



New Mexican Parents'  
Perspectives of  
Public Schools'  
Communication Services for  
their Children with ASD  
during Covid-19:  
Preliminary Results

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LEND Capstone Project

THESIS TO BE COMPLETED JULY 2021

# My research questions



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How have public schools' communication and language services for children with ASD in New Mexico been affected during Covid?

What are their parents' perspectives? What do they think has changed? What do they think is working? What do they think isn't?

# LEND Competencies Addressed

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## **Competency 1: Family-Centered/Culturally Competent**

- 1.10 Use family input in a meaningful way in design/ delivery/evaluation of services

## **Competency 5: Research and Critical Thinking**

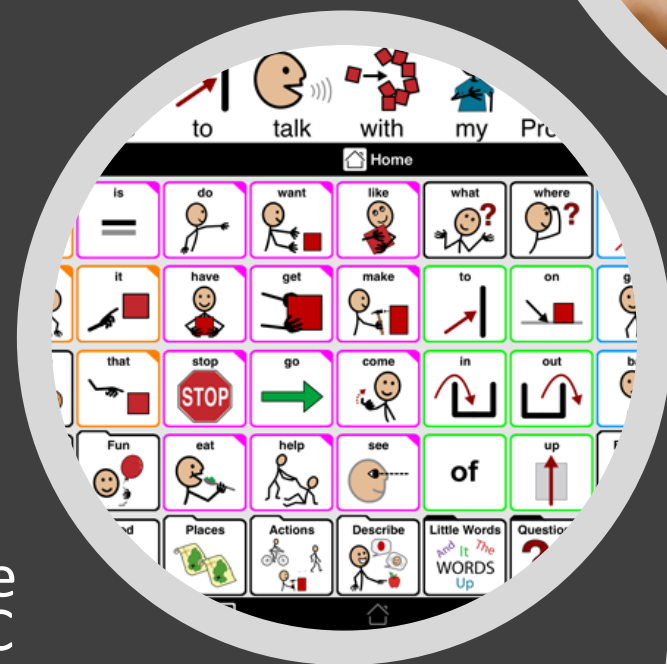
- 5.1 Critically review literature (evidence, design, sample size, CI's, statistical tests)
- 5.2 Demonstrate skills in access/utilization of electronic information, resources and databases
- 5.3 Gain experience with designing, revising, implementing and evaluating a research project
- 5.4 Demonstrate basic competencies in professional writing
- 5.5 Demonstrate verbal presentation skills including use of PowerPoint and auditory augmentation system
- 5.6 Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of research and surveillance on programs/policy

# Communication Interventions Provided by SLPs and Special Educators Are Essential for Students with ASD

Having social communication deficits is a one of the essential criteria for an ASD dx

Most struggle with grammar, narrative discourse, and abstract language

The NIH estimates approximately 25-35% are minimally verbal and these benefit from AAC interventions



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# HIGHLIGHTS OF MY LIT REVIEW

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# SPARK Survey of 8,000 Parents of School Children with ASD – Impact of Covid

March 2020 in the U.S. (Chung, 2020)



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- The Simons Powering Autism Research Project
- **84%:** children's **school services had been disrupted**
- **63%:** **severe disruptions** in services and therapies
- **64%:** **speech therapy was most disrupted** therapy

# More of the March 2020 SPARK survey results



- only 43% of parents whose children were receiving remote services said their children were making moderate to high gains



I knew most schools had gone remote.

Pre-Covid research on the effectiveness of tele-practice with students with ASD consisted of a few, small n studies.





Hines et al. (2019) and Ashburner et al. (2016) interviewed rural parents re: tele-practice interventions for their children with ASD:

The parents liked the convenience of tele-practice, online coaching, and being able to see what their children were doing.



Parents felt it still is easier for practitioners to get the “whole picture” in person.



Some reported technical difficulties.

Hao et al. (2020) and Sutherland et al. (2018) found, for children with ASD, tele-practice results in similar gains to in-person interventions





## Why a Qualitative Research Study?

### Parent Perspective

- In the field of mental health, parent satisfaction with interventions has been shown to affect follow-through with treatment and outcomes for children (Graf et al., 2014; MacKenzie et al., 2004)
- Understanding parent perspectives helps to improve rapport and inform practice and policy changes

This was the first qualitative study I have ever done.

IRB approved it in October

SEMI-STRUCTURED  
1:1 INTERVIEWS  
VIA ZOOM WITH  
5 PARTICIPANTS

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**ALL WERE ASKED: CHANGES?  
DISADVANTAGES? BENEFITS?**

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**I FOLLOWED UP WITH  
CLARIFYING QUESTIONS AND  
REQUESTS FOR ELABORATION**

# THE FIVE PARTICIPANTS

	Role	Race/ Ethnicity	Child's classroom placement	Child's grade	Child's gender	CARS Severity
1	mom	white	Self-contained	1st	F	Severe
2	mom	white	Blended class co-taught by GenEd and SpEd teachers with some pull-out	K	M	Mod-Mild
3	mom	white	Mainstreamed with pull-outs for therapy only	K	M	Mod-Mild
4	dad	white	Self-contained	3rd	M	Mod-Mild
5	mom	Hispanic	Self-contained	2nd	M	Mod-Mild

# THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF TRANSCRIPTS

(based on J.A. Smith's 1996 model)

Dr. Gevarter and I separately IDed "subthemes" in the transcripts – facts or opinions shared by 3 or more parents – then met to collapse our lists until we had 100% agreement

Each subtheme was supported by direct quotes from the transcripts

An inter-rater reliability check was done with an undergraduate student volunteer

I will also be seeking participants' feedback on my preliminary results - see if they want to clarify or add anything

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# RESULTS SUMMARY

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# CHANGES REPORTED

	School switched to all online	Decrease in IEP communication/ language service minutes	Parent independently found external means to compensate for reduced school services
1	Y(* in Nov. went to hybrid)	Y	Y – increased ABA services
2	Y	N	N
3	Y	Y	Y – increased services with private therapist
4	Y	N	N
5	Y	Y	Y – tutors child herself 2hr/night

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6 OTHER SUBTHEMES  
IDENTIFIED WERE NEGATIVE

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4 of 5  
reported  
having had  
to advocate  
to get their  
child's  
needs met

“I had to fight to get her an [in-person ]placement because [the district officials] gave the teachers the choices, whether they wanted to be in school or not. And most of them said no....And so it wasn't then like the district found a placement for her. You have to go out to the other schools and ... talk to the principals ... can say, we'll take them or we won't take them... And so then I ... worked my way up the chain in this special education department....They told me, “Well, this is what the school board decided. So that's what we have to do.” And then I reminded them there's federal laws and that goes above the school board....so I went up to the superintendent and that's when things started to finally happen.”

4 of 5  
believed  
their child  
would do  
better in-  
person

“He's very much a hands on, kiddo. And so, he does so much better in an in-person situation....which is so crazy, because we have seen progress, but I know ... we could be seeing a whole lot more....He absolutely needs that environment and he's one of those ones that ... compartmentalizes. So school is school, and home is home, and he very much does not want to be doing school things at home. And so that's been a real struggle to get him used to doing any school type stuff.”

“there are just some things that you have to do in person ...that you really have a hard time dealing or judging over over a computer screen....it's really hard to kind of get the best measure of what kids are able to do when you just see him in this structured online environment”

4 of 5  
lack of peer  
interaction  
was  
negatively  
impacting  
their child

“I think there's that disconnect here [at home] where like, I don't want to play with you, you're my sister.... And that's the huge negative that he's not getting that those instances to practice his language, you know, with other kids in a social situation with them because right now. Like, I think he would comment more on his peer stuff if they were in person. Whereas, like right now they're having a prompt him to do that.”

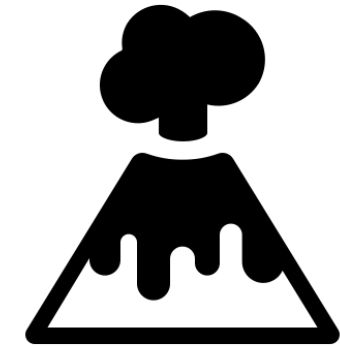
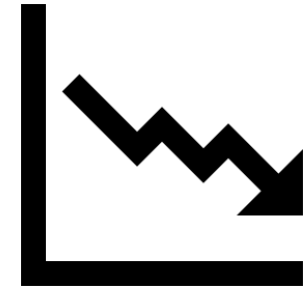
The following concerns were each reported by 3 of 5 of the parents:

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**Regression of communication/ language skills:** Loss of verbal vocabulary; loss of literacy skills; loss of social skills \* These 3 parents also reported a reduction of service minutes

**Challenging behaviors with initial switch to remote:** overstimulated by screen leading to frustration and inability to focus (2); frustrated by school and home being in one place

**Communication challenges on-line:** students talking over each other, child's voice too soft to be detected, glitches causing delays in conversation leading to communication; muting students preventing conversation, too many faces to process



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# THE ONE POSITIVE SUBTHEME

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3 of the 5  
saw  
increased  
transparency  
as an  
advantage

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[Last year] I was not able to be in the classroom with them. They considered that more as a distraction. And so, that to me was not -- It was not fun because I didn't get to see the things. But yeah, now I have been able to. **It's kind of like when we were doing ABA at home, you're actually able to see all the progress and see what they're learning and what the goals are.**

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the only good aspect that I've learned is that **when** when we go to pick up materials, for each semester they're giving him like a packet for SLP and speech, ... at least I can kind of get a grasp of what they're wanting to work on with him.

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# CONCLUSIONS & QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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What could help make future tele-practice more effective?

The results did **not** support previous findings that, for children with ASD, tele-practice generally elicits similar results as in-person interventions (Hao et al. , 2020 and Sutherland et al, 2018).





What could in-person schools do to make children's interventions more transparent?

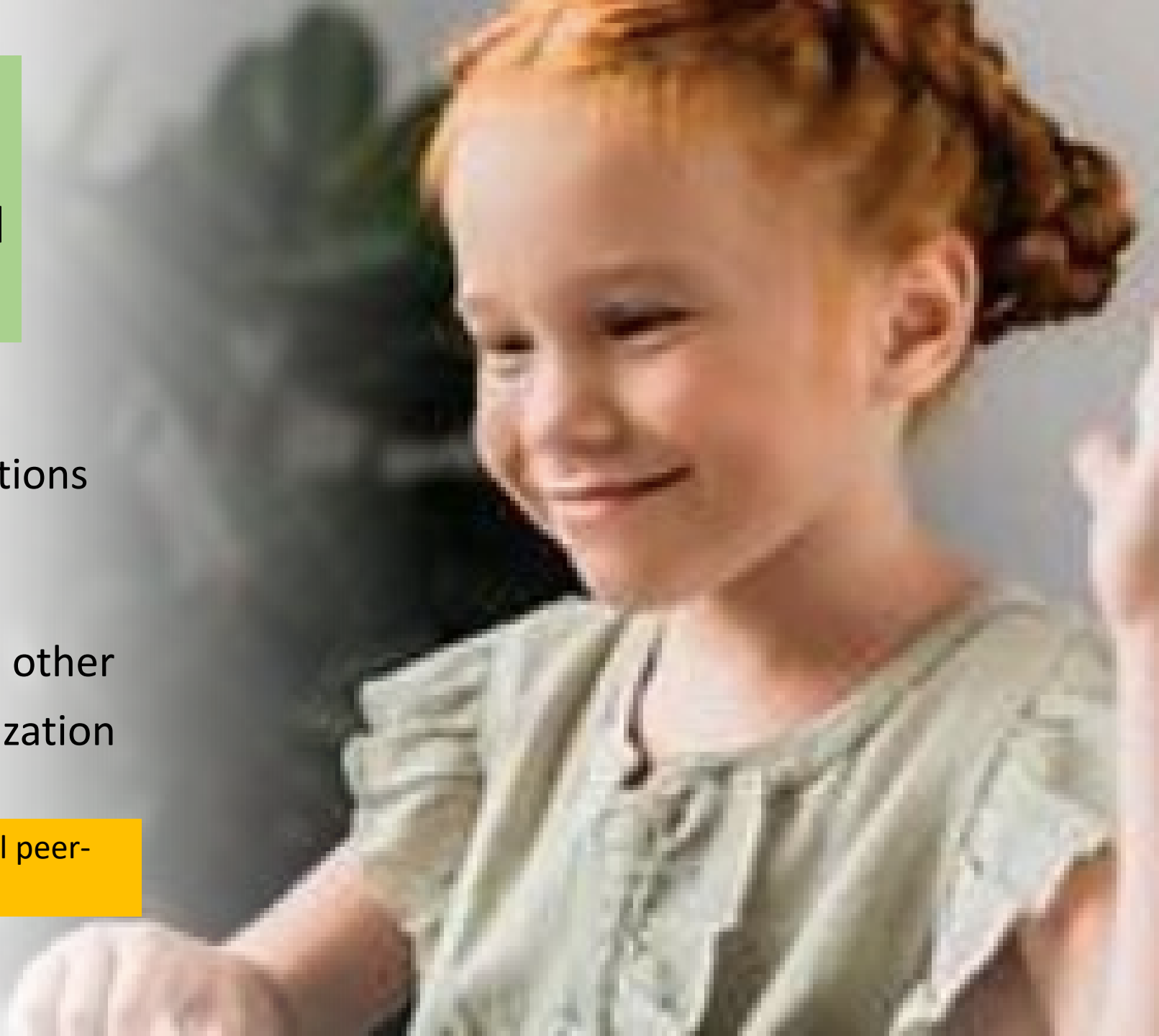
Our findings that parents appreciated the transparency that remote services provided but still felt their children would do better in person were consistent with those of previous studies. (Hines et al., 2019) and Ashburner et al., 2016)

More planning is need to facilitate communication and provide more natural peer interactions online

Parents described

- strictly controlled conversations
- whole class being muted,
- situations where students constantly talked over each other
- No opportunities for socialization

What could help facilitate more natural peer-to-peer interactions online?



Finally, more work is needed to ensure that, if this pandemic continues, or another occurs in the future, IEP services are maintained for children with disabilities.

Parents should not have to

1. advocate for services required by federal law
2. pay extra money or spend extra personal time compensating

❖ Decrease of services correlated with regression of skills in this study

The school experiences of families in this study varied considerably – some schools did figure out how to maintain service minutes. How could they share their successful strategies with others?



# Special thanks for their extra support!

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- Dr. Cindy Gevarter, my thesis advisor
- Erin Gallegos, the undergrad who did back up recordings, proofed my transcriptions, and helped with my inter-reliability check
- My other thesis committee members: Dr. Richard Arenas and Dr. Carlos Izzary-Pérez
- Dr. Christine Vining, my LEND mentor



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