



# Deconstructing the Puzzle: Autism in Portland Public Schools



Leah Kenney's Senior Capstone Spring 2016 ENVS 400

**“The autistic is only himself.”- Hans Asperger**

Research Interviews Observation Suggested Curriculum v

1. What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and how do people with ASD learn differently than neurotypical people?
2. How have Portland Public Schools structured their special education system in order to accommodate people with ASD?
3. What is a curriculum that can be implemented in Portland Public School Systems that is inclusive to people with ASD?

## Top Stories

### 1. Standardizing Students



**Does standardization of curriculum help or hinder special education?**

The Common Core is a topic that has been increasingly controversial, especially in the current political climate. Child development teachers say that the Common Core standards are completely developmentally inappropriate (Porter, 2011). That being said, it is important to remember that although every student learns differently, every student should also be given a chance to be challenged. So, is it better for there to be a common curriculum that ignores individuality in each student and provides “equal opportunity” or is it better to spend more time and more money to help students that need it? This question is not easy to answer, but in my research I found that some form of standardization is necessary and if correctly implemented with proper funding, would be the ideal.

### 2. Deconstructing The Puzzle

**How do people with autism relate to their surrounding environment?**

Autism is a relatively new medical phenomenon, although perhaps not as recent as the current vaccination panic suggests. The term “autism” was coined in 1912 with the first person ever diagnosed with autism at a mere 81 years old. Though the data we have is under constant scrutiny for its accuracy, methodology, and usefulness, the Centers for Disease Control reports that the current rate of autism diagnosis in the United States is 1 in 68. This is a continuation of a trend identified by the Environmental Protection Agency that started between 1988 and 1992, when the worldwide diagnosis of autism spiked from 6 in 10,000 kids to 24 in 10,000. People with autism often face sensory, movement, communication, socialization and learning differences.

### 3. Inside the Classroom



**How are Portland Public Schools accommodating people with ASDs?**

Academically, many people with ASD do not have any kind of deficits, but there are social, communication, learning, and sensory differences that can make general education classrooms non-ideal for students with ASD. In theory, an integrated and inclusive classrooms would be ideal for students with ASD as long as curriculum and Individual Evaluation Programs (IEPs) are being implemented. Having typical social interactions along with teachers altering curricula based on need would facilitate a good learning environment based off of studies and research done on the inclusive classroom (LeBlanc, 2011). Portland specifically has a plan to integrate special education classrooms into neurotypical ones. That being said, inclusivity in classrooms requires money that Portland public schools do not have.

### 4. Adapted Curriculum

**What can we do better?**

1. Scientific approach to education
2. Through their spontaneous activity, children labor to ‘make themselves into men’ (Montessori, 1964)
3. Mental development, similar to physical growth, is an example of natural, internally regulated force.
4. Liberty is the imperative ingredient that enables education to assist the ‘unfolding of a child’s life’ (Montessori, 1964)
5. Order, most especially within the child, but also in the child’s environment, is prerequisite to the child becoming an independent, autonomous, and rational individual.

## References

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