

# The impact of implementation support on the use of a social engagement intervention for children with autism in public schools

Jill Locke, Wendy Shih, Christina D Kang-Yi, Julie Caramanico, Travis Shingledecker, Jordan Gibson, Lindsay Frederick and David S Mandell

Children with autism often face challenges with social skills such as low levels of engagement with peers and experiencing few social connections with others. There are several practices (supported by scientific evidence) that have been shown to improve social skills, but ensuring the proper use of these practices in schools (referred to as ‘implementation’) can be a challenge. This study compared two implementation strategies to improve the use of a social engagement intervention, Remaking Recess, for children with autism in public schools. The first involved *identifying and preparing* individuals who support and execute an implementation in schools. The second involved *tailoring strategies* to address barriers and utilize facilitators that were previously identified (e.g., ensuring adequate training and providing sufficient support for school staff). Thirty-one children with autism in grades K – 5<sup>th</sup> grade (ages 5 to 12 years) and 28 school personnel were randomly assigned into two different groups: (1) training in Remaking Recess; or (2) training in Remaking Recess with implementation support, receiving three additional consultation and implementation support sessions with school administrators over six weeks. Study analyses compared implementation fidelity (defined as use of Remaking Recess as it was designed) and social outcomes (peer engagement, social network inclusion, and friendship nominations) between the two study groups (i.e., those who had training with or without additional support). Results showed that in both groups, fidelity (i.e., whether Remaking Recess was implemented as it was designed) improved after training but remained low. Children in the Remaking Recess with implementation support group had significantly higher inclusion in peer social networks and received more friendship nominations than children in the Remaking Recess only group. Children in both groups experienced decreased solitary engagement and increased peer engagement. Study results suggest that implementation supports may be associated with improved child outcomes.