

# **Autism Grant Program: Annual Progress Report**

**DRAFT**

**July 2019**

**This page has been left blank intentionally.**

## Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board



Stuart W. Stedman, CHAIR  
Fred Farias III, OD, VICE CHAIR  
John T. Steen Jr., SECRETARY TO THE BOARD  
S. Javaid Anwar  
Ricky A. Raven  
Donna N. Williams  
Welcome Wilson Jr.  
Michelle Q. Tran, STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

Houston  
McAllen  
San Antonio  
Midland  
Sugarland  
Arlington  
Houston  
Houston

Raymund A. Paredes, COMMISSIONER OF HIGHER EDUCATION

### Agency Mission

The mission of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) is to provide leadership and coordination for Texas higher education and to promote access, affordability, quality, success, and cost efficiency through *60x30TX*, resulting in a globally competitive workforce that positions Texas as an international leader.

### Agency Vision

The THECB will be recognized as an international leader in developing and implementing innovative higher education policy to accomplish our mission.

### Agency Philosophy

The THECB will promote access to and success in quality higher education across the state with the conviction that access and success without quality is mediocrity and that quality without access and success is unacceptable.

The Coordinating Board's core values are:

**Accountability:** We hold ourselves responsible for our actions and welcome every opportunity to educate stakeholders about our policies, decisions, and aspirations.

**Efficiency:** We accomplish our work using resources in the most effective manner.

**Collaboration:** We develop partnerships that result in student success and a highly qualified, globally competent workforce.

**Excellence:** We strive for excellence in all our endeavors.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.

Please cite this report as follows: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2019). Autism Grant Program: Annual Progress Report. Austin, TX.

## Background

In 2015, the 84th Texas Legislature appropriated \$8.1 million to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to make competitive grant awards to Texas public general academic institutions (GAIs) that conduct research and/or provide treatment to children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In 2017, the 85th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, continued support for the program and expanded eligibility by authorizing the participation of Texas independent universities and health-related institutions. The General Appropriations Act, Senate Bill 1, Article III, Rider 50, directed the THECB to offer three categories of funding to eligible institutions.

The following briefly summarizes the three categories of the grant award in Fiscal Years 2018 and 2019:

### **Parent-directed Treatment**

- Parent-directed Treatment – total available in each fiscal year of \$2,250,000, for research centers that serve a combined total of at least 750 children with ASD annually through parent-direct treatment methods.

### **Teacher/Paraprofessional Training**

- Board-certified Behavior Analyst Training for Teachers/Paraprofessionals – total available in each fiscal year of \$950,000 to autism research centers that serve a combined total of at least 2,547 children with ASD per year by training teachers and/or paraprofessionals. Teachers/paraprofessionals may be in public and/or private institutions, teaching grades prekindergarten through 12th grade.

### **Innovative Treatment Models**

- Research, Development, and Evaluation of Innovative Autism Treatment Models – total amount available in each fiscal year of \$700,000 to one or more autism research centers to research, develop, and evaluate innovative autism treatment models that provide treatment to the greatest number of children with ASD.

The THECB administers the Autism Grant Program (AGP) through a competitive grant application process. Grant recipients provide treatments through multiple approaches: conventional treatments (behavioral analysis), innovative treatments, treatments in the public school system, and treatments at home with parents and caregivers.

The AGP has a target for its recipients to serve 6,594 children with ASD for grants awarded in fiscal years 2018 and 2019, or 13,188 children since the program began in 2016. As of April 2019, grant recipients have treated 17,229 children with ASD in the first grant cycle (2016-18), which ended in June 2018. An additional 562 children with ASD were treated under a second grant period (2017-19), which will run through June 2019. A third grant cycle (2018-20) allows for the treatment of an additional 416 children with ASD, for a combined total of 18,207 children with ASD served since the program began in 2016. A fourth round of awards were made to support Parent-directed Treatment in FY 2019, with a grant end date of December 2020. The program is currently exceeding its targets for the Parent-directed Treatment and Behavior Analyst Training for Teachers/Paraprofessionals.

**Table 1.** Autism Grant Program Categories and Service for August 2017 through April 2019

<b>Autism Grant Program Category</b>	<b>Amount Awarded</b>	<b>Children Served to Date</b>	<b>Teachers/ Paraprofessionals Served to Date</b>
Parent-directed Treatment	\$4,500,000	1,910	n/a
Behavior Analyst Training for Teachers/Paraprofessionals	\$1,900,000	15,893	2,110
Innovative Autism Treatment Models	\$1,400,000	166	n/a
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$7,800,000</b>	<b>17,969</b>	<b>2,110</b>

Source: THECB AGP grantees required reports

The AGP also included \$150,000 per fiscal year for administrative costs, which the THECB uses to support staff salaries, external reviewers, and other related administrative costs.

The initial ASD grant awards were made in all three funding categories in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, and a second round of awards were made to support Parent-directed Treatment in FY 2017. The initial AGP grants ended in June 2018 and the second grant awards for the Parent-directed Treatment end in June 2019.

The third ASD grant awards were made in all three funding categories in FY 2018, and a fourth round of awards were made to support Parent-directed Treatment in FY 2019. The third AGP grants will end in June 2020, and the fourth AGP grant awards for the Parent-directed Treatment will end in December 2020.

## **Program Development**

Rules for the AGP were established using the THECB's negotiated rulemaking process with input from stakeholders, including representatives from Texas public universities, the Texas Autism Research and Resource Center, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and the Texas Council on Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders. Following the negotiated rulemaking process, the THECB adopted rules for the program in April 2016. Rules are codified in Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Chapter 6, Subchapter K, and available [online](#).

## **Review, Assessment, and Selection Process**

The AGP is a competitive grant and applications are reviewed by THECB staff and external expert reviewers. To assist in the selection process, the THECB contracted with two external reviewers, one with primary expertise in parent-based treatment, and one with primary expertise in teacher/paraprofessional training. Another external reviewer with expertise in ASD grant projects volunteered from the HHSC and participated in the review process.

Each application was reviewed by a three-member team comprised of the THECB grant administrator, an additional THECB staff member, and an external content expert reviewer. Proposals were assessed based on criteria described in the Request for Applications (RFA), including the projected number of children with ASD to be served, feasibility of the timeline, attainability of the goals, long-term influence of the project past the grant period, management structure, plans for evaluation, sufficiency and economy of the budget, and qualifications of the directors and key staff. The THECB staff compiled the assessment results and made recommendations for funding to the Commissioner of Higher Education. The commissioner reviewed the information and made the final award selection for funding.

## **Fiscal Years 2017-2019 Autism Grant Program Awards**

In FY 2017, \$2,499,050 was available to make additional awards under the Parent-directed Treatment category. A second RFA was issued in April 2017. Eight applications were received for Parent-directed Treatment, and six were recommended and selected for awards. The following provides information about the six awards, which will continue through June 2019.

### **Parent-directed Treatment**

In the Parent-directed Treatment category, the THECB funded six applications. Information about each project follows:

**Texas A&M University, Center of Disability and Development.** The project offers training to parents and community partners (including teachers and librarians) to help children with ASD learn to read and increase literacy rates. Continuous enrollment modification are allowing the project to serve more families than anticipated.

Total award: \$450,668  
Expenditures to date: \$269,148.79  
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 45  
Parent/children pairs served to date: 35

**Texas State University, Clinic for Autism Research, Evaluation, and Support (CARES).** The project will train 40 parents in role-play and modeling of intervention procedures. The project offers a choice between in-person service delivery and telehealth services to reach beyond the immediate geographic region to serve parents who might not otherwise have access.

Total award: \$142,877  
Expenditures to date: \$117,067.00  
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 40  
Parent/children pairs served to date: 33

**University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL), Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities.** The project offers communication and behavior management assessment training to Houston-area caregivers of individuals diagnosed with autism, with six components to the program: 1) Behavior over Breakfast, 2) Connecting the Dots, 3) Verbal Behavior Clinic, 4) Severe Behavior Disorders Research Clinic, 5) Texas Children's Hospital Behavior Analysis Program, and 6) UHCL Verbal Behavior Clinic Telehealth. The project won the 2017-18 Star Award from the Clear Creek Independent School District's Special Education Parent Teacher Organization.

Total award: \$393,751  
Expenditures to date: \$248,914.93  
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 72  
Parent/children pairs served to date: 58

**University of North Texas, Kristin Farmer Autism Center.** The project offers school readiness training to parents via home visits to low-income and underserved populations. The project is ahead of schedule and is exceeding its original target number of children served before the end of the two-year grant period.

Total award: \$447,550  
Expenditures to date: \$237,066.33  
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 100  
Parent/children pairs served to date: 203

**The University of Texas at Austin, Center for Disability Studies.** The project provides training to parents/caregivers of children with autism on two topics: (1) Applied Behavior Analysis with a focus on self-determined learning and (2) Transition to Adulthood.

Total award: \$439,531  
Expenditures to date: \$244,491.30  
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 460  
Parent/children pairs served to date: 207

**The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, Department of Pediatrics.** The project lays the groundwork for an extensive study of how probiotics and improvements in children's gastrointestinal health can reduce ASD-related behavior problems. The project is exceeding its original target number of children served before the end of the two-year grant period.

Total award: \$375,618  
Expenditures to date: \$160,286.13  
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 24  
Parent/children pairs served to date: 26

## Fiscal Years 2018-2020 Autism Grant Program Awards

A FY 2018 RFA with funding available for all three categories of the grant program was released in May 2018 and the following projects were selected for funding by category.

### Parent-directed Treatment – Initial Award Cycle

In the Parent-directed Treatment category, the THECB funded the following six projects:

**Texas A&M University (TAMU), Center of Disability and Development.** The project offers a program in homes and online to train parents in communication strategies for their children with ASD. The program expanded its reach to recruit and prioritize families from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, rural areas, and children with severe autism spectrum disorder.

TAMU presented their project at the Association for Behavior Analysis International's 13th Annual Autism Conference, the Council for Exceptional Children International Conference on Autism Intellectual Disability and Developmental Disabilities, and the National Association of School Psychologists. Parent and autism support groups also invited TAMU grant recipients to present to their members.

Total award: \$500,000

Expenditures to date: \$49,735.41

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 168

Parent/children pairs served to date: 33

**Baylor College of Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine/Texas Children's Hospital Autism Center.** The project offers implementation of a parent-led, flexible, individually tailored cognitive-behavioral treatment intervention for children with autism and anxiety and examines the effectiveness of Stepped-Care Behavioral Interventions for Anxiety in Children with Autism. The project has a waitlist of families as a result of successful marketing and recruitment efforts.

Total award: \$500,000

Expenditures to date: \$20,966.41

Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 120

Parent/children pairs served to date: 3



**University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL), Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities.** The project builds upon a prior THECB autism grant and offers communication and behavior management assessment training to Houston-area caregivers of individuals diagnosed with ASD with six components to the program: 1) Behavior over Breakfast, 2) Connecting the Dots, 3) Verbal Behavior Clinic, 4) Severe Behavior Disorders Research Clinic, 5) Texas Children's Hospital Behavior Analysis Program, and 6) UHCL Verbal Behavior Clinic Telehealth.

Project leaders are also developing a handbook and research programs as a result of the project's continued success.

Total award: \$497,996  
Expenditures to date: \$51,901.35  
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 165  
Parent/children pairs served to date: 22

**Baylor University, Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities.** The project provides high-quality parent training in evidence-based practices to rural families through a six-week program, for a total of 12 visits and 18 hours consisting of frequent visits with a parent coach. The project is receiving tremendous community support. Numerous service provider quality partnerships to assist with family recruitment have been facilitated by project leaders.

Total award: \$278,456  
Expenditures to date: \$9,634.79  
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 100  
Parent/children pairs served to date: 0

**The University of Texas at Dallas, Development of Social Cognition Laboratory, School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences.** The project investigates two mechanisms of social impairment in older adolescents with autism that current psychosocial programs fail to address: 1) exclusionary social environments and 2) underactive neural responses in the "social brain." The goal is to address these mechanisms to assist with real-world future functioning to secure and maintain employment, succeed in college, and develop satisfying personal and professional relationships. The project is receiving significant favorable feedback from participants, demonstrating anecdotal progress.

Total award: \$305,130  
Expenditures to date: \$24,105.42  
Parent/children pairs projected to be served: 154  
Parent/children pairs served to date: 26

**The University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley, College of Education Special Education Research Consortium.** The project delivers evidence-based training to help develop parent capacities (including Individualized Education Program knowledge), connections, cognition, and confidence to generate an autism community of resources and support. Parent participants have reported significant gains in their capacity to connect with other similar families via organizing play dates, conference attendance, and support groups; increased confidence when planning to advocate in the school settings for their children; and increased overall cognition as a result of the information shared through the project.

Total award: \$500,000

Expenditures to date: \$67,725.37

Parent/children projected to be served: 190

Parent/children served to date: 62

## **Teacher/Paraprofessional Training**

In the Teacher/Paraprofessional Training Category, the Coordinating Board funded four applications. The following provides a brief overview of each project.

**Sam Houston State University, Low Incidence Disabilities and Autism Program.** The project offers a training model for educators who work with children with autism and who are interested in learning to write and implement a behavior intervention plan (BIP) derived from the results of a functional behavior assessment (FBA) to avoid non-prescriptive, blanket treatments that result in costly, improper interventions that delay or prevent positive outcomes. At least one school district so far has requested future trainings to include permitted attendance by a range of education professionals as result of their perceived value of the training.

Total award: \$305,366

Expenditure to date: \$4,368.91

Children projected to be served: 4,200

Children served to date: 0

Teachers projected to be served: 820

Teacher served to date: 0

**Texas A&M University, Center on Disability and Development.** The project provides an introductory online learning management training and will develop intermediate and advanced training for Texas professionals in private and public educational institutions who provide services to children with autism. Various email and social media platform outreach efforts have resulted in reaching over 12,600 people, namely educators, including 33 school districts to date.

Total award: \$475,000

Expenditures to date: \$28,099.63

Children projected to be served: 2,935

Children served to date: 49

Teachers projected to be served: 308

Teachers served to date: 109

**Texas Tech University, Burkhart Center for Autism Education and Research.**

The project offers initial training of multiple education service centers (ESC) Autism Specialists in the state as part of a Trainer of Trainer program during a three-day, intensive workshop to learn skills specific to training teachers alongside TTU faculty and staff. To date, 15 of the 18 ESCs are scheduled to attend a workshop by the summer of 2019. Efforts to accommodate the schedule of the remaining three ESCs are in progress.

Total award: \$475,000

Expenditures to date: \$56,946.59

Children projected to be served: 8,000

Children served to date: 0

Teachers projected to be served: 400

Teachers served to date: 0

**University of Houston-Clear Lake, Center for Autism and Developmental**

**Disabilities.** The project is an extension and modification of a 2016 THECB autism grant that offers teachers and paraprofessionals training and classroom consultation services on effective practices for students with autism, with a particular focus on understanding and managing problem behavior. Data indicate all participants demonstrate what they learned with high integrity (i.e., at least 90% accuracy). Participants have shared their feeling that the training should be standard for all special education teachers and paraprofessionals via satisfaction surveys and verbal communication with project personnel.

Total award: \$173,300

Expenditures to date: \$32,907.13

Children projected to be served: 450

Children served to date: 204

Teachers projected to be served: 100

Teachers served to date: 44

## **Innovative Treatment Models**

In the Innovative Treatment category, the THECB provided funding for two awards:

**The University of Texas at San Antonio, Psychological Assessment and Consultation Center (San Antonio Applied Behavior Analysis Research Consortium).**

The purpose of the project is to pilot an innovative evaluation and treatment procedure to facilitate early identification and intervention of infants (0-18 months) and toddlers (18-36 months) "at-risk" for autism. Community interest has led to increased inquiries for volunteer opportunities in the project.

Total award: \$1,251,063

Expenditures to date: \$80,643.41

Children projected to be served: 75

Children served to date: 17

**The University of Texas at Dallas/Callier Autism Treatment Research Center:**

The project offers research on the effectiveness of visual-based early intervention strategies to improve social interaction, attention, and play skills in economically/culturally diverse children, younger than age 5 up to preschool. The project reports strong early results with students' measurable improvement in eye contact, social engagement, and verbal reciprocity.

Total award: \$882,261

Expenditures to date: \$83,438.00

Children projected to be served: 400

Children served to date: 0

The THECB maintains information about the AGP online at [www.thecb.state.tx.us/agp](http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/agp).



This document is available on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board website:  
<http://www.thecb.state.tx.us>

**For more information contact:**

Melinda Valdez, EdD, Program Director  
Academic Quality and Workforce  
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board  
P.O. Box 12788  
Austin, TX 78711  
PHONE (512) 427-6115  
FAX (512) 427-6168  
[melinda.valdez@thecb.state.tx.us](mailto:melinda.valdez@thecb.state.tx.us)