INTRODUCTION

Students with disabilities are enrolling in postsecondary education (PSE) programs at increasing rates. Parents are generally supportive of their child’s participation in PSE programs, although some who are used to providing a protective, advocate role may experience more difficulty with changes in their level of parental involvement. While parents may not prioritize PSEs that offer the “typical” college experience, these settings have demonstrated success in increasing independence and reducing need for supports.

Parent and student perceptions of the independent living skills (ILS) of college students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) over the course of a PSE program were similar at the beginning of the academic year. At the end of the academic year, parents rated students’ ILS as higher. These differences were attributed, by the researchers, to parents’ awareness of their students’ growth during the program. Still, little is known about differences in parent, student, and others’ perceptions of students’ ILS.

METHOD

Participants
As part of two PSE programs (for college students, ages 18-22, and ages 22-26), 47 students, 35 parents, and 6 residential community assistants reported on students’ baseline ILS prior to entry into the PSE program.

Measures
Ratings were provided on students’ overall independence using a Likert-scale, ranging from zero (not at all independent) to ten (extremely independent).

RESULTS

Students and Parents
Findings showed significant moderate agreement between student and parent report of students’ ILS (r = .24, p < .05), in which both rated fairly high independence (M = 82.8 and M = 75.5).

Students and Program Staff
Student and program staff reports were significantly negatively related (r = -.57, p < .05), such that community assistants rated students as having lower levels of independence (M = 42.7).

DISCUSSION

While parents and students agreed on students’ ILS abilities prior to PSE program entry, student ratings and perceptions of their own ILS were higher compared to perceptions of program staff. This may reflect students’ inability to accurately assess their own skill level and parents’ protective nature of their children’s abilities. If this is the case, program staff may serve as more accurate reporters of students’ ILS at program entry.

There were several limitations to this study. More objective measures of independence may help to parse out actual and perceived abilities. Additionally, the study sample was fairly small and students in residential versus non-residential PSE programs were not analyzed separately. Future studies should take these factors into account and examine changes in perceptions throughout the program.

REFERENCES