Parents Grateful for Early Child Autism Program at FSU

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PANAMA CITY -- The Centers for Disease Control released new numbers this week showing 1 in 68 children suffer from autism spectrum disorder. In Bay county that translates into as many as 2,000 children.

The parents of those kids say they would have a difficult time without the FSU Panama City campus' Early Child Autism Program.

Debbie McDaniel's son is autistic. Symptoms include communications challenges, social challenges and repetitive behaviors. About a year ago, he couldn't even speak in complete sentences. The Butchikas Clinic is changing that.

"He's learning social skills," McDaniel said. "He's learning self-help skills. They work on his academic skills."

The clinic is part of the Florida State University Panama City campus's Early Child Autism Program.

Students learn through the applied behavior analysis method. It's also the only non-profit Early Childhood Autism service provider in the Panhandle.

"Families who have children with autism are actively seeking out services. Behavior analysts to get those services in ABA so I think it would be natural that they would want to move to an area that has rich resources," training coordinator Nikki Dickens said.

"Getting individualized one on one therapy has been shown to be the most evidence base and effective treatment. And the research is showing that we can treat those symptoms of autism and many children have a chance to participate without those supports down the road by getting therapy earlier and as early as possible," EAC Program Director Dr. Amy Polick said.

As for McDaniel, her son is showing significant improvement.

"He's a much happier well-adjusted child because of applied behavior analysis," McDaniel said.

FSU will also host the 4th Annual Auction for Autism Awareness on April 11. All proceeds will go to the Early Childhood Autism Program.