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The Effects of the Early Start Denver Model for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Meta-Analysis

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Abstract: This meta-analysis examined the effects of the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) for young children with autism on developmental outcome measures. The 12 included studies reported results from 640 children with autism across 44 unique effect sizes. The aggregated effect size, calculated using a robust variance estimation meta-analysis, was 0.357 (p = 0.024), which is a moderate effect size with a statistically significant overall weighted averaged that favored participants who received the ESDM compared to children in control groups, with moderate heterogeneity across studies. This result was largely driven by improvements in cognition (g = 0.412) and language (g = 0.408). There were no significant effects observed for measures of autism symptomology, adaptive behavior, social communication, or restrictive and repetitive behaviors.