

The Florida Senate  
**COMMITTEE MEETING EXPANDED AGENDA**

EDUCATION PRE-K - 12  
Senator Simon, Chair  
Senator Calatayud, Vice Chair

**MEETING DATE:** Tuesday, January 14, 2025  
**TIME:** 11:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.  
**PLACE:** Pat Thomas Committee Room, 412 Knott Building

**MEMBERS:** Senator Simon, Chair; Senator Calatayud, Vice Chair; Senators Berman, Burgess, Collins, Davis, Gaetz, Thompson, and Yarborough

TAB		BILL NO. and INTRODUCER	BILL DESCRIPTION and SENATE COMMITTEE ACTIONS	COMMITTEE ACTION
1		Presentations on Supports for Families and Students with Autism <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• UF Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment</li><li>• Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD)</li><li>• Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS)</li><li>• Palm Beach School for Autism</li><li>• South Florida Autism Charter School</li></ul>		Presented

Other Related Meeting Documents

# Overview of ASD & CARD

**ANN-MARIE ORLANDO, PH.D., CCC-SLP/A**  
DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA CENTER FOR AUTISM AND RELATED  
DISABILITIES

# What is ASD?

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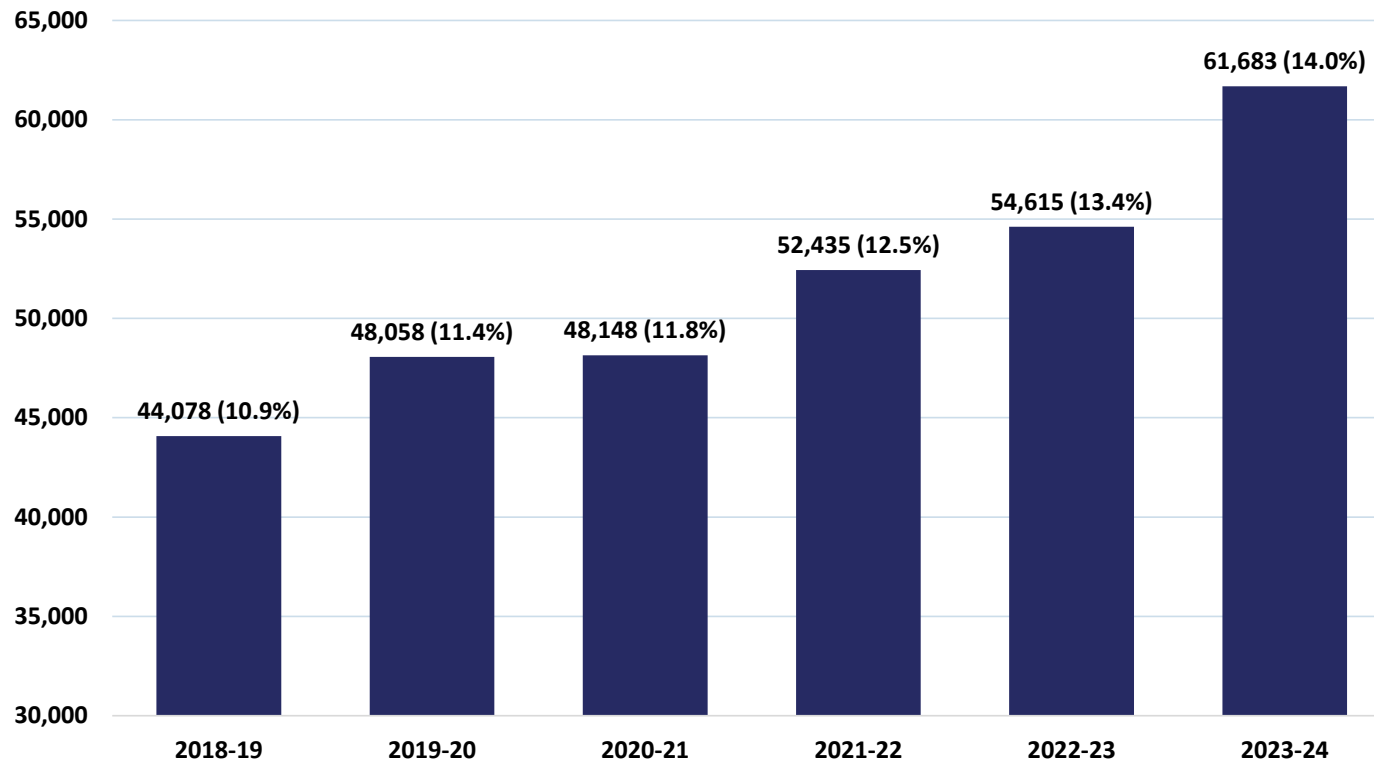
## What is Autism?

- Lifelong, neurodevelopmental disability; affects patterns of development, not the ability to learn
- Affects a person's ability to communicate, understand language, play, and socially interact with others; is primarily a social communication disorder





# Students Identified with ASD in Florida



Source: Final Survey 2, 2023-24  
[www.fldoe.org](http://www.fldoe.org)

## Why the Increase in ASD Diagnosis?

- Increased awareness
- Broader diagnostic criteria
- Early intervention findings may prompt referral for to pediatricians for evaluation of ASD
- Better ASD awareness training for pediatricians
- More informed parents
- Diagnosis can lead to more services



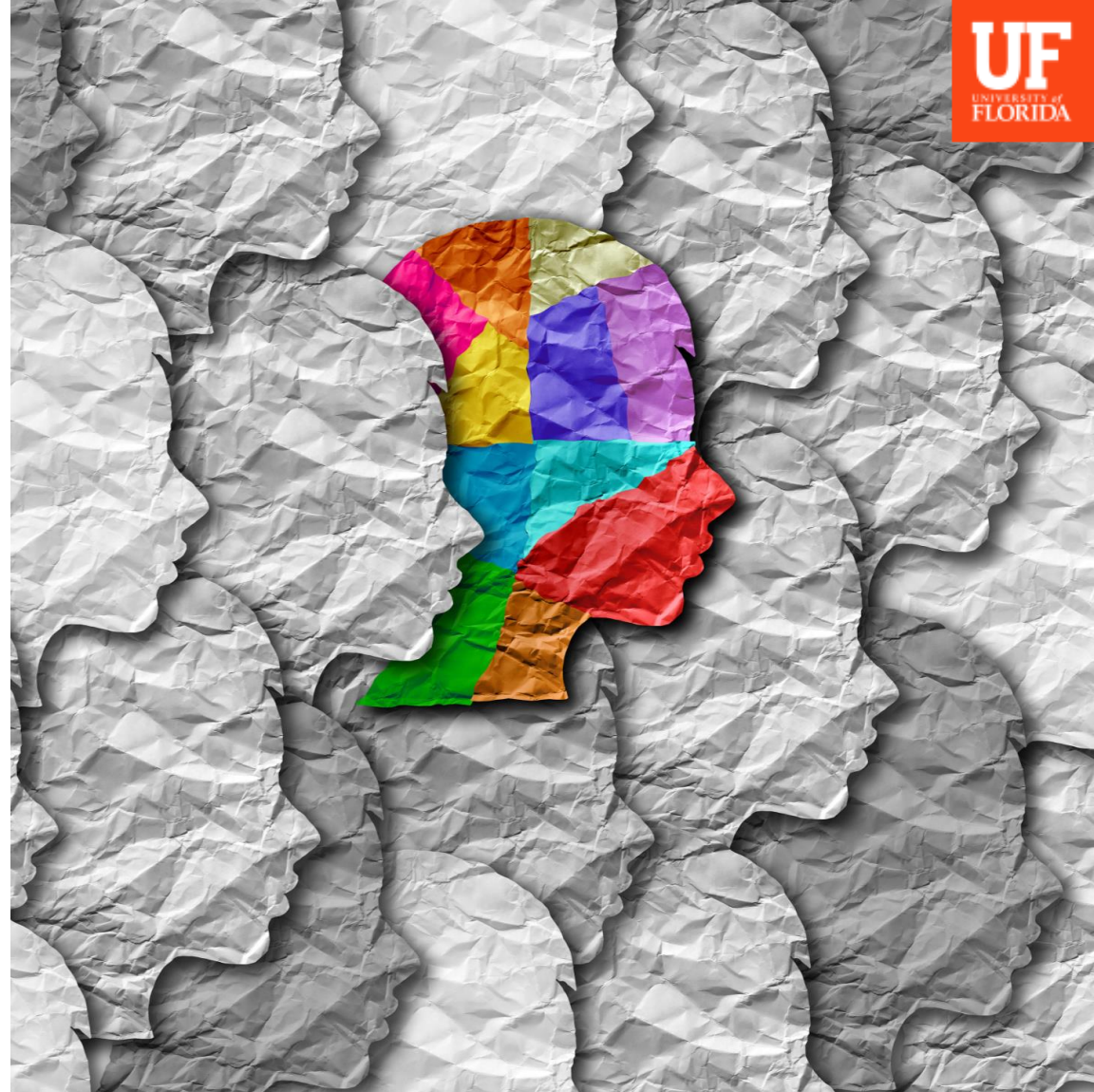
# Factors that Can Contribute to ASD

## Genetic

- ASD-related genes
- Neurodevelopmental disorders

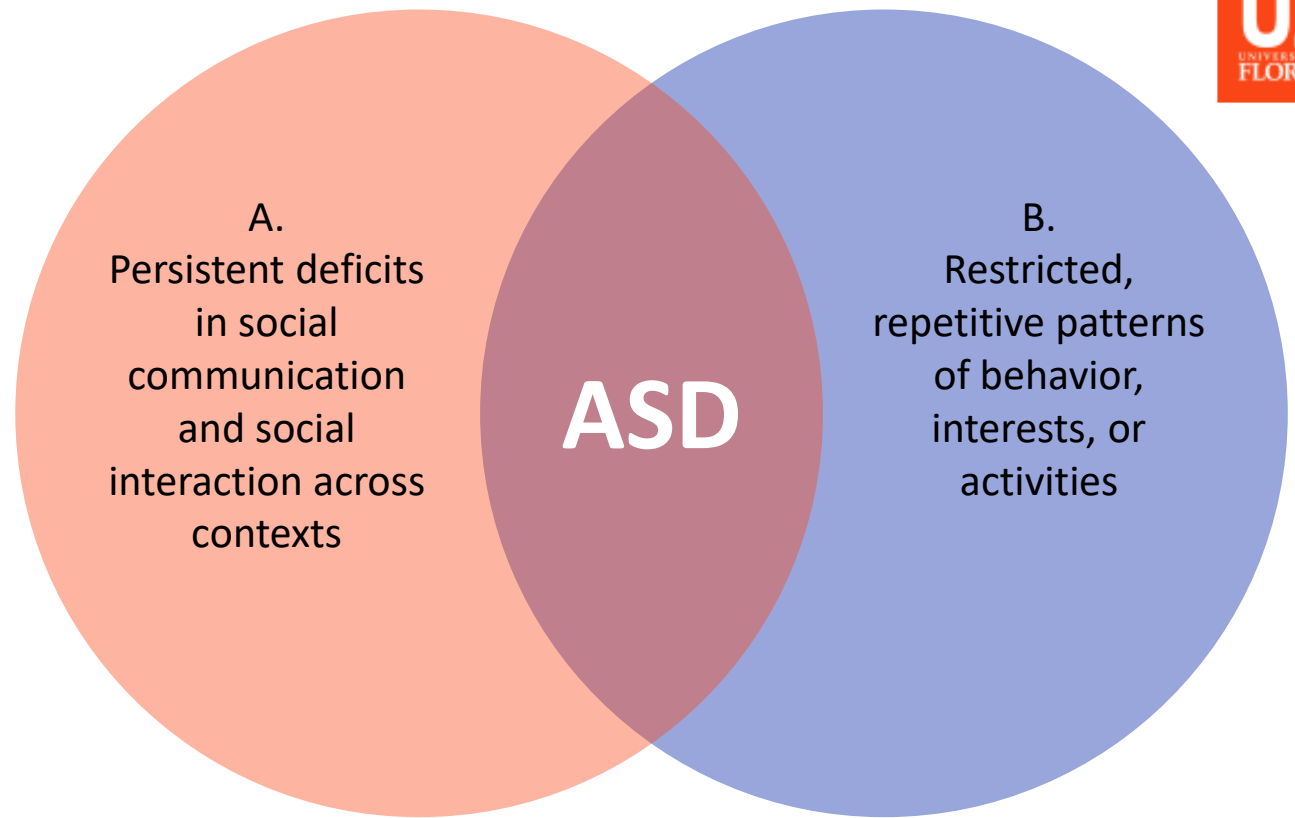
## Environmental

## Other risk factors



# Autism Spectrum Disorder Diagnosis: DSM-5

(APA, 2013)



- C. Symptoms must be present in early childhood (but may not become fully manifest until social demands exceed limited capacities)
- D. Symptoms together limit and impair everyday functioning



# ASD Evaluation

## Screening

- Completed by pediatrician at 18- and 24-month check-ups
- Early Steps
- FDLRS Child Find
- Easterseals

## Diagnosis

- Physician
  - Pediatrician
  - Psychiatrist
  - Neurologist (less common)
- Psychologist
  - ASD-specific measures
    - Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule
    - Childhood Autism Rating Scale
    - Adaptive behavior scales
- Multi-disciplinary Team

# Severity Levels and Qualifiers (APA, 2013)



## LEVEL 1

Requires support



## LEVEL 2

Requires substantial support



## LEVEL 3


Requires very substantial support


- With or without accompanying **intellectual** impairment
- With or without accompanying **language** impairment
- Associated with a known medical or genetic condition or environmental factor
- Associated with another neurodevelopmental, mental, or behavioral disorder
- With catatonia

# In General, Individuals with ASD May Have Difficulty With:


! Reading body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, sarcasm, or figures of speech

 Changes in routine or expectation (insistence on sameness)

 Organization and time management (multitasking may be difficult)

 Sensations such as loud noise, lighting, crowds, and scents

 Expressing themselves, having conversations

 Repetitive or stereotypic behaviors that interfere with engagement

 Eye contact

## Some of Many Strengths

- Attention to detail
- Excellent memory
- Passion and expertise for a particular area
- Deep focus
- Visual/spatial skills
- Methodical approach to tasks
- Creative
- Integrity







Center for Autism and  
Related Disabilities

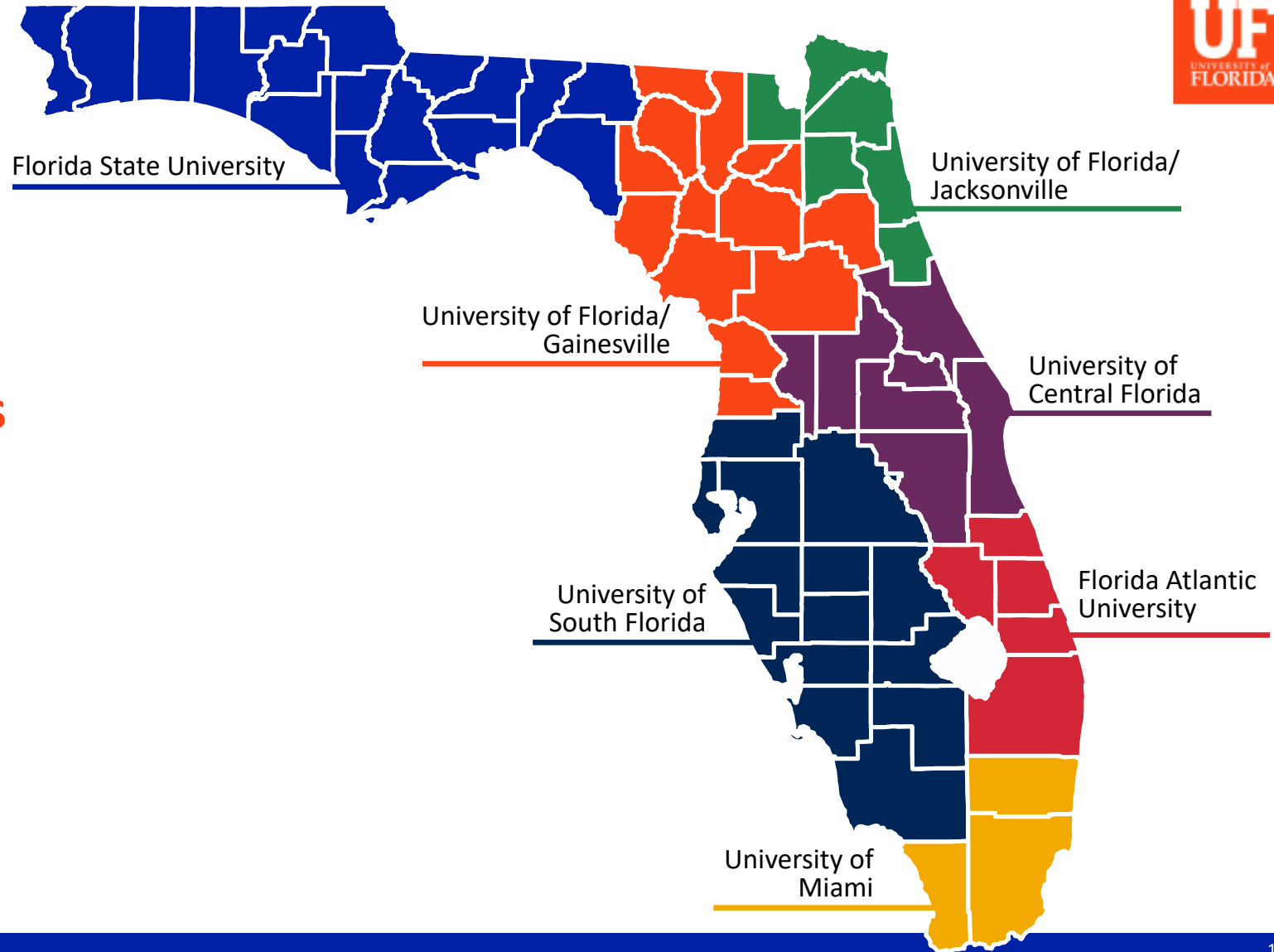
*Florida's First Choice  
for Autism Support*

## What is CARD?

- Center for Autism and Related Disabilities
- 7 centers statewide
- Project funded by the Florida Department of Education
- All services are free of charge



# CARD Service Regions



## Who Does CARD Serve?

Qualifying individuals of any age with the following diagnoses:

- autism spectrum disorder
- developmental disability, through age 9
- dual sensory impairment (hearing and vision)
- hearing impairment and another disabling condition
- vision impairment and another disabling condition

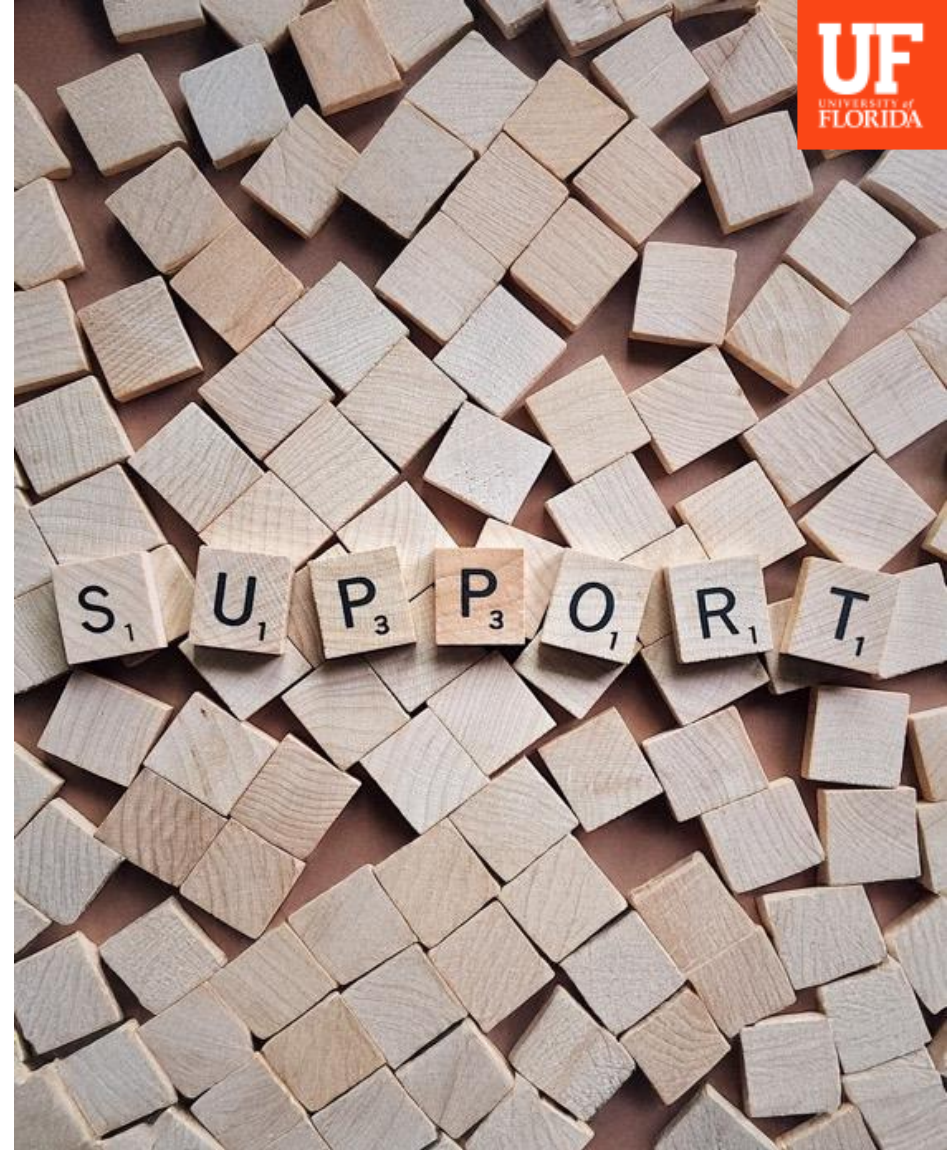


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## What Services Does CARD Provide?

- Training (by request)
- Consultation to schools and school districts (technical assistance)
- Consultation to families and care providers (individual assistance)
- Resource referral
- Public education
- **We do NOT provide**
  - Screening
  - Diagnosis
  - Therapy services



## Professional Learning

- A variety of topics, ranging from information about autism, intervention strategies, and more
- In person, online synchronous, online asynchronous
- Continuing education credits often available



## Technical Assistance

- Support to schools and school districts
- Classroom observations, recommendations, and follow-up
- Help with Individual Education Plans (IEP), 504s, and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs)
- PEPSA partnerships
- <http://doepartnership.fmhi.usf.edu/partnership.html>





## Individual Assistance

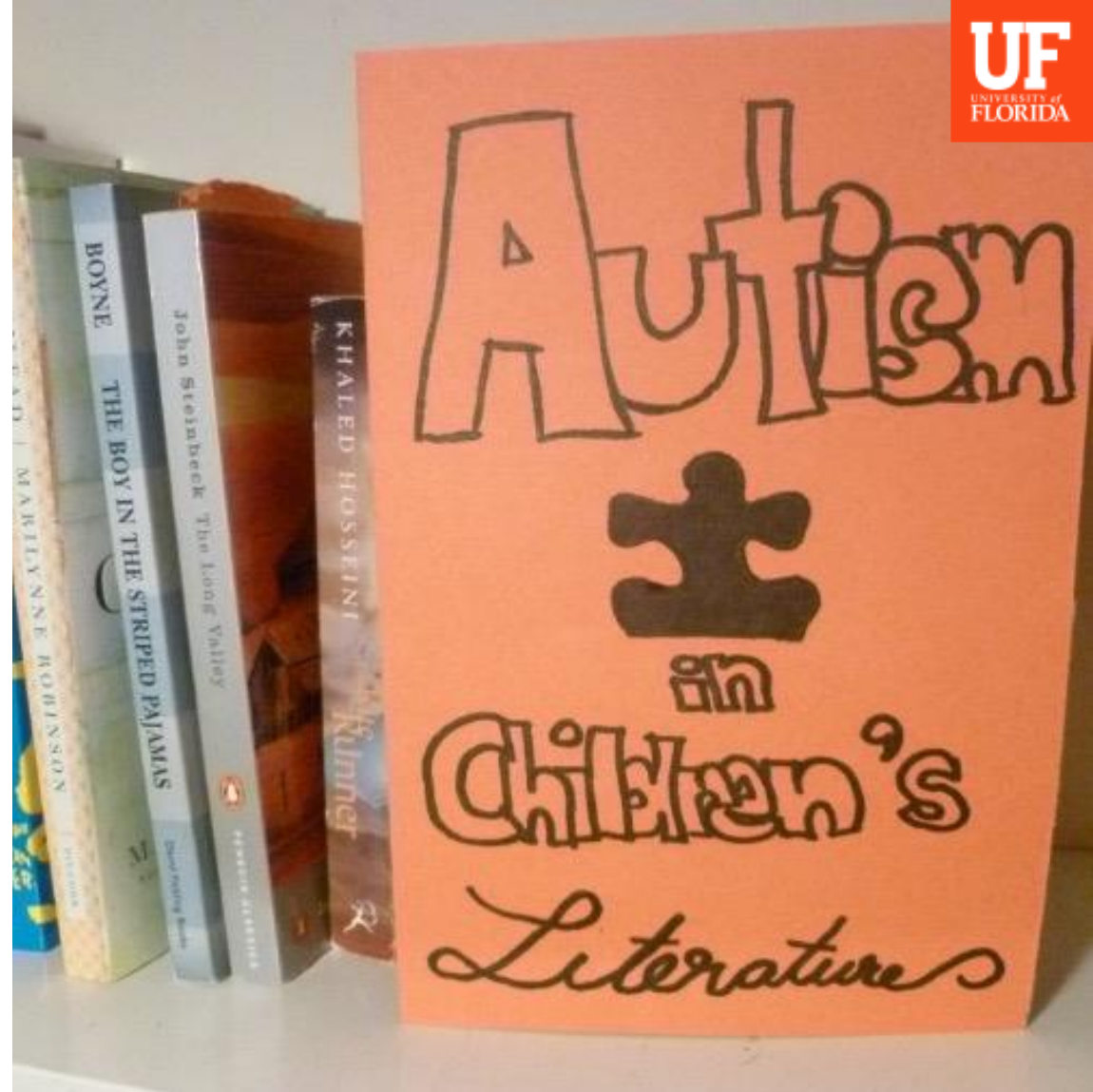
- Support in the home or community
- Observation, coaching, and feedback
- Address concerns such as behavior, communication, self-care and independent functioning skills, social skills, employment, and more





## Resource Referral

- Up to date database of service providers and social service agencies
- Assistance with completing applications for services
- Visual supports lab



## Public Education

- Bring awareness of autism and related disabilities to the community
- Participate in community events across our catchment area
- Advertise CARD services to potential families and professionals



**World Autism  
Awareness Day**

## Who Are the CARD Staff?

Professionals with experience in a variety of disciplines including:

- Behavior analysis
- Occupational therapy
- Psychology
- Special education
- Social work
- Speech-language pathology





## UF Initiatives

- Support groups
- Annual Statewide conference
- Employment Boot Camp
- Autism in the Arts
- Social learning groups



## How Can You Contact CARD?

### Phone:

(352)-265-2230

### Email:

[card-info@ufl.edu](mailto:card-info@ufl.edu)

Ann-Marie Orlando – 352-265-2239

[aorlando@ufl.edu](mailto:aorlando@ufl.edu)

### Address:

4101 NW 89th Blvd.  
Gainesville, FL 32606

### Website:

<http://card.ufl.edu/>





# Overview of UF Health CAN

**KERRI P. PETERS, PHD, BCBA-D**

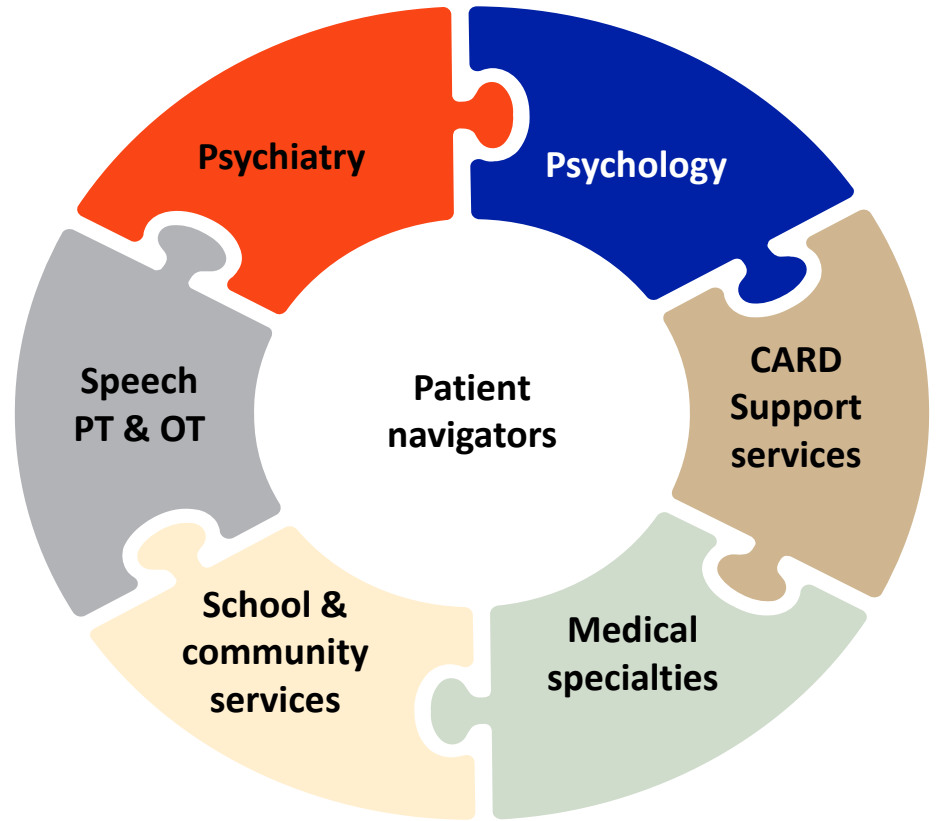
ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA  
CENTER FOR AUTISM AND NEURODEVELOPMENT

## FIVE Mission Areas

- Clinical
- Training & Education
- Research
- Outreach & Advocacy
- Transition to Adulthood



# Patient navigators



# Clinical and community support

- **Collaborative Diagnostic Clinic**

Multidisciplinary team

Psychiatry, Psychology, Nurse Practitioners, Patient Navigator, Behavior Analysts, OT, SLP, and PT, CARD and trainees.

- **Weekly Case Conference**
- **Brief Behavioral Consultation for newly diagnosed**
- **School consultation (behavioral and psychiatric)**
- **Behavioral consultation in inpatient settings**
- **Specialty severe behavior treatment**
- **Specialty pediatric feeding disorder treatment**





# Training and workforce development

- **Psychiatry resident and fellow training**
- **Health Education and Behavior internships**
- **Graduate and undergraduate training**  
Behavior Analysis, Education, Psychology,  
Speech, OT, PT, and much more
- **Research assistantships**
- **Practicum students**
- **Medical provider trainings**



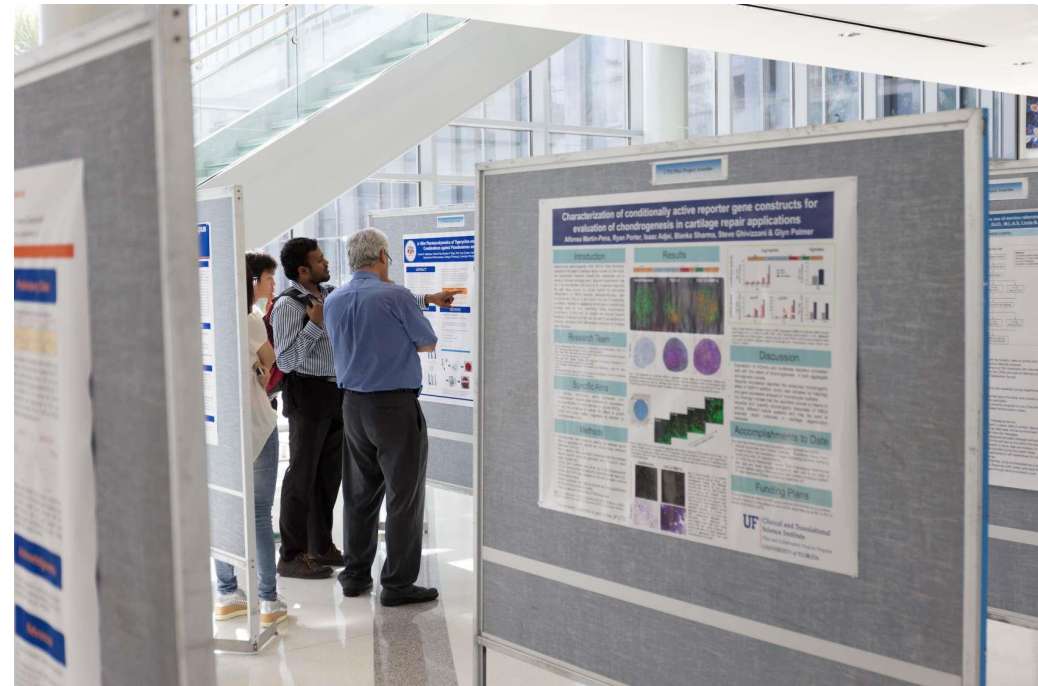


# Research

## **Mission:**

to use basic, clinical, and translational science approaches to answer key questions and accelerate research about autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders

- **Neuroimaging**
- **Genetics etiology**
- **Fundamental science to understand neural circuitry**
- **Behavioral assessment and interventions**
- **Generalization of intervention to community-based settings**
- **Etc.**





# Palm Beach School for Autism

THE JOURNEY OF A CHARTER SCHOOL



# Who are We?



# Ann Eisenberg

Executive Director, Palm Beach  
School for Autism: 2007- Present

- BS, Communications: Syracuse University.
- MS, Nonprofit Management: Regis University.
- Parent liaison for the Florida Early Steps Program in the late 90's.
- Established social and recreational programs for individuals with developmental disabilities in Palm Beach County.
- Parent Representative for the Miami CARD center in the early 2000's.
- Why I do this:

My son was diagnosed on the spectrum at 18 months old in 1992.



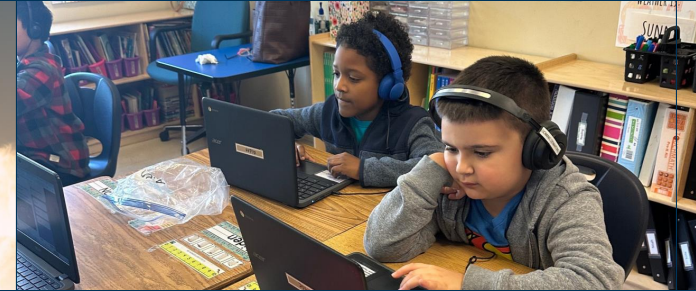
## Allison Ballin

Associate Director, Palm Beach  
School for Autism 2007 - Present

- BS, Marketing and International Business: New York University.
- MS, Special Education: Hunter College.
- A board-certified behavior analyst and special educator with over 30 years of experience advocating for and supporting children and young adults with special needs.
- Experienced in providing direct treatment, education, life planning, and coordination for clients and their families.
- Why I do this:

I am a parent of a young adult with learning and behavioral differences.





1 in 36 children are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. There is a critical need for schools like ours that specialize in educating students with autism.

Here is our journey.

# Our Timeline

THE JOURNEY OF A CHARTER SCHOOL



# Comprehensive Support and Individualized Education

- Low student-to-teacher ratio.
- Multidisciplinary approach includes: educators, speech, occupational, and physical therapists, behavior analysts, mental health counselors, physicians, and families.
- Educate students on access points and general education standards and for students who need access to both types of programming.



# Innovative Teaching Strategies and Real-World Learning Opportunities

- Differentiated instruction, allowing students to learn in the way that works best for them.
- Evidence-based curricula.
- Social skills training and mindfulness strategies are integrated throughout the day, with mental health professionals readily available for support.
- Applied Behavior Analysis principles are used for teaching.
- Collaborate with community partners to provide students with community-based activities and meaningful employment opportunities.
- Established a student-run café offering healthy, affordable breakfasts and lunches for staff, providing real-world experience and essential job skills.



# Programs and Specialized Support



- A music and movement program for preschool and elementary students encourages creativity and promotes the arts.
- A highly trained professional crisis management team provides immediate support to students during times of crisis.
- Ongoing professional development for all staff from in-house experts and outside professionals.
- We work closely with the District of Palm Beach County, Executive Director Kevin McCormick and Assistant General Counsel Laura Pincus.

# Academic Achievements and Performance Highlights

- Our School Improvement Rating based on required state testing advanced from "Maintaining" to "Commendable" for the 2022/2023 school year.
- Over 56% of our students made learning gains in reading, placing us 5th in Palm Beach County.
- Over 94% of our students made learning gains in math, placing us 1st in Palm Beach County/2nd statewide.
- A 98% teacher retention rate and a 97% student retention rate.





A strong team culture is the foundation of Palm Beach School for Autism's success. We share a common vision and work collaboratively to ensure the best possible outcomes for our students.

We are committed to supporting the entire family. Autism affects the entire family. We strive to provide ongoing support, resources, and a listening ear to families whenever they need it. By supporting the entire family, we can best ensure the success and well-being of our students.

# Financial Stability



- Purchased our 4.2-acre property, including the building, in 2021.
- Referendum funds help cover costs associated with high security needs.
- Fundraising allows us to offer social and recreational activities for students that would otherwise not be funded. Grants and foundations are crucial in providing additional funding for programs not otherwise covered by our FEFP funding.
- Wisely investing money has afforded us emergency funds.
- To stay competitive with area private and public schools, we pay 100% of our employees' health insurance costs. As we cannot afford to participate in the Florida Retirement System, this is our way of recruiting and retaining teaching staff.



# Challenges

- FUNDING!
- Teacher state certification exam requirements.
- Burnout of staff due to new state requirements and the needs of our student population.
- Supporting our families in navigating the increasing challenges posed by state and federal funding reductions for individuals with disabilities under the Medicaid/Med Waiver program.
- New state testing requirements interfere with instruction and therapies.





# What's Next?

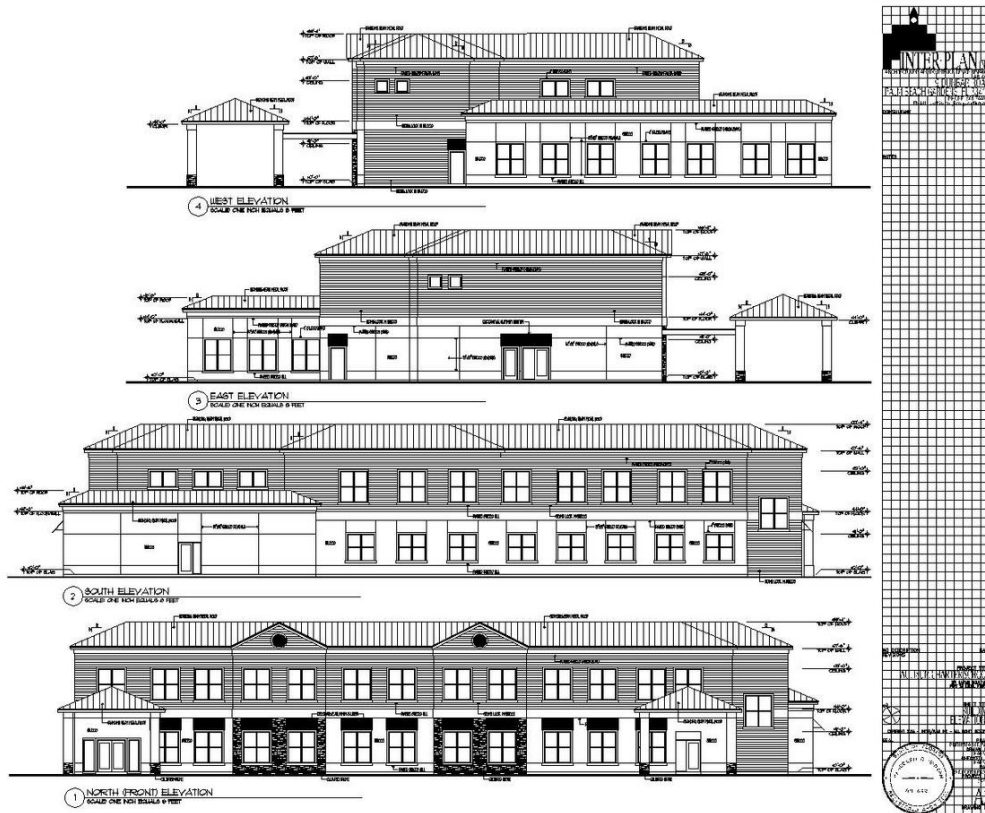
- Port St. Lucie new campus, Treasure Coast School for Autism, August 2026!
- FUNDING!
- The Charter School Program (CSP) Grant is critical for start-up funding for a replication, yet it is not easily attainable.
- If the grant doesn't provide funding in a timely manner to help offset start-up costs, then the opportunity to build new schools for students with autism will not happen, start-up funds are vital to replications.

# Solutions to Successful Replications



- Provide funding to schools wishing to replicate, establishing set criteria.
- Schools demonstrating a successful track record of serving students with exceptional needs should be prioritized for funding support when seeking to replicate their successful models.
- Prioritizing these established schools would streamline the replication process and ensure effective and high-quality educational models.

# Treasure Coast School for Autism: St. Lucie County



# Meet Katie





T H A N K

Y O U



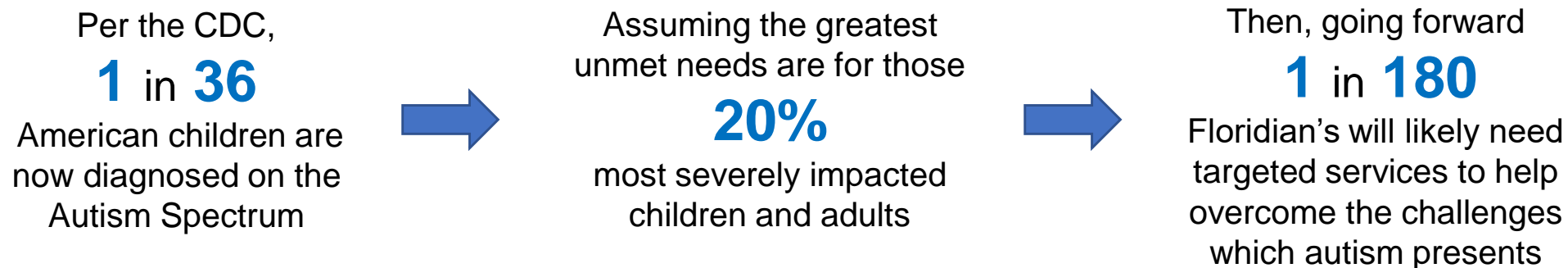
# **Current Autism Challenges in the State of Florida**

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January 2025



# Goal – To Become the Nation’s Leader in the Provision of Comprehensive, High Quality of Autism Services



To become the national leader in the care of **individuals on the more impacted end of the autism spectrum**, these **125,000** Floridians will require the State to focus on three as-yet unmet needs:

## Education

PK – Age 22

## Vocational

9<sup>th</sup> Grade – Adulthood

## Housing

Adulthood



## Education

PK – Age 22



# A Comprehensive Model - South Florida Autism



- In 2009, a group of parents and one of the nation's preeminent autism educators, Dr. Tamara Moodie, created the **South Florida Autism Charter Schools (SFACS)**.
- Now entering its 16<sup>th</sup> year of operation, SFACS embraces a 3-to-1 model in which three adults - 1 teacher and 2 assistants - serve nine children in each classroom. **This is the best school of its kind in the United States.**
- SFACS currently serves 300 students ages 5 through 22 at its **state-of-the-art, 60,000 square foot academic building** in Hialeah. Through its long-standing and positive relationship with Miami Dade County Public Schools, SFACS is now expanding to serve more families in need by opening a new campus in South Dade.
- This year, the organization will also serve over fifty adults in our Center program. The **Center provides life skills and vocational training, fitness and nutrition, and comprehensive therapy services** for this growing population of individuals after they age out of the school program.
- In the near-term, the team will then pivot toward the **Villages, our vehicle charged with creating viable residential solutions.**
- To accomplish this work, South Florida Autism is comprised of **four affiliated 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations** whose mandates are to provide fundraising, grow the school program, deliver needed autism services (particularly to the over 22 population), and create residential solutions.

# Education – A Mission to Promote Equity



- Certain states require that local districts provide students on the spectrum with the highest and best level of service.
- This frequently results in home districts placing and funding Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) students in private schools, sometimes in other states.
- The process of securing these placements is extremely time consuming and frequently requires parents hiring advocates or lawyers to force districts to live up to their obligations to educate these deserving children.
- This is a burden well beyond the means of many working families.
- In the vast majority of states, where districts have no such obligation, parents are faced with the choice of paying tuition to private schools (private school tuition is currently \$40-\$50k per year) or sending their children to district schools which may or may not have quality autism-focused programs.
- Rarely do these pull-out modules or autism clusters (within larger campuses enrolling neurotypical students) serve the needs of the most impacted ASD students, while even the least impacted are frequently subject to social isolation or even bullying.

**In this environment, high performing autism-focused schools are a godsend for parents of ASD students – an option that should be available to all families regardless of their financial condition.**

# **Education – By Targeting Underserved Communities**



- Although the prevalence of autism is uniform across all ethnicities and neighborhoods, quality options are least available for families in lower income, urban communities.
- One precept of the work is to accelerate the growth of autism charter schools positioned to serve those families in which a private school is not a financially viable option.

**These schools are most needed in communities lacking viable alternatives.**

**We will be intentional in seeking out both urban and rural parents, educators and community leaders in an effort to lower their burden of establishing a high-performing, autism-focused school.**



# Education – A Need for ASD Charter Schools

Again, per the CDC:

**1** in **36**

American children  
are diagnosed on  
the Autism Spectrum



Assuming autism charter  
schools target only the  
**20%** most severely  
impacted students



Then **1** in **180**  
children would benefit  
from  
such an autism-focused  
school



Florida's **15** largest districts  
need **38** such schools to serve  
their most impacted students:

	District #	District	Total Enrollment	Required ASD Charters
	00	FLORIDA	2,872,309	53
1.	13	MIAMI-DADE	337,719	6
2.	06	BROWARD	251,408	5
3.	29	HILLSBOROUGH	224,152	4
4.	48	ORANGE	207,695	4
5.	50	PALM BEACH	191,398	4
6.	16	DUVAL	129,094	2
7.	53	POLK	116,031	2
8.	36	LEE	100,064	2
9.	52	PINELLAS	91,021	2
10.	51	PASCO	85,840	2
11.	49	OSCEOLA	74,289	1
12.	05	BREVARD	73,810	1
13.	59	SEMINOLE	65,443	1
14.	64	VOLUSIA	62,742	1
15.	41	MANATEE	52,895	1

**38**

In total, Florida districts need  
**53** such schools



Therefore, any  
concentration of  
**54,000** students  
would greatly benefit  
by the introduction of  
an autism charter  
school solely focused  
on serving highly  
impacted students



Based on the  
comprehensive needs of  
these students, many with  
comorbidities, and the  
commensurate wraparound  
services required by their  
families, these schools  
should never enroll more  
than **300** students



# Education - Governance

## Why Charter?

- Schools require a governance structure that is 100% focused on the specific needs of this segment of the overall population and extremely nimble in the allocation of resources in response to the ever-changing needs of the highly impacted ASD students they serve.
- Schools need to be able to hire and fire. ASD students are tough and many, especially young educators, find that the daily tasks are too difficult.

## Why this in the best interests of traditional Florida districts?

- Highly impacted students are difficult and expensive to educate. This represents an economic loss for most traditional districts who tend to serve these students in suboptimal clusters.
- When confronted with these suboptimal settings, ASD parents tend to be extremely vocal and litigious in their response, particularly if the districts are not living up to their responsibilities as required under the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- If not for autism focused schools, many Florida are either home-schooled or increasingly in nascent private schools lacking the accountability and transparency that adherence to an IEP requires.
- This represents the loss of a 5% of FEFP administrative fee that districts would receive if instead they authorized high performing ASD charter schools.
- In many cases, these nascent ASD schools could rent underutilized district buildings, representing a tangible source of cash flow while allowing the authorizing district to maintain the asset in their district's borrowing base.





# Education - Cost to Launch

## Funding

- These new ASD Charter Schools may or may not receive federal start-up funding under the CSP grant program.
- Even if they do, such federal support unfortunately arrives after it is needed for the specific training that these schools require -- and will be needed to support the Year 1 budget as these schools typically start with less than 80 students.
- Therefore, the following funding would be a tremendous catalyst for the creation of such schools:

Start-up Funding Need by School	Year 0	Year 1	Total	
Principal-in-Training (1 year)	\$ 135,000		\$ 135,000	<i>Includes taxes and benefits</i>
Early Administrative Hires (9 months)	105,000		105,000	<i>Office Manager / LEA / Secretary</i>
Minimum Safety / Security Upgrades				
Vehicular Motorized Gates	45,000			
DashPass - Dismissal & Unification	1,000			
Portable Radios	10,000			
Network & Phones	40,000			
Camera System	99,000			
FF&E and Leasehold Improvements	125,000	40,000	165,000	<i>Cleaning, paint and carpet only</i>
Training with NAACS Affiliate	25,000	5,000	30,000	<i>Nat'l Accelerator of Autism Charter Schools</i>
Incremental Travel to New Site	15,000	5,000	20,000	<i>Gas/mileage for supervision from SFACS</i>
Motor Vehicles (1 Van + 1 Van)	75,000	75,000	150,000	<i>Initial transportation components</i>
	\$ 675,000	\$ 125,000	\$ 800,000	

## Initial Pilot

- Create **6** such schools by the fall of 2026 in the State's two largest districts, Miami-Dade and Broward, at an aggregate appropriation of \$4.8 million.

## Scale

- Create **20** additional such schools by the fall of 2028 throughout Florida at an aggregate appropriation of \$16.0 million.



## Vocational

9<sup>th</sup> Grade –  
Adulthood

# **Vocational Opportunities – We need more, we need better**



- If we can create these new schools serving 15,900 students annually (53 schools x 300 student/school), we have greatly enhanced the lives of individuals from age 5 through age 22.
- The next step in the process of becoming the nation's preeminent provider of Comprehensive, High Quality of Autism Services is to enhance and increase the network of post-grad vocational options.
- There are many companies and nonprofit providers of such services in the State, but unfortunately many cater primarily to higher functioning adults. There are fewer opportunities for individuals on the more impacted end of the spectrum.
- Many of us see the need to create new businesses tailored specifically to the needs of these most-impacted adults. Employment in such enterprises will enable participants to regularly leave their residential settings, interact with their communities and, most importantly, provide these adults with a greater sense of self-worth and achievement.
- Unfortunately, creating these opportunities may be getting harder, not easier. In December, the U.S. Department of Labor announced a new proposed rule that would phase-out certificates issued under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Section 14(c) permits the payment of special wages to individuals with disabilities who are unable to work as productively as a non-disabled person performing the same task.
- While this is appropriate for all higher-functioning adults with autism, it may mean that new vocational options for individuals with lesser skills will become less economically feasible, resulting in the creation of fewer jobs and opportunities.

# **Vocational Opportunities – We need more, we need better**



- Initial thoughts on accelerating the growth and/or expansion of vocational opportunities for adults on the more impacted end of the spectrum:
  - Additional financial support for long-standing organizations currently doing this work.
  - Tax incentives for landlords who lease to such organizations.
  - One-time capex appropriations for such organizations to purchase the equipment and technology required to establish or expand their underlying businesses.
  - Establishing mechanisms such that individuals could get adequately compensated for the work they are able to do, with such funds being used to offset their living and housing expenses, while still allowing such individual to maintain their eligibility under programs such as the waiver and SSI.



**Housing**

Adulthood





## **Housing Opportunities – We need to be creative**

- If our adults have received the highest and best education available and we've created new and innovative vocational opportunities to meet their specific abilities, then we also need to develop thousands of units of accessible housing for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- We all know that these individuals need proper environments with 24/7 supervision. They also need additional on-site functional support, including those related to security, transportation, food service, and medical personnel.
- We also know that current federal policy mandates group homes of 4-6 adults, a model that does not provide any of the additional support functions listed above, let alone providing amenity-filled settings that are actually designed for these adults.
- Bottom line, we need the ability to create villages to serve those adults most affected by autism and we need dedicated funding streams, divorced from the current bureaucratic constraints to make these settings financially viable for the long-term.
- By the way, wealthy families always have the option of pursuing private settings -- in which the annual cost is between \$50,000 and \$60,000 per year. If these are invariably designed as larger communities -- and more akin to retirement communities or better ALFs...then why are families with lesser means always be consigned to suboptimal group homes, in which their high-needs adult children are subject to low-needs care?

# Vocational Opportunities – We need to be creative



- Initial thoughts on accelerating the growth of residential settings for adults on the more impacted end of the spectrum:
  - While no one wants the insidious institutional settings of days gone by, we must convince the Feds (and ourselves) to support *village* settings in which individuals have access to the services that only larger scale models can provide.
  - To address the juxtaposition of the sizable and growing need for such multi-adult residential solutions and the harsh reality of the excessive cost of land and construction in Florida, perhaps we could pursue non-traditional adaptive reuse opportunities.
  - Many large districts in the State have publicly announced their intention to close underutilized school buildings due to private, charter and home school competition magnified by downward shifting demographics.
  - Can we repurpose some of these campuses, already imbedded within their communities, and replete with parking, fencing, security, technology, food service, etc. toward the creation of long-term housing solutions for the most highly-impacted adults on the spectrum?
  - As a catalyst, could the legislature incentivize districts, and in some cases the local public housing authorities, to partner to do this work?

Thank you for your consideration.

Glenn Pierce

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[gpierce@autismcharterschools.org](mailto:gpierce@autismcharterschools.org)

(954) 892-0687

Proud parent of 22-year-old son on the more impacted end of the autism spectrum.

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## Appendix



### Additional Information About South Florida Autism Charter Schools and the National Accelerator of Autism Charter Schools





## SFACS Mission and Vision

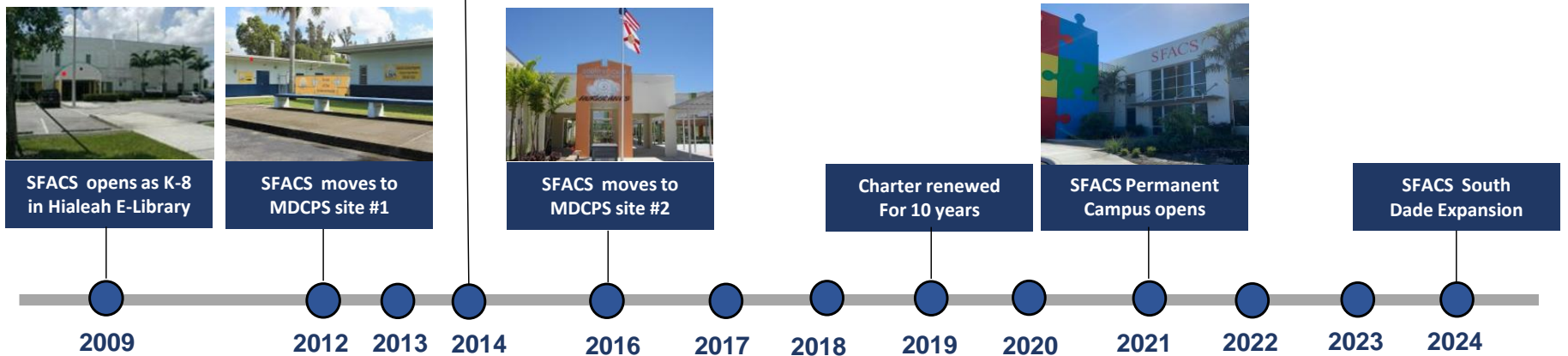
1. Provide the highest quality of academic and behavioral care available for *all* families, not just those living in communities with the financial means to pursue private settings.
2. Serve those students with the *most* complex challenges --those who were heretofore the least served in existing district, private and home school environments.
3. Do so at scale. Serve as many students as possible, while maintaining operational integrity.
4. Create a model that was self-sustainable from Day 1 and not reliant on philanthropy to cover day-to-day expenses.
5. Use the school as a platform to provide resources and training for the larger autism community.
6. Create a state-of-the-art, yet economically responsible and replicable model campus for the education of students on the autism spectrum.
7. Work *with* districts -- not against them and embrace coalitions with advocacy groups, other charter schools and colleges and university to develop and continuously refine a **public-private partnership model that could be successfully replicated regionally, then nationally.**

# SFACS Timeline



## Students

K-22	81	143	Initial 12 <sup>th</sup> grade Graduating Class	176	239	266	284	285	300+
22+	-	-		5	10	17	25	35	50+



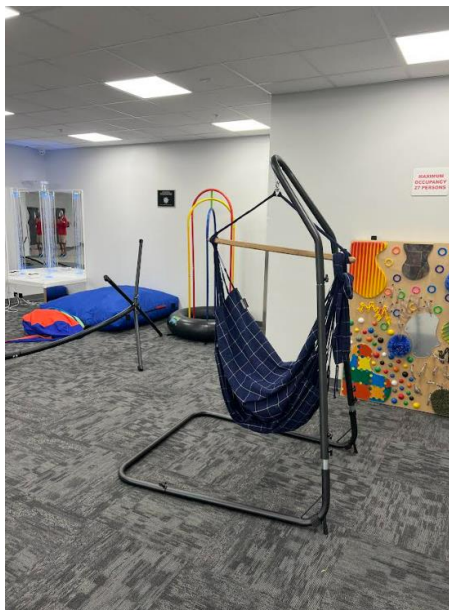
Term of Current Charter Contract: 7/1/19 thru 6/30/29

SFACS maintains the distinction of being the only charter school that is accretive to the District's financials. One third of our current students live in Broward County, while an estimated quarter of our students would choose to be home-schooled if not for SFACS. As a result, the incremental administrative fee that MDCPS garners as our authorizer is enhancing rather than cannibalizing in its financial impact on the District.

In June 2024, SFACS celebrated 15 school years of serving the County's families most impacted by autism.



## SFACS Hialeah Campus



# **The National Accelerator of Autism Charter Schools (NAACS)**



## **Three Strategic Initiatives**

### **School Leadership**

- The Accelerator will serve future school leaders which approach it for help, grow our own and proactively seek talent from traditional school districts.
- We know that the special education world is filled with effective leaders who are tremendously frustrated by the institutional barriers in large districts which prevent them from employing best practices in teaching developmentally challenged students.

### **Board Leadership**

- We will encourage boards and/or leaders to assemble an ideal mix of parents, professionals and local funders.
- The professional component will target an optimal mix of finance, law, education and medical experience.

### **Geographic Targets**

- Initially, NAACS will focus on states in which per pupil funding under statute is adequate to produce exceptional results. Later we will pursue states in which advocacy can yield higher per pupil revenue based on demonstrated need or state in which there is an opportunity to obtain required dedicated appropriations.
- We will look to partner with strong state charter school associations.
- We will highly encourage existing operators to replicate.
- We will convene local funders to present the need and opportunity.



# NAACS Areas of Support

## Translate into Seven Tactical Areas of Support

There are seven areas in which NAACS will accelerate the growth of high performing charter schools serving students and families on the autism spectrum.

- Analysis & Communications
- Advocacy
- Executive Director / Board Training
- Accelerator Charter School Toolbox
- Teacher Training / Certification
- Parent Training
- School Accreditation

## Led by an Active Board with Strong Florida Experience

### Board Members

Co-Chair **Glenn Pierce** – SFACS Bd. Chair (Weston)

Co-Chair **Diana Diaz-Harrison M.Ed.** – AZACS ED (Phoenix)

Vice Chair **Dr. Tamara Moodie** – SFACS ED (Miramar)

Secretary **Joe Hoffer** – TX CS Lawyer & Advocate (San Antonio)

Treasurer **Richard Moreno** – Building Hope (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)

**John Snider** – Retired Head of Charter Practice RBC Capital (Phoenix)

**Laura Fiemann** – Charter School Development Corp (Phoenix)

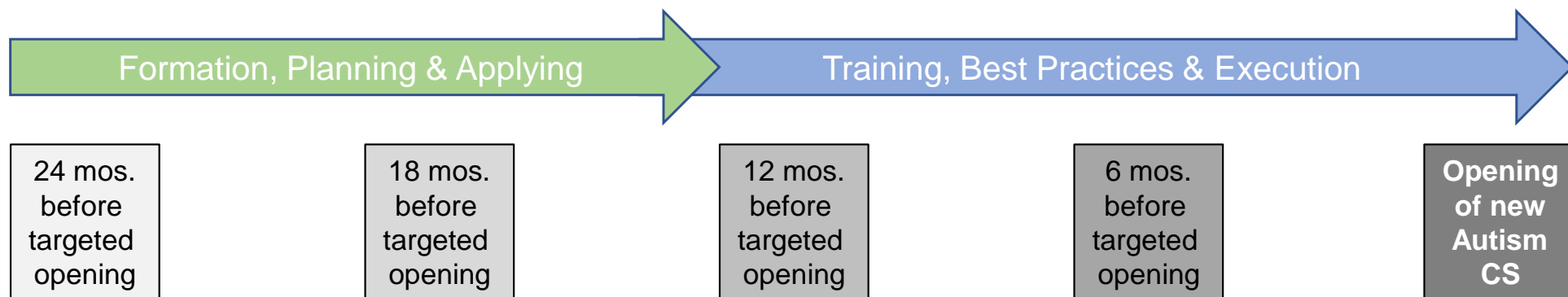
*Current board members have significant experienced in CS applications, CS ops, Technology, Curriculum, ABA, CS funding, budgeting, accounting, compliance, legal and governance.*





# NAACS - Areas of Support

## Executive Director & Board Training



## Board Leadership

**September** – School Design & Governance

**November** - Application

**February** – Facilities

**April** – Leadership Hiring

## School Leadership

**July** – Hiring and School Opening

**November** – IEPs and Compliance

**February** – Enrollment & Staffing

**April** – Testing & Reporting



\* After visits to AZACS or SFACS, founding Board Members will be trained both in their communities and remotely.

\* School Leaders will spend **one week during each quarter prior to opening** at either the AZACS or SFACS school campuses.



# Current NAACS Fellows

## Cohort I

- Thrive Center for Success. Magnolia (Houston), TX (2022)
- Arizona Autism Charter School – West Valley, Peoria (Phoenix), AZ (2002)
- Arizona Autism Charter School - Tucson, AZ (2023)
- Academy for Collaborative Education (ACE), Monroe, LA (2024)
- **South Florida Autism Charter Autism - South Dade, FL (2024)**
- Discovery Charter Schools, Las Vegas, NV (August 2025)
- **The Villages Charter Schools, FL (Jan 2025)**

## Cohort II

- **Autism Collier, Naples, FL (2025)**
- AIM Star Learning, Maple Valley (Seattle), WA (2025)
- xSTREAM Minds Academy, Birmingham, AL (2025)
- Jennifer Hills / Colorado League of Charters, Colorado Springs, CO (2025)
- Prospect Academy of Denver, CO (2025)
- **South Florida Autism Charter Autism – Dade & Broward Expansion (2025-2026)**
- Plus, initial prospects in Alabama, **Florida (Lee, Leon, Putnam, Volusia)**, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania

1/14/2025  
Meeting Date  
Education Prek-12  
Committee

The Florida Senate  
**APPEARANCE RECORD**

Deliver both copies of this form to  
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

Presentations on Supports  
for families + students with  
Bill Number or Topic Autism

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name Ann-Marie Orlando Phone 352-215-2747

Address 1725 SW 86th Terrace Email aorlando@ufl.edu  
Street

Gainesville FL 32607  
City State Zip

**Reset Form**

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☒ Information **OR** Waive Speaking: ☐ In Support ☐ Against

**PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:**

☒ I am appearing without  
compensation or sponsorship.

☐ I am a registered lobbyist,  
representing:

☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received  
something of value for my appearance  
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),  
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

1/14/2025

Meeting Date

Education PreK-12

Committee

The Florida Senate

# APPEARANCE RECORD

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Presentations on Supports  
for families and Students  
with Autism

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name Kerri Peters

Phone 940 391 9411

Address 2260 NW 47th St.

Email kberard@ufl.edu

Street

Gainesville FL

32605

City

State

Zip

Reset Form

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate

**APPEARANCE RECORD**

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Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Meeting Date

Committee

Name

Phone

Address

Email

Street

City

State

Zip

Speaking:

☐ For

☐ Against

☒ Information

**OR**

Waive Speaking:

☐ In Support

☐ Against

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S-001 (08/10/2021)



The Florida Senate

**APPEARANCE RECORD**

Deliver both copies of this form to  
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

JAN 14, 2025  
Meeting Date

SENATE KREED  
Committee

Name DR. PEGGY AUNT Phone 850-856-2623

Address 325 W. GARDNER ST Email AMELIA.JOHNSON@FLSENATE.GOV  
Street

TAUHANASSUL FL 32397  
City State Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☒ Information **OR** Waive Speaking: ☐ In Support ☐ Against

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate  
**APPEARANCE RECORD**

Deliver both copies of this form to  
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

JAN 14, 2025  
Meeting Date

Education  
Committee

Autism  
Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name Ann Eisenberg Phone 561-533-9917

Address 8480 LANANA Road Email AnnLe@PBSFA.org  
Street

LAKE WORTH FL 33467  
City State Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☒ Information **OR** Waive Speaking: ☐ In Support ☐ Against

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate

APPEARANCE RECORD

1/14/25

Meeting Date

SENATE EDUCATION

Committee

Deliver both copies of this form to  
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

GLENN PIERCE

Phone

954 892 0687

Address

2534 ROYAL PALM WAY

Street

Email

glenn.pierce2534@gmail.com

WESTON

City

FL

State

33327

Zip

Speaking:

☐

For

☐

Against

☐

Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☐

In Support

☐

Against

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate

**APPEARANCE RECORD**

Deliver both copies of this form to  
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

11/14/24

Meeting Date

Autism

Bill Number or Topic

Education

Committee

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

Allison Ballin

Phone

(561) 533 9917 - (561) 306757

Address

11576 Ponywalk Trail

Email

allisonballin.org

Street

Boynton Beach, FL

State

33473

Zip

Speaking:

☐

For

☐

Against

☒

Information

**OR**

Waive Speaking:

☐

In Support

☐

Against

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate

**APPEARANCE RECORD**

Deliver both copies of this form to  
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Meeting Date

Committee

1/14/2024  
Education PreK-12

Name

Phone

Jonathan Lehmann

046.765.9281

Address

Email

475 Brickell Ave Apt 4007  
Street  
Miami FL 33131  
City State Zip

jlehmann@earlifecdx.com

Speaking:



For



Against



Information

**OR**

Waive Speaking:



In Support



Against

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S-001 (08/10/2021)



# CourtSmart Tag Report

**Room:** KB 412

**Case No.:** -

**Type:**

**Caption:** Senate Education Pre K-12

**Judge:**

**Started:** 1/14/2025 11:01:29 AM

**Ends:** 1/14/2025 1:00:52 PM

**Length:** 01:59:24

**11:04:21 AM** Chair Simon brings meeting to order  
11:05:33 AM Roll call Quorum present  
11:07:43 AM Chair opening remarks  
11:07:55 AM Tab 1 Dr. Ann Marie, UFAusitm of Florida of Orlando  
11:15:05 AM Dr. Kerri Peters, AD UP Center for Autism  
11:17:54 AM Senator Gaetz ask questions series of question  
11:20:18 AM Dr. Ann Marie responds  
11:27:22 AM Senator Gaetz follow up question  
11:32:45 AM Dr. Marie responds  
11:35:00 AM Senator Davis for a series of questions  
11:43:34 AM Dr. Ann Marie responds  
11:56:08 AM Dr. Peggy Aune, DOE Strategic Improvement in Schools  
11:58:14 AM Chair Simon asks question  
12:00:15 PM Dr. Peggy Aune responds  
12:01:08 PM Dr. Danita Duhart, DOE Strategic Improvement in Schools  
12:15:56 PM Ann Eisenberg, Palm Beach School for Autism  
12:16:19 PM Senator Collins ask questions  
12:16:45 PM Dr. Eisenberg responds  
12:17:57 PM Allison, Ballin, Palm Beach School for Autism  
12:18:44 PM Senator Davis asks question  
12:25:16 PM Dr. Ballin responds  
12:26:32 PM Senator Berman asks series of question  
12:27:11 PM Dr. Eisenberg responds  
12:30:33 PM Senator Davis asks series of question  
12:32:21 PM Dri. Eisenberg responds  
12:35:84 PM Glenn Pierce South Florida Autism Charter School  
12:58:18 PM Senator Collins makes remarks  
12:58:55 PM Jonathan Lehman, VP Early Tech Niagnostic  
01:00:52:PM Senator Calatyud moves we adjours



# Senate Committee on PreK-12 Education

Peggy Aune, Ed.D., Vice Chancellor for Strategic Improvement

January 14, 2025



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF  
**EDUCATION**  
fldoe.org

[www.FLDOE.org](http://www.FLDOE.org)



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# Florida Diagnostic Learning Resources System (FDLRS)



**PURPOSE:** Assist in the provision of medical, physiological, psychological, and educational testing and other services designed to evaluate and diagnose exceptionalities, to make referrals for necessary instruction and services, and to facilitate the provision of instruction and services to exceptional students.

## FDLRS NETWORK

**FDLRS  
Administration**

**(18) FDLRS  
Associate  
Centers**

**(6) FDLRS  
Multidisciplinary  
Centers**

**(2) FDLRS  
Specialized  
Centers**

# FDLRS Administration and Associate Centers

- There are **four central functions** of each FDLRS Associate Center:
  - Child find;
  - Parent services;
  - Human resource development;
  - Technology.

FDLRS collaborates with districts, support personnel, administrators and students with disabilities to ensure these four functions are carried out.





# FDLRS Administration and AC Services

## Child Find

FDLRS Child Find, in coordination with the school districts, locates children who are potentially eligible for services under the IDEA and provides diagnostic screening, placement, training and support.

## Family Services

FDLRS Parent and Family Services Specialists assist in the development of family-friendly programs, training and support services for children with disabilities. FDLRS facilitates the partnership between schools and parents to support student achievement.

## Resource Development

FDLRS resources development is available in the areas of behavior management, instructional strategies, differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, explicit instruction, secondary transition and collaborative teaching.

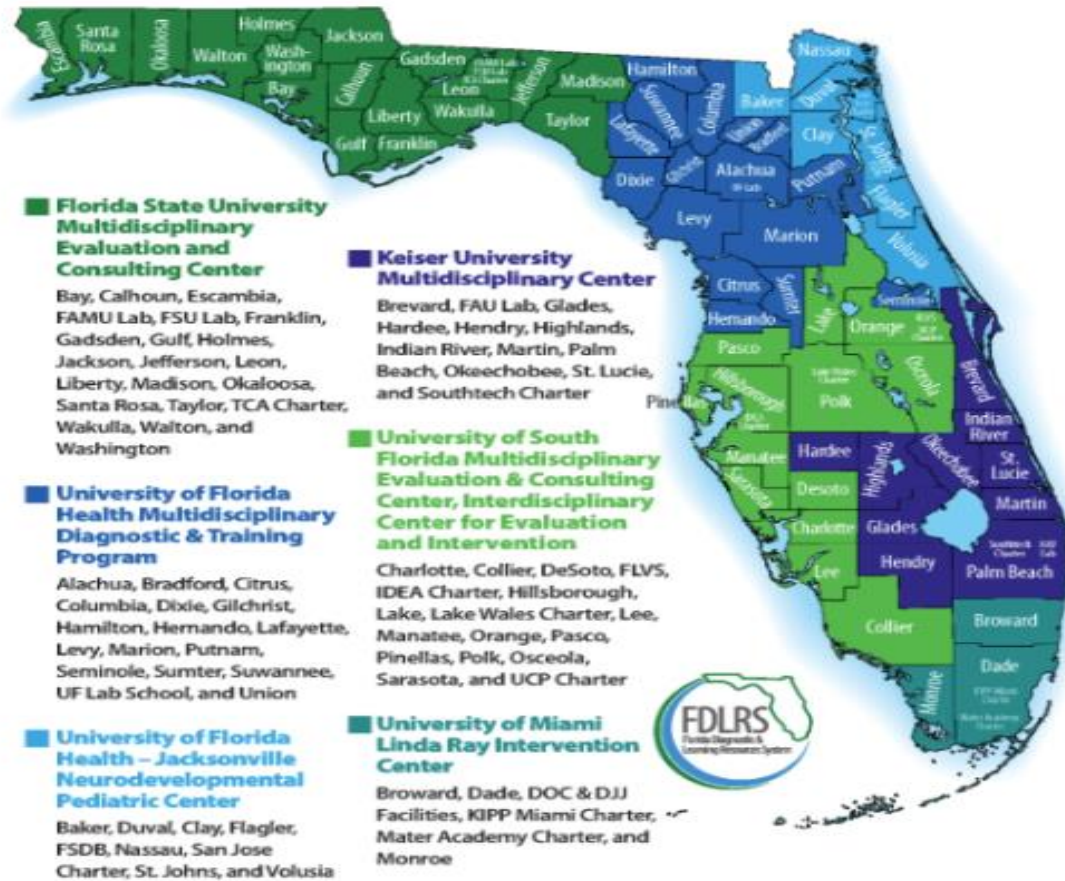
## Technology

FDLRS technology support personnel provide services in multiple areas including assistive technology, instructional technology, universal design for learning, accessible educational materials and virtual instruction.





# FDLRS Multidisciplinary Centers (MDC)



## FDLRS MDC Services

School-based, individual, and group health services with students.

Psychological assessment of children and adolescents.

Collaboration with appropriate community-based agencies and resources.

Specialized evaluations of children suspected of having an autism spectrum disorder or an attention disorder.

Academic and behavioral consultations.

Specialized evaluations for bilingual children.

Participation in school-based intervention teams.

Audiological, speech, and language evaluations.



## FDLRS Specialized Centers

- **Florida Instructional Materials Center for the Visually Impaired (FIMC-VI)**
  - Provides accessible materials, hosts events, and supports the visually impaired
- **Resource Materials and Technology Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (RMTC-DHH)**
  - Focuses on research, curriculum, and interventions for students with hearing impairments.



## FDLRS Outcomes and Achievements

Outcomes and Achievements	FDLRS Administration and AC
Child Find Screenings	25,569
Professional Learning Events	3,686

Outcomes and Achievements	FDLRS Specialized Centers
Students Served	8,115
Professional Learning Events	120

Outcomes and Achievements	FDLRS MDC
Students Served	2,025
Professional Learning Events	1,448





**[www.FLDOE.org](http://www.FLDOE.org)**

For Additional Questions:

Amelia Johnson  
Deputy Chief of Staff  
[Amelia.Johnson@fldoe.org](mailto:Amelia.Johnson@fldoe.org)



# THE FLORIDA SENATE

Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

## COMMITTEES:

Appropriations Committee on Pre-K - 12 Education,  
Vice Chair  
Education Postsecondary  
Education Pre-K - 12  
Fiscal Policy  
Judiciary  
Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and  
Domestic Security  
Rules

**SENATOR GERALDINE F. "GERI"  
THOMPSON**  
15th District

January 15, 2025

The Honorable Chair Simon  
Chairman  
404 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Chair Simon,

I am writing to formally request a leave of absence due to a medical condition from the Committee on Education Pre-K-12 during the interim committee meetings scheduled from January 13 through February 21, 2025. While I regret being unable to actively participate in Senate proceedings during this period, this temporary leave is essential to enable me to return to my duties fully restored.

I greatly appreciate your understanding and support during this time. If additional documentation or details are needed, please let me know.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Geraldine F. Thompson".

Senator Geraldine F. Thompson  
FL Senate District 15

Cc: Matthew Bouck, Staff Director  
Alexander Brick, Deputy Staff Director  
Secret Williams, Administrative Assistant  
Maggie Gerson, Staff Director

## REPLY TO:

- ☐ 511 W. South Street, Suite 205, Orlando, Florida 32805 (407) 245-0194
- ☐ 205 Senate Building, 404 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100 (850) 487-5015

Senate's Website: [www.flsenate.gov](http://www.flsenate.gov)

**BEN ALBRITTON**  
President of the Senate

**JASON BRODEUR**  
President Pro Tempore