teachers who will be working with these students gives them time to prepare and create a classroom environment that will be successful.

**Outcomes**

Five years later, the benefits of the program are evident. We continuously collect data on student performance, which go hand in hand with the individual educational plan goals and help ensure growth. Designated staff members chart individual progress on students’ specific behavioral or instructional goals to learn if there are patterns of problematic behavior or if goals are accomplished. We then use our regularly scheduled team time to discuss any concerns and make recommendations for new approaches to diminish these behaviors.

The ASD facilitator helps our staff track data to learn if the supports and strategies being implemented are working. Data sheets with targeted behaviors are documented to see if meltdowns or other behavioral issues are decreasing. Student growth is also measured by showing that less direct support of the paraeducator is needed during classroom or school activities. Our data show that student growth is increasing in general education classrooms.

The Bridges Program gives us a clear vision of how to best serve students with ASD. Communicating the program to our district, board of trustees, parents, and grant-funding sources is a continuous process in building a cohesive program for students with ASD. While outside funding sources provided the invaluable seed money for the Bridges Program, we must take a creative approach in supporting students with ASD, using our existing resources to sustain the program for years to come. With unified goals and research-based practices, the bridge to move ASD students into regular education settings can be successfully erected and traversed.

Darren Schlepp is principal of Edgerton Elementary School in Kalispell, Montana.

**For Children and Adults Together**

**My Friend With Autism**
By Beverly Bishop
Fiction • Ages: 4 and up

Written by the parent of an autistic child, *My Friend With Autism* examines what makes autistic children a little different, but also the ways they are similar to other kids. The book is packed with coloring pages for kids and detailed notes for adults on how to discuss each page with children.

**The Autism Acceptance Book**
By Ellen Sabin
Nonfiction • Ages: 6 and up

This spiral-bound workbook has exercises and conversation-starters to help adults guide students on a path to understanding autism and respecting differences. The publisher, Watering Can Press, offers a downloadable guide for teachers.

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Understanding Autism: Books for Students

Given autism spectrum disorder’s range of characteristics, it can be hard for children to understand their autistic peers, and just as difficult for parents to know where to begin to help. A growing number of books written by therapists, parents, and those on the autism spectrum can assist parents in navigating discussions about autism. The following books offer information and age-appropriate activities for young readers, and can serve as conversation starters for families.

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FOR YOUNG ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

*All About My Brother*
By Sarah Peralta
Nonfiction • Ages: 4 and up

Peralta was eight when she wrote and illustrated this 36-page story exploring life with her autistic brother. With bright illustrations and straightforward explanations, *All About My Brother* invites young readers to understand siblings or classmates with autism.

*Ian’s Walk: A Story About Autism*
By Laurie Lears
Fiction • Ages: 6 to 10

What’s it like to walk in an autistic person’s shoes? *Ian’s Walk* offers an answer. This richly illustrated book is narrated by Julie, who takes her autistic brother Ian to the park to feed ducks. When he wanders off, Julie must try to envision the world through his eyes to find him, offering a portrait of how autism impacts family members.

*Keisha’s Doors and Tacos, Anyone?*
By Marvie Ellis
Fiction • Ages: 6 and up

In these two bilingual books, Ellis, a pediatric speech pathologist and education consultant, weaves simple stories that help children relate to autistic peers. *Keisha’s Doors* examines the way a family grapples with three-year-old Keisha’s autism diagnosis. In *Tacos, Anyone?* Thomas learns from a therapist how to play and have fun with his younger autistic sibling, Michael.

FOR OLDER ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

*A Is for Autism, F Is for Friend*
By Joanna L. Keating-Velasco
Fiction • Ages: 8-12

Chelsea is an average 10-year-old girl who plays soccer and loves spaghetti … and who just happens to have autism. This quick 54-page read offers a glimpse of Chelsea’s life, serving as a primer on autism for older elementary students. Discussion questions follow each chapter.

*How to Talk to an Autistic Kid*
By Daniel Stefanski
Nonfiction • Ages: 10 and up

“Even though my brain is different, I’m still a kid,” writes Stefanski, who is autistic and penned this practical handbook at age 14. In it, he offers personal stories and explanations for why autistic children act the way they do. He even addresses teasing and bullying.

*Rules*
By Cynthia Lord
Fiction • Ages: 9 and up

Twelve-year-old Catherine invents “rules,” like “No toys in the fish tank,” to help her autistic brother, David, navigate his world. *Rules* follows Catherine as she befriends wheelchair-bound Jason, who helps Catherine understand the meaning of acceptance. It’s an accessible, honest, often humorous story about disabilities, family dynamics, and friendship.