A Growing Demographic
Students on the spectrum are becoming a significant population with special needs.
- 1 in 45 boys identified with ASD
- 1 to 1.5 million Americans on the spectrum
- Estimated 30% increase just since 2012
- Most prevalent developmental disorder

It’s a Broad Spectrum
What are the characteristics of students on the autism spectrum?
- Adherence to rigid routines and rules
- Speech lacking tone and pitch
- Lack of eye contact or staring
- Delayed motor development
- Naivety and immaturity in certain areas, great maturity in others
- Social isolation
- Poor impulse control
- High anxiety
- Lack of a “filter” in social situations
- Slower auditory, visual, or intellectual processing
- Perfectionist tendencies
- Intense focus on specific interests
- Normal to outstanding intelligence
- Strong verbal skills and rich vocabularies
- Tendency to grasp meaning through intellect as opposed to intuition
- Deep curiosity and willingness to ask critical questions
- Attention to details, remembering facts
- Astute powers of observation

How can teacher librarians better serve students on the spectrum?
A review of the literature reveals many ways the school library media program can assist students. Interventions fall into five broad categories:

Programming
- Sensory story time
- Social skills instruction and reinforcement
- Partner and group work
- Social stories
- Peer education
- Autism Awareness Month

Professional Development
- Professional collection
- Best practices publications
- Training
- Technology or publishing resources

Space
- Stress relief manipulatives ("fidgets")
- Lighting
- Acoustics
- Flexibility

Management
- Associate training
- Student volunteer training
- Policy review and education
- IEP and 504 compliance
- Assistive technology

Collection Development

Going Forward
- Empirical studies or trials of particular interventions
- Include ASD in training and professional development. Two good resources: