

ASSERT Finds Success in Expansion

Sue Reeves

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An ASSERT student communicates with her teacher via an iPad app.

The Autism Support Services: Education, Research, and Training (ASSERT) program at Utah State University's Center for Persons with Disabilities has added an additional afternoon session to the program and administrators have so far been pleased with its success. The new session was the result of increased funding received from the state of Utah.

"Since our current classroom space was not large enough to accommodate four additional students, we decided to open up an afternoon session instead," said Dr. Thomas Higbee, the director of ASSERT.

Higbee said that preparations for the expansion took place throughout the summer, some of which included training additional staff and rearranging the classroom to make more effective use of the space.

Lyndsay Nix, the ASSERT program coordinator, said that even though it takes more "coordinating," having two sessions has allowed them to hire more staff because they are now more flexible with schedules.

"Adding an afternoon session has also facilitated our research by giving us additional access to students to run our research projects," Higbee said. "It has also given us more flexibility when scheduling observations or training

sessions as we can schedule them in either the morning or the afternoon."

Nix said that it is fun to have students there all day, but it definitely affects time management for staff meetings and additional work that has to take place after the students have left.

"While it has certainly increased the amount of administrative time that is required to manage the program," Higbee said, "the ability to serve more families has been worth it."

Higbee said that two more families will be added to the program in January, bringing the total to 14 families.

"All in all, while difficult, the expansion has been a very positive thing for ASSERT," Higbee said. "We have been able to help more families of children with autism, which is the most important thing."