loss: "My wife and I found it very frustrating to navigate from specialist to specialist trying to find someone who could help our daughter. I wanted to reduce that frustration by raising awareness and offering more opportunities for professionals, community workers, and families to gain expertise in the area of autism. My vision is realized when they meet the IBCCES continuing education requirements."

Since 2001, The International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) has set the standard for certification in autism continuing education. These credentials are recognized by organizations nationally and internationally to ensure the highest quality of care and training. The certification carries authority and responsibility. The holders of the CAS and AC are respected for their expertise or specialty in autism. As a result, they are able to work more effectively on their educational, health, and work teams. IBCCES's certification reinforces ongoing quality training for healthcare and education professionals, as well caregivers and professionals in the public sector.

## IMPROVING QUALITY SERVICES – THE IBCCES CERTIFICATION PROCESS

**Certified Autism Specialist (CAS)** - for professionals responsible for the support and/or services for individuals with autism. This work must relate specifically to the professionals' scope of practice.

### Requirements

- Master's degree plus at least 2 years of experience treating or supporting individuals with autism
- OR a Bachelor's degree and at least 10 years of experience in a related field

**Autism Certificate (AC)** - for professionals employed in a setting that requires work or contact with individuals with autism.

### Requirements

- Two years of experience in a field that treats or supports individuals with autism
- Must be currently employed in a job setting that requires work or contact with individuals with autism

### Process to Earn and Maintain Certification for CAS and AC

- Online application includes submission of documents to verify identity, references, transcripts, license, etc.
- All continuing education units must be either earned through a IBCCES approved provider or must be approved during the application or renewal process
- Obtain 14 hours of continuing education units directly related to autism based on the IBCCES 10 Areas of Autism Competency.
- Candidates must pass the online Autism Competency Exam specifically for CAS or AC
- Pay certification fee and renewal every 2 years
- Submit 14 hours of continuing education units for every 2 years
- Abide by the IBCCES Standards and Code of Ethics

### About the authors



**Jean Blosser** is passionate about creating systems in our schools that ensure high quality, results-oriented education. She is an internationally recognized expert, author and speaker in school services for children with disabilities. To Jean, collaboration is essential! She believes engagement and interaction between parents, teachers, and therapists will guarantee that children reach their highest potential.

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**Holly Kaiser** embraces the evolving changes in special education as a great opportunity to make a positive impact on students' success. She is a leader in state and national professional associations and promotes high standards of education, leadership, and quality of care. She led a national therapy company known for its excellent staff, mentoring programs, and therapy management services.

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