Continuing FACES: Fostering Advocacy, Communication, Empowerment, and Supports for Historically Underrepresented Families of Children with Autism

OIED 2018-2019 Diversity Mini-Grant Final Report

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Program Objectives and Impacts

Objective

The purpose of Continuing FACES was to provide ongoing support for the implementation of the FACES parent advocacy program here at NC State by training underrepresented undergraduate and/or graduate students to engage in applied research in the social sciences. The purpose of the FACES program is to connect families to autism services and to assess the effectiveness of the program in shaping knowledge, advocacy, and empowerment among historically underrepresented (i.e., African American and Latino) parents of children with autism. Consistent with the goals from our funded 2017-2018 Diversity Mini-Grant, the Continuing FACES project had an emphasis on the following target areas:

1. Enhancing the quality of teaching and learning about diversity in the social sciences
2. Enriching the diversity experiences of all students
3. Creating a welcoming and inclusive work and learning environment where differences are respected and valued, that offers opportunity for and supports the success of all students, staff and faculty
4. Improving recruitment, retention and graduation of students from historically underrepresented groups

Impact

Along with PI, Dr. Jamie Pearson, six graduate research assistants and four undergraduate research assistants worked on the FACES project during the 2018-19 funding period. The FACES team conducted one Meeting FACES event during the fall of 2018, a second Meeting FACES event during the spring of 2019, and also implemented the full FACES intervention during the spring of 2019.

Meeting FACES. The Meeting FACES events were designed to promote knowledge of autism and to build connections between parents, educators, and service providers in the community. The research team held two Meeting FACES events during the funding period: one in November, 2018 and the second in January, 2019. The first event was held at the Cooperative Extension Office in Winston Salem, NC. During this Meeting FACES event, 20 parents and/or caregivers/family members and 9 service providers were in attendance (i.e., signed the attendance sheet). The second Meeting FACES event was held at Dilworth Church in Charlotte, NC. At the second event, 38 parents
and/or caregivers/family members and 10 service providers were in attendance (i.e., signed the attendance sheet). During the Meeting FACES events, the research assistants along with additional volunteers provided childcare for families who needed it. Childcare was provided for eight children at the Winston-Salem event and six children at the Charlotte event. Each of the Meeting FACES events lasted approximately three hours and included introductions, meet and greets, and an informational session during which educators, service providers, and representatives from various community agencies (e.g., TEACCH, Autism Society of NC, NCSU Psychoeducational Clinic) shared information about the resources and services they provide. Following the informational session, participants had an opportunity to engage in question and answer sessions and build connections with service providers of need/interest to them. Overall, the research team received very positive feedback about the Meeting FACES events from families and service providers.

Figure 1. Winston Salem resource table

Figure 2. Meeting FACES Charlotte Participants

**Full FACES.** The team also facilitated the full FACES intervention during the 2018-19 funding period. This experimental group design study was a 4-week training needs of African American families of children with autism in and around the Triangle. From February 2019-April 2019, 18 African American families participated in the full FACES training for four weeks (two separate groups). The goal of the full FACES training is to strengthen knowledge, advocacy, and empowerment among minority families of children with autism. During each of the four weeks, training topics included: autism definitions and characteristics, special education laws, behavior management, and communication strategies among others. We were also able to include a special feature session on mental health, faith, and coping. Guest speaker, Dr. Janee Avent Harris facilitated this session and the participants provided overwhelmingly positive feedback following this session in particular.
Commensurate with the initiatives of the FACES project, Continuing FACES has accomplished the following during the 2018-19 OIED funding period:

1. Provided graduate students (including three historically underrepresented research assistants) in the Departments of Teacher Education and Learning Sciences and Psychology with the opportunity to contribute to an interdisciplinary research team,
2. Provided graduate students with an opportunity to engage in applied research experiences related to (a) the development and implementation of parent-training interventions, (b) culturally responsive research methods, and (c) both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis (i.e., mixed methods research),
3. Provided training to graduate students to conduct assessments and provide services for the widely diverse population of children and families they will serve as professionals in the field, and
4. Fostered a community of interdisciplinary autism researchers, clinicians, and students at NCSU that (a) addresses the underrepresentation of minority graduate students in applied research, (b) builds the platform and capacity to procure external funding that will support ongoing autism research and scholarship, and (c) contributes to the enhancement of the overall research and scholarship enterprise at NCSU.
Project Evaluation

Preliminary Findings

Meeting FACES. Following the two Meeting FACES events, participants were asked to complete a brief survey to indicate their satisfaction with the program, and to gain more information about the types of autism services and supports families would benefit from. Example survey questions included:

- Below is a list of potential services that may currently be limited, non-existent, or not customized for children and young adults with autism and their families. We would like to know how important these potential services might be for you, your family, or the families you serve (educators/providers).
- Overall, how satisfied were you with the Meeting FACES event today?
- How likely is it that you will recommend the Meeting FACES program to others? (e.g., family members, friends, parents, patients).

FACES Group Design. Participants who completed the FACES group design completed a pre-and post-assessment that measured multiple constructs such as knowledge of autism, perceptions of empowerment, parent-professional partnership, and advocacy, among others.

The research team has completed data collection for both the Meeting FACES projects and the full FACES training and will begin comprehensive data analyses for both projects in the fall.
**Sustainability**

Consistent with our proposed plan for sustainability following the 2017-2018 OIED funding period, the FACES team hosted two additional *Meeting FACES* events during the 2018-19 funding cycle, completed data analysis on the first two Meeting FACES studies, and continued with data analysis on the AAAF interview study. As planned, the [preliminary] findings from the data analysis on both projects were incorporated into the full FACES program which was implemented as an experimental group design in the Spring of 2019.

The full FACES program is a face-to-face parent training and advocacy program that is delivered across four 3-hour training sessions for a total of 12 hours of training and instruction. The scope of the FACES program is based on (a) what is known about areas of needed support for individuals with ASD (e.g., Meadan et al., 2014; Tager-Flusberg and Kasari, 2013), (b) what is known about the need for advocacy among parents of children with ASD (Burker 2013; Cohen, 2009; Mueller & Carranza, 2011), and (c) recommendations about how parents can be better prepared to advocate for and address the needs of African American children with ASD (Pearson and Meadan, 2018). Using findings from Meeting FACES and the AAAF interview study, the FACES team was able to adapt the FACES program to meet the needs of local families. The experimental group design included participants from the AAAF interview study and participants from the Meeting FACES events. Following her first submission for an Early Career grant to the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), which was not funded, but received favorable scores, Dr. Pearson is currently revising the proposal and preparing for resubmission. If funded, this grant will support ongoing development, refinement, and data collection for the FACES program.

Finally, FACES is intended to be a long-standing community resource for underserved families of children with autism across the state of North Carolina. This project has the potential to be embedded in collaborative initiatives with the Autism Society of North Carolina, the Psychoeducational Clinic in the Department of Psychology at NCSU, and the Center for Family and Community Engagement in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at NCSU. As such, this program creates a unique opportunity for NCSU to become a pillar in the autism community, particularly among families who are otherwise underserved. This second year of NCSU Diversity Mini-Grant funding has supported our development and implementation of the aforementioned programs and has provided us, we believe, with leverage to gain external funding that increases our potential to scale up and reach a larger number of underserved families of children with autism across the state of North Carolina.
Publications & Presentations

Articles under review


Conference Presentations


