

From Disabled... to NeuroDiverse Autism and School

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The Anova Center for Education - ACE School
Santa Rosa & Concord, California

Rotary Club of Santa Rosa
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Anova Center for Education



The ACE School model was specifically designed to serve children and teenagers (K-12+) diagnosed with High Functioning Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, Learning Disabilities and other Neurodevelopmental Impairments.

Anova provides ACE School programs in Santa Rosa and Concord, CA. Our program has evolved over 25 years to become a global leader in autism education and is sought out by families from across the US

The missing piece had been a custom designed school facility.



What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurodevelopmental disorder whose manifestations occur in great variation in severity, or across a 'Spectrum'. The essential features are:

- Markedly abnormal development in social interaction and communication
- Markedly restricted repertoire of activities and interests
- Marked impairment in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors (e.g. eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body postures)
- Failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level (takes different forms at different ages)

Younger individuals may have little or no interest in establishing friendships, whereas older individuals may have an interest but lack understanding of the conventions of social interaction.

- Lack of 'joint attention' with others (e.g. not sharing objects or experiences) or awareness of others feelings or needs.
- Impairment in communication is marked and sustained and affects both verbal and nonverbal skills. There may be a delay in, or total lack of, the development of spoken language.
- Delays in social interaction, language, and symbolic play must be apparent prior to 3 years of age.

What is the Prevalence of Autism?

Autism has evolved from a relatively rare phenomenon to a commonly diagnosed childhood condition over the last twenty years.

1 in every 31 children in the United States today have been identified with autism. (1 in 150 in the year 2000) Still growing.

Autism affects all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups but mostly occurs in boys (girls are increasingly being diagnosed)

Autism is the fastest growing childhood disability and is more common than pediatric AIDS, juvenile diabetes, and childhood cancer combined.

What Causes Autism?

Autism Spectrum Disorders have no known causes and no known cures.

Some researchers believe autism is not a single phenomenon but rather a collection of similar conditions or “autisms”

Most theories have focused on the interaction between a genetic susceptibility or predisposition toward autism and environmental triggers such as environmental toxins. Prenatal or childhood injury?

Some cases are clearly genetically transmitted... twin studies and others are not so clear. Vaccines controversy...?

Environmental toxins including chemicals, viruses, and bacteria can potentially cause genetic changes...but when and how remains unclear.

What are the Treatments for Autism?

Can Autism be cured? Jenny McCarthy and many others think so.

Most scientists do not believe a cure currently exists, but that treatment can significantly and permanently reduce symptoms.

Contemporary autism treatment takes many forms including some that are controversial, unproven and expensive. The average individual with autism will require 3-5 million dollars of care/services in their lifetime...a figure that is likely to skyrocket.

The most common treatments seek to teach developmental skills that the child is missing (especially language, social, and behavioral) in clinical or naturalistic environments, using a wide variety of techniques and philosophies.

Many adults with high functioning autism and their advocates believe that autism is actually a 'superpower' like Greta Thunberg possesses and NOT a disability to be treated or cured.

When your school burns down... that is bad what should you do about it?



**REBUILDING
HOPE**

A CAPITAL CAMPAIGN TO BRING
ANOVA STUDENTS HOME

RebuildAnova.org

ANOVA

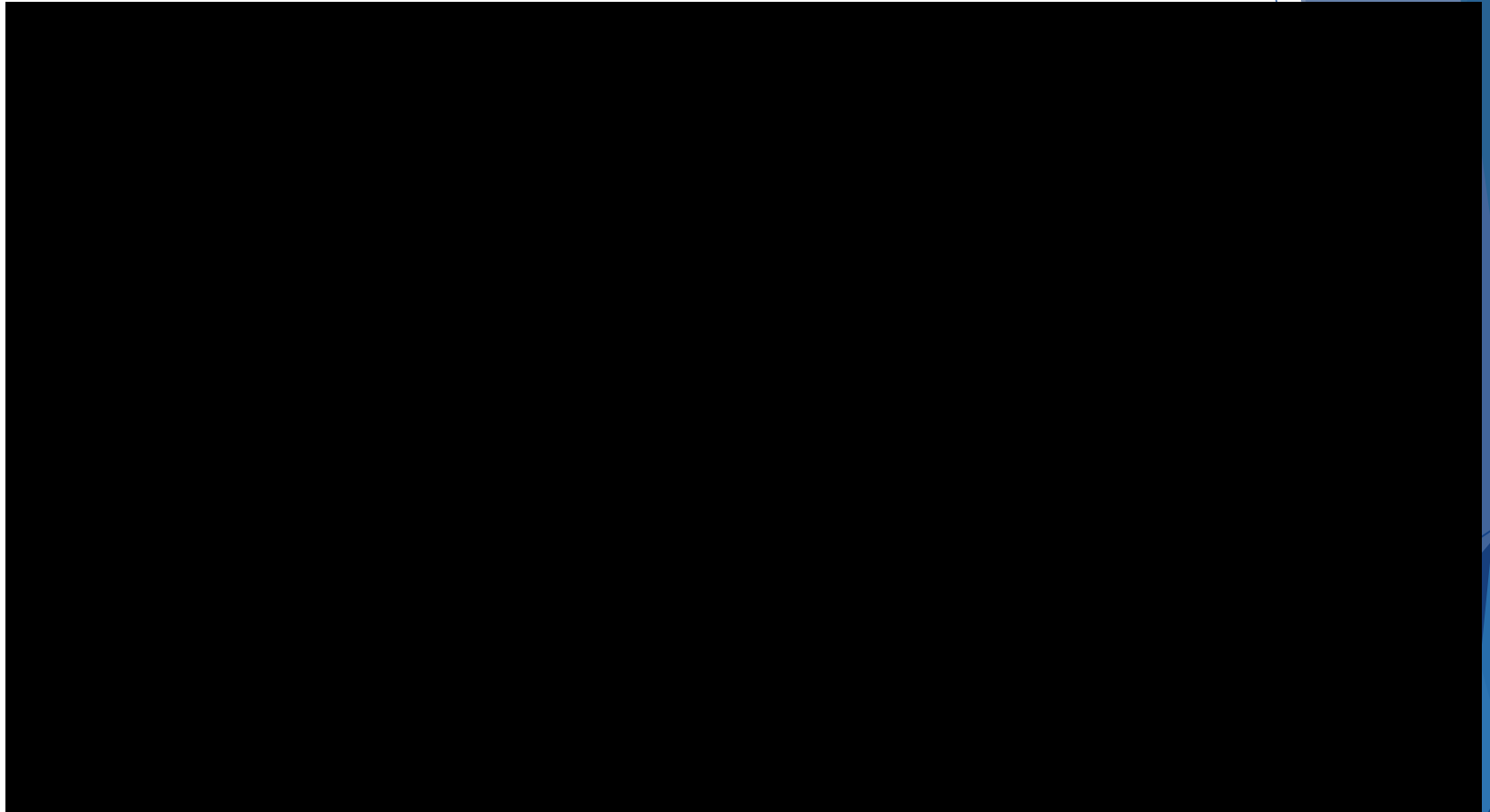


QUATTROCCHI KWOK
ARCHITECTS

Anova mobilized our team and our community to design, finance and construct a world-class facility that is worthy of our mission. Sonoma County is a world-renowned cultural region and we deserve a world class school for our children with autism. Like the mythical Phoenix rising from the ashes, our campus is bigger, better and more attuned to the diverse needs of our students than ever before!



Let's take a look inside!



Neurodevelopmental Impairments and School Performance



- ❖ Sensory integration difficulties
- ❖ Specific learning disabilities or differences
- ❖ Behavioral excesses or deficits
- ❖ Impairments in ‘social thinking’ (mindreading)
- ❖ Mental health issues

The obstacles to learning with Autism

Our autistic student population can be challenged by a combination of:

- ❖ Sensory Modulation - Sensory Integration Difficulties
- ❖ Inconsistent or atypical academic abilities, executive functioning, short term memory and processing speed deficits
- ❖ Socially awkward or distressing interpersonal experiences related to social cognition and pragmatic language delays
- ❖ Anxiety, Depression, Attention and mental health issues

These developmental and neurological deficits have led to emotional, behavioral and learning challenges in typical classroom environments. These students are often 'disabled' by their autism and need therapy and support to show their incredible strengths.

AUTISM IS A KIND OF DIVERSITY...but not when school hurts your brain and you can't be in class.

Social Thinking Deficits

Our students can experience profound deficits in ‘social thinking’ that limit their ability to ‘take the perspective’ of others in social situations. The combination of a bright and verbally expressive child with social cognition impairments can lead to serious emotional and behavioral problems, particularly around public school environments.

Social Cognition Deficits

Often viewed as eccentric, odd or manipulative...even by staff.

Frequently become the victims of teasing and bullying despite desire to have friends.

Display deficits in language pragmatics and prosody (tone) even with large vocabulary

Can be extremely literal and have difficulties utilizing language in a social context

Autism is

Anova Method of Education

- AME

AME is an intensive educational and treatment program designed for a rapidly growing, poorly understood, and acutely underserved population of school age children and young adults.

❖ *Simultaneous application of treatment modalities is essential*; Five primary components of the Anova Method:

- * Occupational Therapy/Sensory Integration
- * Social Cognition Therapy/Speech Therapy
- * Highly Individualized Academic Instruction
- * Behavior Analysis/Positive Behavior Support
- * Counseling/Psychological Services

ACE School Academic Program

- ❖ Highly individualized
- ❖ Meets State standards – WASC Accredited
- ❖ Uses State adopted text books & curricula
- ❖ Multi-sensory approaches to education
- ❖ Prepares student for return to public school or higher education



Academic program



State-of-the-art adaptive technology: AAC

- ❖ Multiple laptops and desktops per classroom
- ❖ A Chromebook and textbooks for every student
- ❖ State-of-the-art educational software
- ❖ WASC Accredited
- ❖ Highly competent professional educators

The ACE School Philosophy on Student Behavior

- ❖ The Ace School program is based on 'equitable' treatment for every student and allows for flexibility in the application of reinforcement for desired behaviors and consequences for rule violations.
- ❖ Staff help students to recognize that each student has their own unique set of behavioral and educational needs and though not all students are treated identically, all are treated fairly.

ACE School Staff Philosophy

Fundamentals of an effective therapy staff:

- ❖ The role of the ACE School staff is not to judge students who display an 'unexpected' behavior but instead to determine why it occurs and how we can help the student to meet that need in a pro-social way.
- ❖ The ACE School staff use the power of human relationships, praise, naturally occurring rewards and personalized incentives to shape student behavior rather than relying on negative consequences or artificial incentives.

Sensory Integration at School

The Anova perspective:

Sensory Integration is involved in every human behavior, including the complex sequences of verbal and motor behaviors that are required to succeed in school.

Assessing learning from a sensory integration perspective helps to identify sensory needs that drive behavior, including maladaptive responses that interfere with educational performance.

Pediatric Occupational Therapy

Specialized treatment to address complex sensory and motor difficulties in children, including:

- ❖ Sensory Integration Dysfunction
- ❖ Sensory defensiveness
- ❖ Impaired visual perceptual skills
- ❖ Impaired visual-motor integration
- ❖ Impaired fine or gross motor coordination and planning.
- ❖ Auditory processing difficulties

Occupational Therapy & Behavior

Defensiveness

- ❖ Outbursts
- ❖ Self-injury
- ❖ Avoidance responses
- ❖ Hypervigilance

Modulation problems

- ❖ Distractibility
- ❖ Self-stimulation
- ❖ Difficulty with transitions
- ❖ Shutting down

Occupational Therapy Interventions to remove the obstacles in autism.

The Anova perspective:

- ▶ Specially designed classrooms can facilitate improved sensory processing and are associated with improved behavior, social interaction, and learning outcomes.
- ▶ Certain sensory experiences can be applied therapeutically to influence the efficiency of sensory processing. These sensations may include spinning, brushing, swinging, and many others.
- ▶ Students with autism can be taught to self-monitor and access sensory interventions independently when necessary to tolerate school environments.
- ▶ When combined with OT, specially designed learning spaces can allow academically gifted students to learn how to independently regulate THEMSELVES.

Occupational Therapy Clinic



Specially designed
clinic space to improve:

- ❖ Gross or large muscle motor planning
- ❖ Fine motor coordination to aid in the production of handwriting
- ❖ Sensory Integration and modulation abilities
- ❖ Coordinated use of both sides of the body

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