

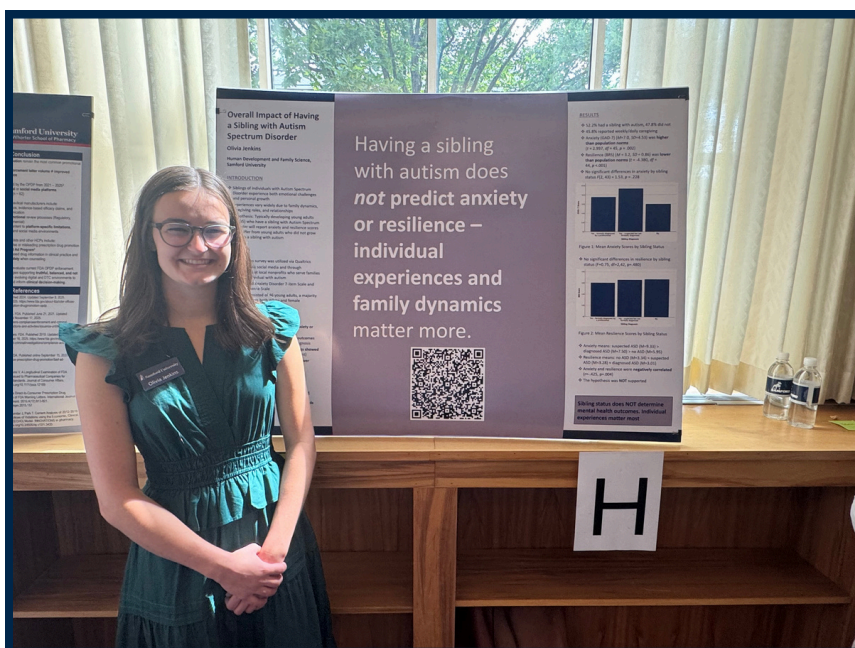
2026 Samford Student Research Colloquia Abstracts

Overall Impact of Having a Sibling with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Student: Olivia Jenkins

Mentors: Kayla Wenth, Nicole Howell, Celeste Hill

Abstract: This study explored how having a sibling with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) relates to anxiety and resilience in typically developing young adults. The current study examined whether young adults with a sibling with ASD differ in anxiety and resilience compared to those without. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 46 participants between the ages of 18 and 35. Anxiety was measured using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7), and resilience was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). Participants were categorized into three groups based on sibling status: no sibling with ASD, a sibling formally diagnosed with ASD, or a sibling suspected of having ASD. One-way ANOVAs were used to compare group differences. The results showed no significant differences in anxiety or resilience between the groups. However, overall anxiety levels in the sample were higher, and resilience levels were lower, than general population norms. A significant negative relationship between anxiety and resilience was also found, suggesting that individuals with higher resilience tend to report lower anxiety. The findings suggest that simply having a sibling with ASD does not independently determine mental health outcomes. Instead, individual experiences and family factors may play a larger role, highlighting the complexity of the sibling experience.

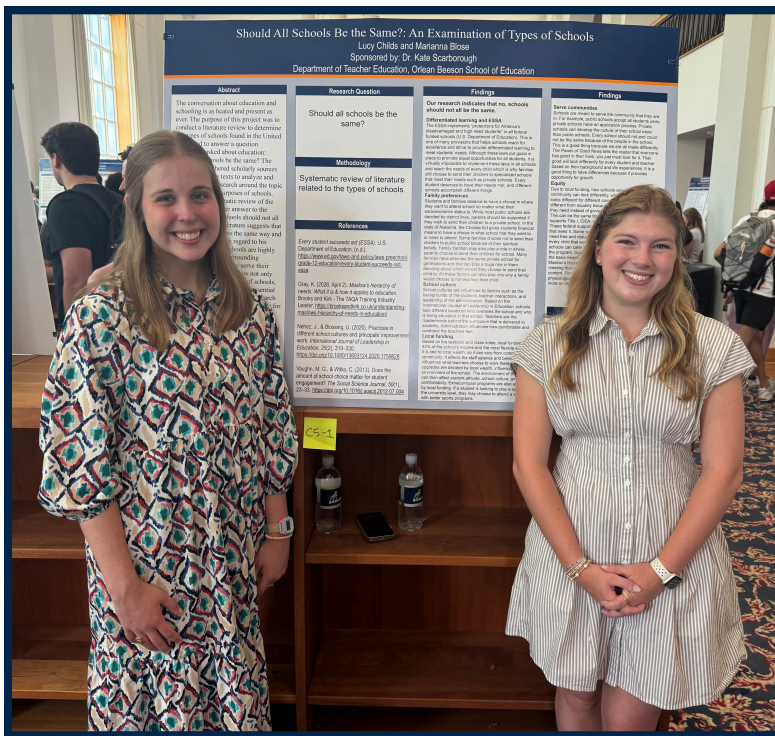


Should All Schools Be the Same? An Examination of Types of Schools

Students: Lucy Childs, Marianna Blöse

Mentor: Kate Scarborough

Abstract: The conversation about education and schooling is as heated and present as ever. The purpose of this project was to conduct a literature review to determine the types of schools found in the United States and to answer a question commonly asked about education: Should all schools be the same? The researchers gathered scholarly sources including course texts to analyze and investigate the research around the topic of the types and purposes of schools. Following a systematic review of the related literature, the answer to the question was no, schools should not all be the same. The literature suggests that not every child learns the same way and has different needs in regard to his education. Further, schools are highly influenced by their surrounding community and need to serve their families. The findings show not only purposes of different types of schools, but also why each of them is essential to the education system. This research is important to the field of education for a number of reasons. First, parents and guardians need to be aware of their options when choosing a school to send their children to. Second, every child deserves an education that fits individual needs. Finally, clarity on topics such as the purpose of schools affects policy decisions at local, state, and federal levels.



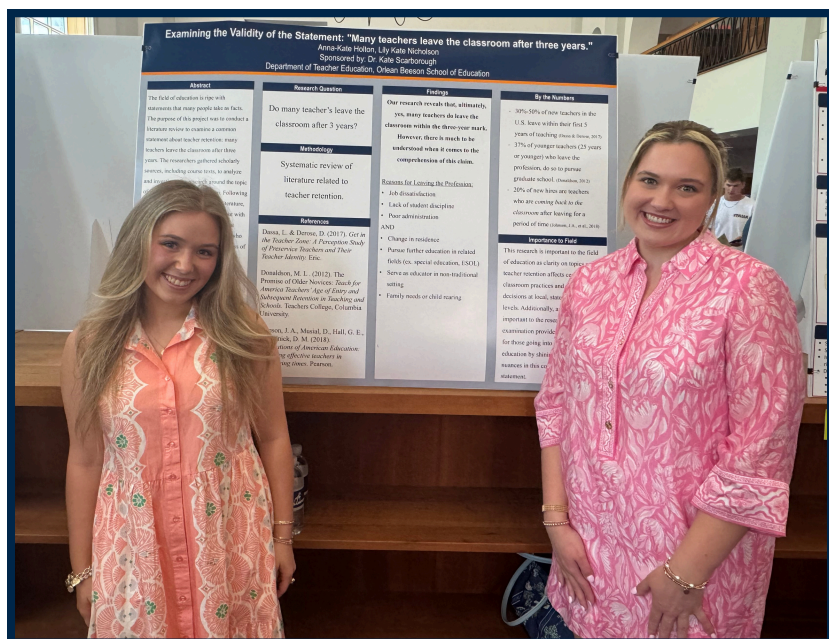
Examining the Validity of the Statement: "Many teachers leave the classroom after three years."

Students: Anna-Kate Holton, Lily Kate Nicholson

Mentor: Kate Scarborough

Abstract: The field of education is ripe with statements that many people take as facts. The purpose of this project was to conduct a literature review to examine a common statement about teacher retention: many teachers leave the classroom after three years. The researchers gathered scholarly sources including course

texts to analyze and investigate the research around the topic of teachers leaving the classroom. Following a systematic review of the related literature, the answer to the question was yes, but with stipulations. The literature suggests that while there is a percentage of teachers who leave the traditional classroom due to loss of love for the profession or frustration with the work environment, there are copious amounts of other reasons as to why. These causes range from teachers seeking to further their education in specialty areas such as special education or English as a second language, serving as educators in non-profits, museum, or other non-traditional education settings, or even raising families. Further, the statement also does not consider the statistics on the number of teachers that return to the classroom after an absence. This research is important to the field of education as clarity on topics such as teacher retention affects classroom practices and policy decisions at local, state, and federal levels. Additionally, and perhaps most important to the researchers, this examination provides encouragement for those going into the field of education by shining a light on the nuances in this commonly believed statement.



Is Kindergarten the New First Grade? A Review of Literature

Students: Gracie Hopkins, Lauren Parker

Mentor: Kate Scarborough

Abstract: The field of education is ripe with statements that many people take as facts. The purpose of this project was to conduct a literature review to answer a question commonly asked about education: "Is kindergarten the new first grade? The researchers gathered scholarly sources including course texts to analyze and investigate the research around the topic of school curriculum. Following a systematic review of the related literature, the answer to the question was yes. The literature suggests that over time there has been an increased focus on school accountability, school performance indicators, duration of school year, and expectations of families, resulting in kindergarten becoming the new first grade. Further, there has been a notable decrease in play experiences in kindergarten classrooms even though play is critical to early childhood development. This research is important to the field of education as clarity on topics such as grade level expectations affects classroom practice and policy decisions at local, state, and federal levels.

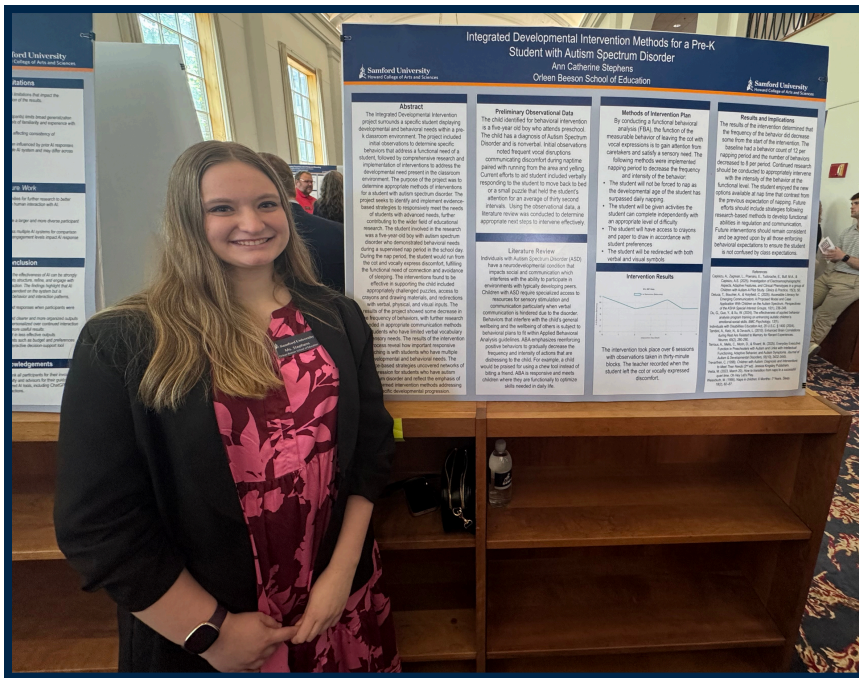


Integrated Developmental Intervention Methods for a Pre-K Student with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Student: Ann Catherine Stephens

Mentor: Hannah Kennedy

Abstract: The Integrated Developmental Intervention project surrounds a specific student displaying developmental and behavioral needs within a pre-k classroom environment. The project included initial observations to determine specific behaviors that address a functional need of a student, followed by comprehensive research and implementation of interventions to address the developmental need present in the classroom environment. The purpose of the project was to determine appropriate methods of interventions for a student with autism spectrum disorder. The project seeks to identify and implement evidence-based strategies to responsively meet the needs of students with advanced needs, further contributing to the wider field of educational research. The student involved in the research was a five-year-old boy with autism spectrum disorder who demonstrated behavioral needs during a supervised nap period in the school day. During the nap period, the student would run from the cot and vocally express discomfort, fulfilling the functional need of connection and avoidance of sleeping. The interventions found to be effective in supporting the child included appropriately challenged puzzles, access to crayons and drawing materials, and redirections with verbal, physical, and visual inputs. The results of the project showed some decrease in the frequency of behaviors, with further research needed in appropriate communication methods for students who have limited verbal vocabulary and sensory needs. The results of the intervention process reveal how important responsive teaching is with students who have multiple developmental and behavioral needs. The evidence-based strategies uncovered networks of expression for students who have autism spectrum disorder, and reflect the emphasis of data-informed intervention methods addressing specific developmental progression.



The Effectiveness of Behavioral Intervention Strategies to Improve Academic Performance for Students with Special Needs

Student: Kinley Hall

Mentor: Hannah Kennedy

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to implement strategies collected from research with a student in a special education classroom, measure the effectiveness of each strategy, and collect information about other variables that affect the implementation and strategies themselves. This study specifically focused on improving a student's exhibited negative behaviors to improve their academic performance. This study is important to the field of special education because of the benefit from the data received from implementing these strategies. The information gathered gives people who will implement these strategies across multiple disciplines insight into the effectiveness, implications, and the resources needed to implement these strategies, and other strategies to boost student behavior and performance. To gather data on the strategies and student, I conducted a literature review regarding best practices of strategies for students with disabilities to support positive behavior and academic performance. In addition to the literature review, I collected observational data on the student prior to the implementation, during the implementation, and after the implementation. Although the research is limited to data on one student, the data gathered from this research study gains insight into the process of implementing said strategies, the implications, and the benefits that can be applied for a broader group of students and implementers across educational domains.

