BCBA or CAS: What's the Difference?

Stephen Shore, Ph.D, CAS
Myron Pincomb, Board Chairman, IBCCES

IBCCES International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards

This white paper was approved by the Board of Directors of the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) in February 2018. It represents the position of IBCCES, a membership organization whose mission is to promote and advance research based programs that improve the lives of individuals with Autism and other cognitive disorders. It is intended to serve as a resource for those in education or healthcare related fields with an interest working with individuals with ASD. Electronic and/or hard copies may be made for personal, educational, or policymaking purposes, but not for commercial use. All copies must include this notice on the first page. Any other use or distribution requires advance written permission from IBCCES; requests should be sent to info@ibcces.org or IBCCES, 4899 Belfort Blvd, Suite 190 Jacksonville, FL 32256

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards.
All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

ABSTRACT

When professionals who specialize in autism enter their careers, they pledge to do all they can to help those who face the challenge of this often mystifying condition. Some of them enter the world of Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) through BCBA certification to take advantage of the technique's benefits to help persons with autism shape their behavior to function better in life.

There is, however, now a new program that takes a broader approach to the field of autism beyond just behavior. This new program will give a significant career advantage to both those with no prior ABA training and those with ABA experience. For those with no prior ABA training it will provide a great foundation in the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and also research based strategies to help improve student/patient outcomes. While those with experience in ABA, it will introduce more autism-specific techniques, and immerses those who take the course in more specific knowledge about autism than they could have with standard BCBA coursework. This paper will introduce professionals to the world of Certified Autism Specialist (CAS) training, illustrating the differences between it and a BCBA certification. Finally, it will make the case for professionals to consider both programs for a well-rounded, state-of-the-art approach to autism treatment.

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards.
All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 4
CHALLENGES 6
SOLUTION 9
CONCLUSION 17
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES 19

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards.
All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

INTRODUCTION

Parents and other caregivers of people with autism look for therapists and other specialists to deliver topnotch care to their loved ones. Professionals who want to specialize in treating people with autism, therefore, want to learn the latest cutting-edge techniques to deliver their clients such care.

BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst®) and CAS (Certified Autism Specialist) programs are the gold standards in autism-focused practice today. Both those who want to embark on a career to help those with autism reach their full potential—and the parents and loved ones of those with autism—have a vested interest in learning which of these certifications to choose.

It may be more complicated than a matter of "which one." Could it be that professionals who want to be ahead of the game in effective therapies should look at both programs for a comprehensive approach to treatment of individuals with autism?

In this paper, autism experts will explore the benefits of each program to discover the strengths and shortcomings—if any—of each. In particular, they will discuss whether the training in each program may actually complement that in the other.

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards.
All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

CHALLENGES

Theories on the most effective autism treatments have grown near-exponentially over the last few years. One of the more promising treatments is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), a technique that helps clients build skills that would otherwise be difficult—even impossible—for them to acquire.

BCBA coursework zeroes in on this approach. As Pratt et al., in their joint report for the University of Indiana, put it, "ABA…does this by looking at factors in a person's world that undermine their success, and then carefully changing those factors to teach different and more appropriate ways of responding." [Pratt et al., date unknown] Indeed, research bears that out. In fact, those with a BCBA certification can use this effective technique not only in persons with autism, but also with other people who may struggle to achieve their goals in school or in the workforce.

Parenting groups for children with autism agree. *Autism Parenting Magazine*, for example, informs parents that having a person with BCBA certification to oversee a child's autism treatment "is critical." [*Autism Parenting Magazine*, 2016]

For those reasons, U.S. BCBA certifications have risen steadily since the program's certification program's inception, in 1998 [Deochand and Fuqua, 2016].

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards. All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

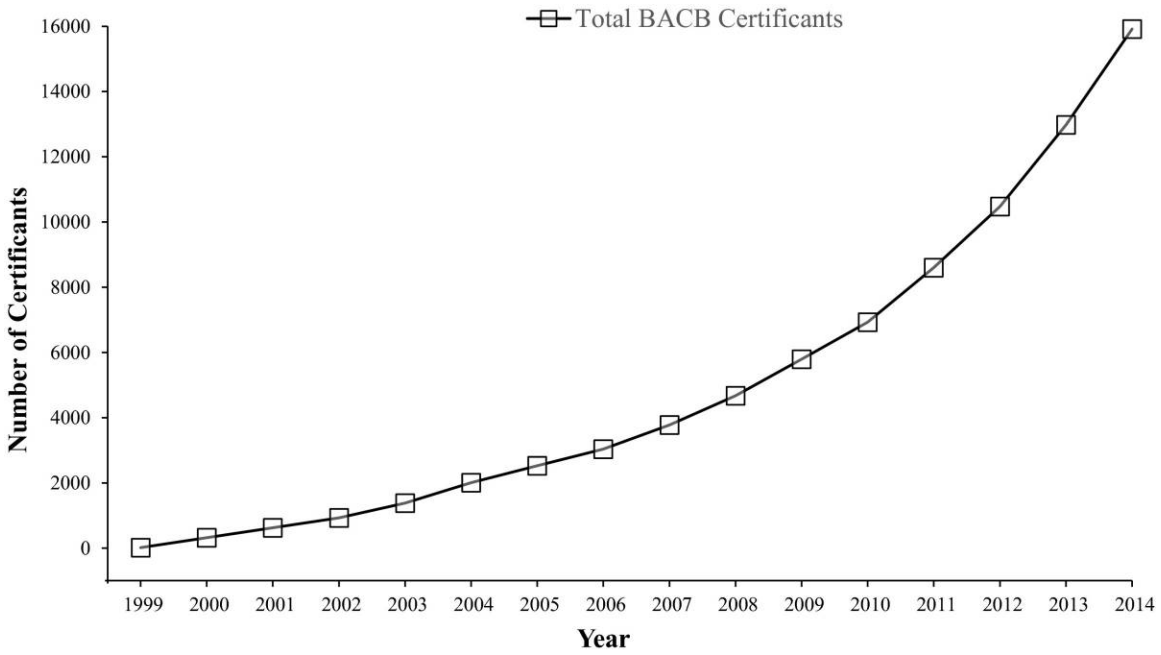


Image courtesy of NCBI. Copyright 2016. Used by permission.

Certainly, a BCBA certification is a good foundation for those who want to work in the field of autism treatment. Theoretical, practical, and ethical aspects of behavior change provide the entire focus of a BCBA program, such as this one, at California State University San Marcos:

Foundations and Concepts in Behavior Analysis (3 units)
ABA 602 – Behavior Analysis Processes for Behavior Change (3 units)
ABA 603 – Applied Behavior Analysis Applications for Complex Procedures and Promoting Behavior Change (3 units)
ABA 604 –Classroom Management, Instructional Methods, and Ethical Considerations in Behavior Analysis (3 units)
ABA 605 – Applied Behavior Analysis in Autism Spectrum Disorder (3 units)
ABA 606 – Ethics and Professional Conduct in Behavior Analysis (3 units)

But therein lies the rub. Is a BCBA adequate in and of itself when one wants to zero in on autism treatment? What if there were another program that could refine that training to focus specifically on autism treatment?

The fact is, BCBA certification, though it does touch on autism spectrum disorder (ASD) during the course of study, is not autism-specific. It focuses on behavior itself.

That, unfortunately, limits the BCBA. Since it only focuses on the behavior aspect, it does not address the uniqueness of people with autism. Every person with autism is

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards. All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

unique. Behavior is not always the root of a child—or an adult's—issues. As noted autism expert Dr. Stephen Shore puts it, "If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism." Since every situation is unique, therapists and teachers need a variety of strategies to choose from, based on each person's individual needs.

BCBA course providers and certificants realize this difference. Some of them, like BCBA course information clearinghouse AppliedBehaviorAnalysisEdu.org, have even encouraged certificate holders and students to pursue careers in fields not at all related to autism treatment.

They point out, "ABAs come away with a broad set of skills that have proven to be effective in promoting and reinforcing desired behaviors in a wide range of areas. This has created countless ways that behavior analysis can be applied to encourage positive behavioral change and improve the quality of life for both individuals and broader segments of the populace." [AppliedBehaviorAnalysisEdu.org, date unknown]

True enough, but what about a more autism-focused certificate program that could add specific value to one's autism treatment practice? Could such a program augment BCBA certification to provide a more comprehensive view of current autism theory and practice?

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards.
All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

SOLUTION

Such a program has come to the autism community. The Certified Autism Specialist (CAS) program is every bit the equal of the BCBA, but adds onto the BCBA's behavioral focus with autism-specific training that covers all aspects of the condition.

Paired with one's BCBA certification, a CAS qualification will enhance one's training in behavioral change with more knowledge of autism itself and how it affects those who have it.

Unlike the BCBA, the CAS program includes a variety of research-based strategies to give teachers and therapists many options to choose from. CAS holders can indeed address the uniqueness of each person with autism.

In addition, the BCBA is an extremely expensive, elite program. In the big picture of autism treatment, not many people have that credential.

The CAS is an alternative to the BCBA in many cases—especially in education. CAS programs are much less expensive and welcome all autism professionals to study. For educators, there is a separate track of study, along with a healthcare-focused track. The education track is much more targeted to education than the BCBA.

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards.
All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

Furthermore, with a more autism-focused certification, parents and caregivers will be more confident that their loved one's care will be in the hands with someone who has extensive knowledge of the condition. The CAS, after all, does not replace the BCBA, but rather augments it with more knowledge of autism and its treatment than any other program currently available.

Candidates can start out with only a CAS. For most professionals, that certification will be enough.

Ten Areas of Competency: A CAS Overview

To receive the CAS certification, professionals must take a stringent examination that covers the latest theories and treatment approaches for autism. The training for the examination covers ten areas of autism knowledge and treatment competency. They are:

1. Autism Overview Competency

- The types of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the symptoms and signs of ASD, the characteristics of ASD, and red flags that should alert caregivers and educators to the possible presence of ASD
- The criteria and process for an ASD diagnosis
- The discovery and recognition of strengths in people with autism
- Treatment strategies for people with autism

This area of study ensures that professionals are familiar with the unique characteristics and challenges of autism that set it apart from other behavioral differences.

2. Behavior Competency

- A study (or review) of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and its benefits for people with autism
- A study of the factors that influence behavior
- Supports for positive behavior and interventions
- Crisis interventions
- A study of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and its benefits for people with autism

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards. All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

This area of study dovetails perfectly with the professional's BCBA study, pointing out the benefits of not only ABA, but also compares the effectiveness of CBT to ABA with respect to autism therapies.

3. Program Development Competency

- Individual Education Plans (IEP) for people with autism
- Specific teaching and intervention strategies for people with autism
- Assessment tools that professionals can use to measure progress in these programs
- Treatment strategies that are effective with ASD, such as TEACCH, RDI, Floortime, and ABA type strategies
- Transition to adulthood supports for people with autism
- Support for adults with autism

This competency ensures that CAS holders are aware of educational and transition strategies designed to help people with ASD develop their intellectual and practical capacities to give them the best chance at success in their career and life.

4. Medical and Health Considerations Specific to Autism

- Gastrointestinal GI) concerns with individuals with autism and their treatment options
- Nutritional concerns and support for people with autism (including addressing food intolerances and allergies)
- The latest research in support for autism
- The latest research in the treatments, and causes of autism
- Sleep disturbances in people with autism and interventions that can help

This area of study goes beyond behavior in people with ASD, identifying some of the underlying medical conditions that can complicate both the behavior and the health of clients with ASD.

5. Sensory Awareness Competency

- Sensory-related issues in people with ASD: awareness of and their relationship to developmental skills
- Sensory integration therapy for ASD
- Anxiety reduction and relaxation techniques for people with ASD

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards. All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

Again, this competency identifies some of the unique challenges people with ASD face with respect to sensory issues. This not only impacts behavior, but also impacts the way someone with autism perceives his or her environment.

6. Motor Skill Competency

- Fine and gross motor development
- Balance, coordination, core strength, and muscle tone intervention and support for students with ASD
- Development and intervention of motor skills in students with autism

7. Social Skills Competency

- Understand the social skill development process and the challenges that ASD poses in the process
- Understand appropriate strategies to develop social skills
- Understand the unwritten and often confusing rules of society as seen through the eyes of someone with ASD
- Training in social skills

Motor skills and social skills, too can challenge people with autism. These skill differences can impact one's behavior, which is another reason professionals whose expertise lies in behavior changes need to immerse themselves in studying the underlying issues that impact behavior—and can give those professionals better insights as to which behavioral interventions may be more effective.

8. Emotional Awareness and Bullying Competency

- Bullying prevention and intervention strategies and intervention for people with autism
- Strategies and support for emotional regulation

Because individuals with ASD often fall victim to bullying, professionals need more than training in behavior to understand why people with autism need extra intervention in this area in life.

9. Communication Competency

- Understand strategies that can increase communication in people with ASD
- Expressive and receptive communication skills development and support

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards. All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

- Pragmatic skills development and support
- Apraxia and articulation challenges in people with autism: intervention and support
- Non-verbal communication methods for people with autism (such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and sign language): strategies and support

People with autism often need special strategies to communicate effectively with others. These needs go well beyond the dimensions of behavior into the area of alternate communication theories and practice. This, too, is an area in which adding a CAS to one's BCBA certification can help immensely when they specialize in working with people with autism.

10. Environmental Competency

- Awareness that social and behavioral development in people with ASD increases with an appropriate environment
- How to structure classrooms and treatment areas to promote skill development
- Education and training for parents
- Life skills training for people with autism
- Elopement (runaway behavior) awareness and prevention

When someone has autism, one's environment greatly impacts his or her behavior. Studying these factors in depth can transform one's behavioral training to become more effective for clients with autism.

Continuing Education for CAS Holders

Continuing education courses for the CAS certification must focus on one or more of these competency areas. The course material must conform to the requirements stated by each competency area included in the CE course. They must also have a sign-in and attendance verification process. Presenters must be qualified in the competency areas covered in the CE course.

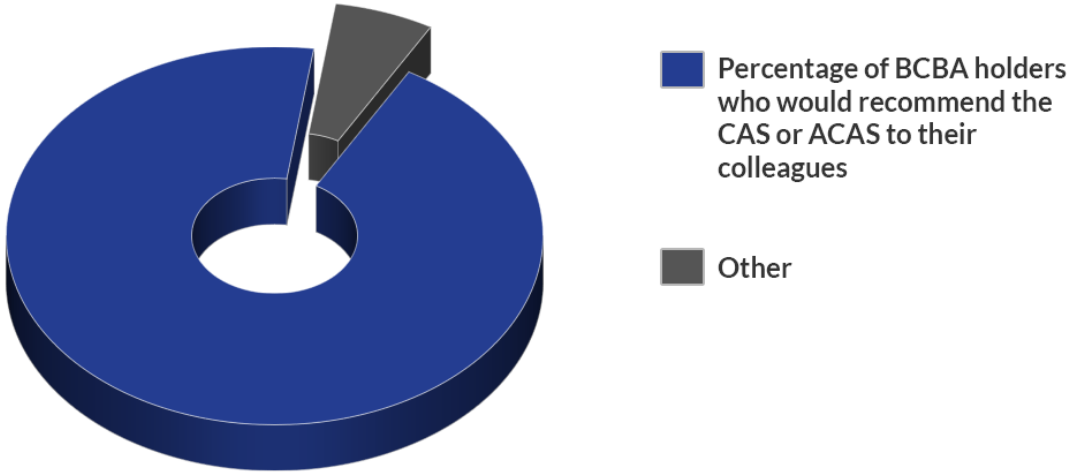
A Complementary Certification that Boosts Autism Knowledge, Effectiveness

While the CAS is not a replacement for the BCBA, it—and the in-depth study that the course requires--is one of the most effective tools to lift an autism professional's knowledge and effectiveness to the next level. Surveys show that among BCBA holders,

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards.
All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

the CAS is a highly sought-after tool to put them into the forefront of their profession (Figure 1). With an 80 percent majority of BCBA holders' clients having autism, a CAS certification is a savvy professional move (Figure 2). 82 percent of parents of children with autism, say the BCBA holders in the same survey, prefer someone who holds a CAS or ACAS to work with their children (Figure 3). With a fraction of the cost of a BCBA to obtain a CAS or ACAS, the extra certification is a most cost-effective way to catapult one's knowledge of autism and its treatment (Figure 4).

FIGURE 1

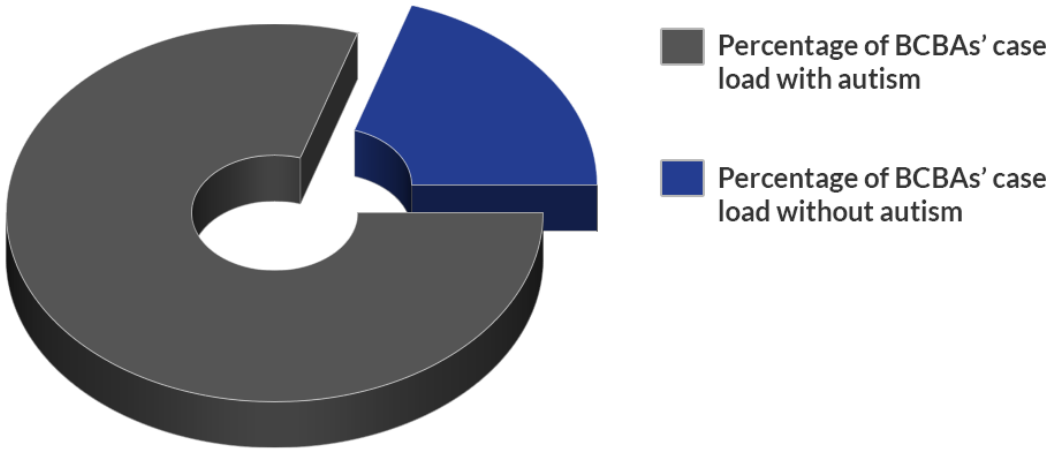


Percentage of BCBA Holders Who Would Recommend the CAS or ACAS (advanced CAS) to Their BCBA-Holding Colleagues

SOURCE: IBCCES

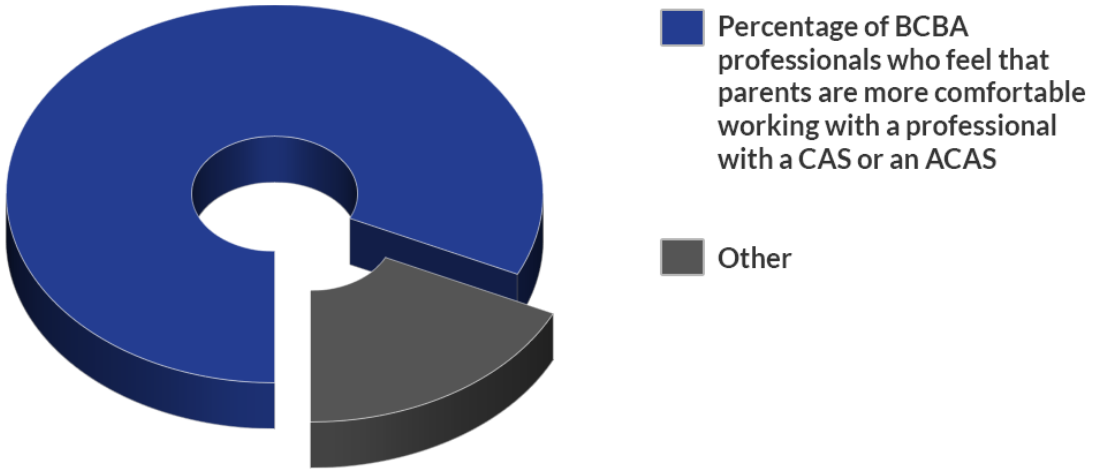
Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards. All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

FIGURE 2



Average Case Loads of BCABs: Percentage of Clients with Autism
Source: [IBCCES]

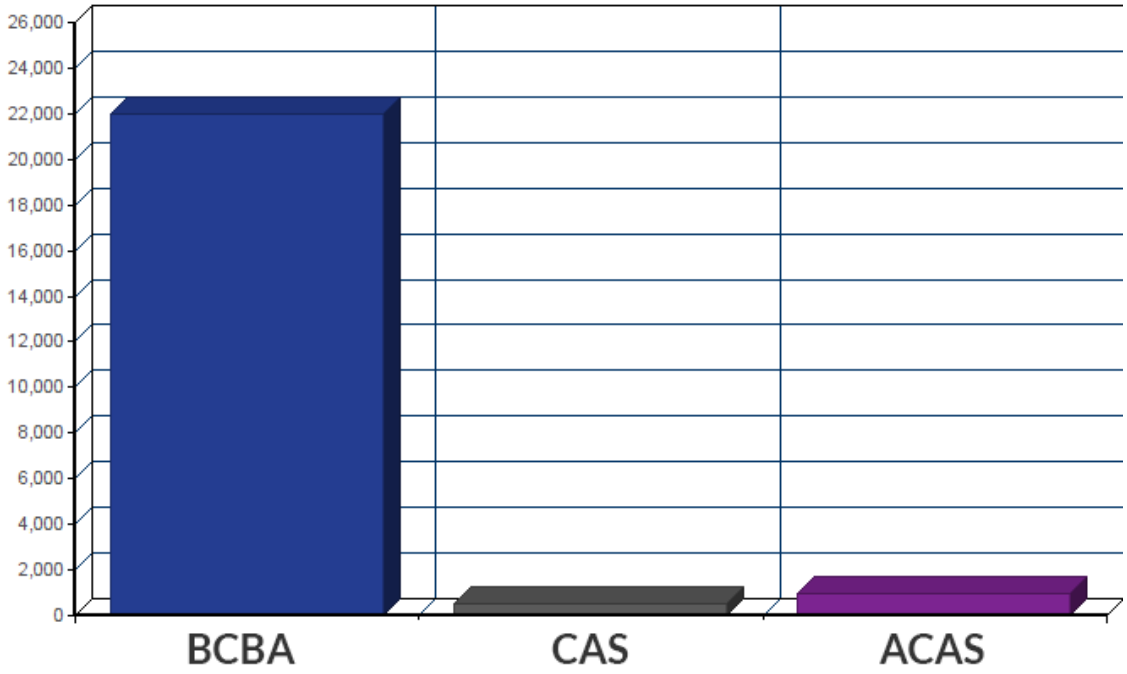
FIGURE 3



Percentage of BCBA holders who feel that parents feel more comfortable working with a professional with a CAS or ACAS holder

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards. All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

FIGURE 4



Comparison of the average total costs for certification and course work: CAS $495, ACAS $995, BCBA $22,000

KEY FINDINGS

- 94% of BCBA surveyed would highly recommend the CAS or ACAS to their BCBA colleagues
- Average caseload of BCAB surveyed had 80% of patients diagnosed with autism
- 82% of BCBA holders surveyed feel that parents feel more comfortable with a CAS or ACAS involved in their child's autism treatment
- The average total cost for certification and coursework for a CAS is $495, for an ACAS $995, and for a BCBA $22,000

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards. All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

CONCLUSION

Looking at all the data and the CAS course's depth of detail and cutting-edge knowledge, it simply makes sense for professionals whose clientele includes people with autism to take advantage of the extra knowledge. Educators, therapists, and those who hold the BCBA but haven't gained the extra advantage that a CAS or an ACAS provides would do well to investigate the possibilities that CAS coursework offers.

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards.
All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

Here are some of their stories:

Daniel, BCBA, CAS and Bayes Achievement Center Executive Director, Huntsville, TX:

“As a BCBA and executive director of a residential center that specializes in serving students with autism, we are thrilled about the Advanced Autism Certification offered by IBCCES. We believe this new evidence-based training with its emphasis in ABA will be a benefit for anyone involved in the treatment of students with autism or intellectual disabilities.”

Wendy, SLP, BCBA, CAS School-Based – New York, NY:

“I feel that the ACAS provides more credibility to caregivers as far as my work with their children with autism. It also ensures that I am maintaining a certain number of CEUs as it specifically relates to the treatment of individuals with autism versus other topic areas.”

Nikki, BCBA, ACAS Private Clinic – San Diego, CA:

“The CAS compliments my BCBA in that, parents notice more, and then once they start speaking to you, then they recognize that the education is in their child's best interest.”

Kim, BCBA, CAS Private Clinic – Orlando, FL:

“My BCBA is specifically behavioral; my CAS lets me specialize in autism.”

As these testimonies show, many autism professionals have discovered, the CAS is a perfect complement for those who already have a BCBA.

The CAS occupies the same level of importance as the BCBA. Both play an important role in the treatment of an individual with autism and complement each other. Parents have more peace of mind when therapist or teacher has a CAS or an ACAS.

While a CAS or ACAS will never replace the BCBA, when a professional has both, the students/patients get the finest care possible, and their parents have something that’s priceless--peace of mind.

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards.
All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/pages/what-to-consider-when-looking-for-a-qualified-aba-provider

2. https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/choosing-aba-provider/

3. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4999363/

4. https://www.csusm.edu/el/certificateprograms/healthhs/appliedbehavioranalysis/programoverview.html

5. https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2013/06/27/countdown-conference-what-will-speaker-dr-stephen-shore-say

6. https://www.appliedbehavioranalysisedu.org/10-things-you-can-do-with-an-aba-degree-other-than-work-with-kids-with-asd/

Copyright © 2018 International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards.
All rights reserved. https://ibcces.org/

FOR MORE INFORMATION

IBCCES is the official licensing board for both CAS and ACAS certification. Its presence reaches across 42 nations, helping individuals with autism and other cognitive disorders reach their full potential with well-trained professionals. With 90 percent of training completed online, professionals can take advantage of the modern researched based education that CAS and ACAS coursework provides. Physical training facilities are located in Jacksonville, Florida and Singapore.

Copyright © 2018 by IBCCES. All rights reserved.

To discover more about CAS and ACAS certification, contact info@ibcces.org