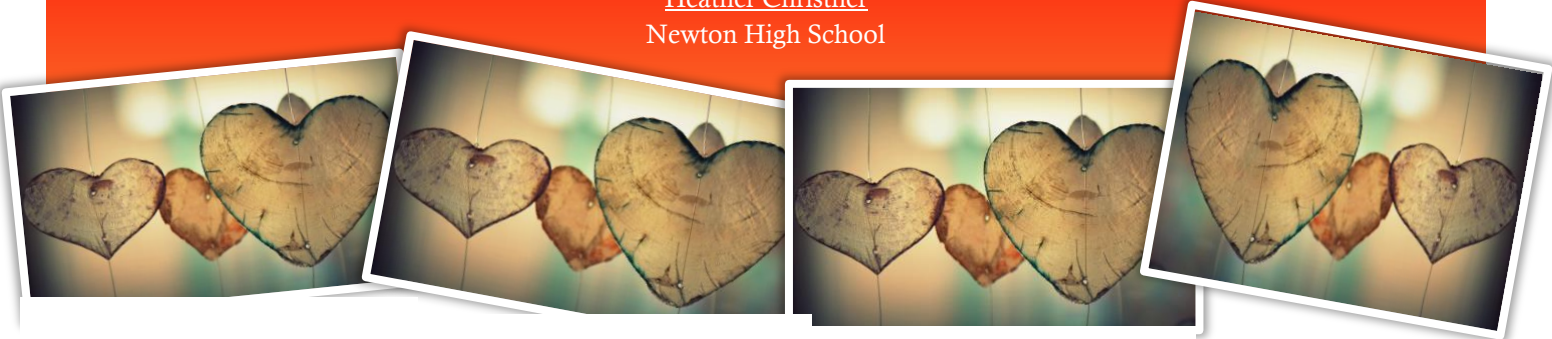


For the Love of Interests

TASN ATBS Spotlight!

Heather Christner

Newton High School



Special Interests in the Classroom Can Connect Love and Learning.

A common worry of educators and parents of students who have autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is that the incorporation of special interests into the daily routine will increase dependence or cause problem behavior. In the online [Autism Internet Modules](#), training module, “Using Special Interests in the Classroom”, Huffman shares that over the past 20 years studies have shown that incorporating special interests into daily activities and instruction can increase desired behaviors (Huffman, 2019). In addition, research has shown that when special interests are embedded into interventions, the incorporation of special interests does not increase the intensity with the engagement of the special interests.

In fact, incorporating special interests into daily activities or instruction has been used to increase joint attention, engagement, social/play, and academic skills. The incorporation of special interests into instruction can also help reduce challenging behaviors.

Heather Christner, a structured learning teacher from Newton High School has embraced the power of special interests with her students. Heather has several students with special passions and works hard to use them within her programs. One of her students loves to announce the weather just like his favorite meteorologists during morning group. He enjoys this group time and so do his peers. Recently he was able to take a tour of a local weather station to meet Lisa Teachman, the chief meteorologist of the KSN StormTrack 3 weather team.



This is an experience that I am sure will have a big impact on this young man. [Joe live from KSN StormTrack 3 Weather Center.](#)

“Our students love being able to work for things that are motivating to them! Not only does using special interests help to keep our students engaged in and motivated, but it also helps to build relationships through meaningful activities. Special interests are such a great tool to help prepare our learners for life after high school!” ~Heather Christner, Structured Learning Teacher.

Check out the [free online training module](#) from the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI) titled **Using Special Interests in the Classroom.**

Additional reading:
[The Benefits of Special Interests in Autism](#)
[Special Interests in Autism](#)