



Project Mosaic: Preparing Highly Qualified Educators to Meet the Unique Needs of Students with Autism in Diverse Settings

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Personnel Preparation to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities (#H325K060211)*

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the nation, and most notably in Northern California, the rapid rise in the incidence of children identified with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) has reached epidemic proportions, presenting unprecedented challenges to the educational community. There is a pressing need to increase the number, quality, and diversity of educators who are fully credentialed and competent to serve students with autism from diverse ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds in diverse settings. To meet this need, Project Mosaic supports the creation of a new Master's and Credential (Level II) special education program emphasis in ASD at San Francisco State University. The project partners with local schools, university/medical centers and community based programs serving and advocating for children, families and adults with ASD. Through specialized coursework (4 core methods) and supervised field experiences (in diverse, urban settings) candidates receive preparation in research-based knowledge, skills and competencies for working effectively with students with autism. The project will financially support and graduate 80 students over a 4 year period. Consistent with SFSU's mission, a high priority of this project is to successfully recruit candidates who have disabilities and are from underrepresented ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups.

The following objectives will assist in meeting these goals while guiding project activities: (1) Establish and maintain school, family and community partnerships with the university to support project activities; (2) Recruit and retain 80 candidates with disabilities and/or from diverse ethnic, cultural and language backgrounds; (3) Develop specialized research-based curricula and pedagogy that allows 20 candidates each project year to provide high quality services and instruction to students with autism; (4) Prepare candidates with knowledge and skill through integrated coursework and supervised field experiences over 3 to 4 semesters to address the specialized needs of students with autism; (5) Evaluate project activities, candidate knowledge and skill, and associated outcomes for the students with autism, and disseminate the program model at the local, state and national level.

Unique features of Project Mosaic include: (a) a streamlined program that allows educators to earn an advanced degree and credential with a specialization in ASD; (b) a comprehensive, competency-based curriculum that is grounded in up-to-date empirical research and evidence-based practices (and aligned with State learning standards) shown to be effective in improving outcomes for children with ASD; (c) specialized coursework linked to highly relevant, supervised field experiences involving direct service to students with ASD within multiple contexts while learning from master teachers, clinicians, parents and adults on the autism spectrum; (d) a clear connection between theory and practice accomplished through independent and collaborative research projects and curriculum development activities that include the use of multi-media technology; (e) collaborative training offered to a wider audience, including paraprofessionals, professionals, undergraduate and graduate students from related disciplines, parents, adults with ASD and members of the community at large.