When it comes to teaching students on the autism spectrum, a recent survey of future teachers in eight states found most could be better prepared. The preservice teachers were in their third or fourth year. Their average score on the autism knowledge scale was a D.

That's significant, since the odds are teachers will have a child with autism in their classroom at least once in their careers. According to Autism Speaks, autism is one of the fastest-growing developmental disorders in the United States, affecting 1 in 68 children.

The URLEND program brings together graduate students and professionals across many educational and health fields. Multi-state, multi-disciplinary leaders are advised by families who experience disability in their everyday lives. End-of-year projects are one way they learn to approach their professions with an interdisciplinary mindset. This unique experience is available to trainees in Utah, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and North Dakota.

The autism inclusion leadership project team included Dr. Gwen Mitchell, Faculty Advisor, (University of Idaho); Nikki Baldwin, Education-Early Childhood (Wyoming); Shayne Barker, Occupational Therapy (Utah); Melissa Crist, Education-Early Childhood (Idaho); Eric Desmarais, Psychology (Idaho); Amanda Hagman, Psychology (Utah).