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## **State autism coordinator updates Madison parents**

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MADISON – Alabama’s chief expert on autism took the podium at the Special Education Parent Connection meeting.

State Autism Coordinator Anna McConnell updated participants about state activities for autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Topics included policy and legislative issues, Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (AIACC), statistics, surveillance studies and options for parental involvement.

“Autism affects 1 in 88 (1 in 54 boys),” McConnell said, yet “receives relatively little funding nationally, compared to far less prevalent disabilities. ADS is the fastest growing developmental disability.”

In Alabama, median age of diagnosis is 48 months, with 95 percent of parents reporting developmental concerns before age 3, she said. About 74 percent of adults with ASD want to work but are unemployed, and most continue to live with their families into adulthood.

The autism council concentrates on “the urgent and substantial need to develop and implement a statewide comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system of care for individuals with ASD and their families,” McConnell said.

Scheduled for release in May, the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fourth Edition” (DSM-IV) “will consolidate the autism spectrum (now including autism; pervasive developmental disorder – not otherwise specified or PDD-NOS; and Asperger Syndrome) into one diagnosis of ADS,” McConnell said.

Previously, McConnell worked as program manager with the Autism Society of Alabama. Last March, she accepted her current position, affiliated with the Alabama Department of Mental Health. Her position was created simultaneously with the autism council.

The department is the “lead agency for the council, which is composed of other state agencies, advocacy organizations, individuals on the spectrum and other stakeholders,” McConnell said.

Director of Special Education Dr. Maria Kilgore said Madison children with autism are served in their least restrictive environment, based on needs, and may or may not have an individualized educational plan. Jamie Hill is the district’s special education coordinator.

Autism Legislative Day is slated for March 5. For more information, call 877-4AUTISM or visit [autism.alabama.gov](http://autism.alabama.gov) or [autism-alabama.org](http://autism-alabama.org).