

## **State Comptroller's Report Examines Tennessee Public Education Services for Infants, Children and Youth with Autism**

Tennessee lacks standardized methods for training teachers of students with autism and there is insufficient information to track the effectiveness of those training efforts, according to a new report released today by the Comptroller's Offices of Research and Education Accountability (OREA).

The report is the second in a three-part series of reports examining Tennessee public services for infants, children and youth with autism.

The report, "Autism in Tennessee: Part 2 – Education," provides an overview of education services available from birth through high school for children with autism. Every child with autism is provided with an individualized education plan - a requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), the federal law governing special education. An analysis of the various approaches used to educate children with autism, options for parents and state, and federal measures of accountability are also included in the report.

The report points out that children and youth with autism will transition into and out of a number of different special education program categories over the course of their elementary and secondary education. These transitions are often a challenge for children with autism and their parents because eligibility criteria and the extent of services vary among special education program categories.

School systems are responsible for providing K-12 teachers with training on how to most effectively teach students with autism. According to the report, each school system goes about this training responsibility differently and the state lacks comprehensive data on which school systems' teachers are most prepared to teach children with autism.

Some teachers may receive training through the Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD) at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. Other school systems provide in-house training and support for teachers. The report profiles Knox and Williamson County Schools as two examples of this practice. Higher education institutions are another source of training for teachers. The report includes a survey of the autism-specific curriculums available at Tennessee's two- and four-year public higher education institutions.

"Best practices for educating children with autism are still largely in development," said Joseph Woodson, OREA legislative research analyst and author of the report. "Tennessee and the nation are still learning how best to educate children with autism."

The report also includes an examination of efforts made in other states to improve autism services. Some states have developed task forces or state-level agencies for autism services, while others have implemented comprehensive systems for teacher training and other support services.

The report and the previous report in this three-part series may be downloaded at:  
<http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/OREA/PublicationDetails.aspx?ReportKey=67121ee3-1603-46da-a1ca-cff374171299>

The first report was released last year and focused on autism data collection and prevalence estimates. The final report will review health care services as they relate to autism in Tennessee. To receive notification when subsequent reports are released, please visit:  
[www.tn.gov/comptroller/orea](http://www.tn.gov/comptroller/orea)

OREA supports the General Assembly, the Comptroller and the public with accurate and objective policy research and analysis.

OREA has issued reports covering a wide range of policy topics since 1994, from education to health care to criminal justice. OREA reports have led to changes in state law, sparked the creation of state initiatives to address critical needs and informed policy debates within the state legislature and across the state.

The National Legislative Program Evaluation Society has recognized the significant impact (in terms of dollar savings, program improvements or increased legislative awareness) of select OREA reports every year since 2002.

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