



**Ohio Senate Committee on Workforce and Higher Education
Interested Party Testimony
HB 33 – FY24-25 State Operating Budget**

**Dr. Lynette Scotese-Wojtila, President, S.U.C.C.E.S.S for Autism
Tuesday, May 9th, 2023**

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, and Ranking Member Smith, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 33, the State Operating Budget, to maintain and support S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism’s funding request of \$100,000 in each fiscal year within the Ohio Department of Higher Education’s Program Support line for S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism to train more professionals to administer The S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Approach across Ohio.

My name is Dr. Lynette Scotese-Wojtila, and I am the president of S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism, a non-profit agency in Wickliffe, Ohio dedicated to supporting individuals with autism by promoting awareness of, research on, and access to truly impactful autism intervention across the lifespan. I've served in the great state of Ohio as a registered and licensed occupational therapist for 35 years and I am a Certified Autism Specialist with a subspecialty in transdisciplinary care.

When I was a volunteer camp counselor in 6th grade, I met a beautiful child named Katie, who had autism. Katie and I were drawn to each other like a magnet to steel. Although back in 1976 I could barely spell “autism”, I knew that Katie’s uniqueness was something to cherish. This awareness is the foundation of my career and what spawned me to establish S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism in 2001. One of our objectives is to train families and teams in an autism model called The S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Approach. We believe that best-practice for autism is that which is customized, neurodevelopmental in nature, and rendered via a team approach with parents as equal partners.

As a proud graduate of Cleveland State’s occupational therapy program, I operate under the premise that humans are born to master. Our prowess in both neuroscience and human growth and development uniquely qualifies OT’s to design evidenced-based interventions that expedite skill mastery in those we serve, regardless of the degree to which their deficits might otherwise impede such mastery. But it is only when we cross-train with fellow transdisciplinary in special education, speech therapy, and psychology that we fully serve students. Although research validates interprofessional collaboration as a major determinant of positive educational outcomes in autism,¹ studies suggest that communication between disciplines is not always shared resulting in staff working in isolation. This barrier to collaboration may be related to time constraints, physical distance from each other, feelings of being already overextended, or interpersonal issues. Access to working parents is also a barrier to collaboration and can limit student gains. Another challenge to collaborative services is the supply and demand issue between staff and the number of students who need service. Of the 185,000 Ohioans with

¹ Science Direct: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2405452616300040>

autism,² 21,000 are school age.³ When I entered the field thirty years ago, the incidence of autism was 1 in 10,000.⁴ Today it is about 1 in 44. This is a staggering 22,627% increase. The burden on staff to absorb this increase is exacerbated by the workforce crisis. An example of this in the Direct Service Provider industry comes from a reported 70.6% increase in discontinuation of programs in 2021 due to insufficient staffing.⁵ Stagnant wages, staff turn-over, and workers being drawn to higher-paying jobs impact hiring⁶ in this and other service industries.

The S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Approach, as a research-based model, has been used to remediate underlying neurological problems in children within northeast Ohio who then naturally achieve personal milestones ranging from saying their first words to going to prom, or being accepted into their college of choice. Since the model was first coined in 1998, thousands of individuals, families and professionals have benefited from its effectiveness. Fieldwork students from Cuyahoga Community College and universities like Cleveland State, Ohio State, Kent State, Akron, and Findley, trained to use the model in their internships, report feeling well prepared for, and highly effective in their jobs serving those with autism on their caseloads.

To promote better programming for individuals with autism, while also combating workforce shortages through job satisfaction and better staff retention, we are proposing a project called **SUCCESSful Training for Autism: An Interprofessional Collaborative Pilot Program**. This project expands a long-time evidence-based model by training already-existing autism teams in The S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Approach. To support Governor DeWine's agenda, this project can include trainees serving children with both autism and mental health comorbidities, are in foster care, or are in early education programs.⁷ Upon completion, trainees will have the skillset to provide neurodevelopmentally sound interventions to their own caseloads, thus expanding access. They may become mentors for future cohorts and help with research aimed to expand the model's original 2019 and 2022 efficacy studies. To accomplish this, the below format will be used:

- **Phase 1:** Participants complete 9 online modules on the model's theories and methods
- **Phase 2:** Participants engage in 20 collaborative method-application lab sessions
- **Phase 3:** Participants design and implement an 8-week program alongside instructors

Lastly, fieldwork students from our university community partners will be invited to participate in the synthesis and analysis of data gathered from enrollees' pre- and post-training measures.

I respectfully ask you to maintain and support our ask of \$100,000 in each fiscal year within the Ohio Department of Higher Education's Program Support line for S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism for the purpose of training more professionals to administer The S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Approach across Ohio. Thank you for your time and I welcome any questions you may have.

Dr. Lynette Scotese-Wojtila
President
S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism

² National Library of Medicine: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9128411/>

³ Easterseals <https://www.easterseals.com/support-and-education/living-with-autism/profiles-ohio.html>

⁴ CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/p1202-autism.html>

⁵ ANCOR: https://www.ancor.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/the_state_of_americas_direct_support_workforce_crisis_2021.pdf

⁶ Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities: <https://dodd.ohio.gov/about-us/our-programs/resource-DSP-Workforce>

⁷ Ohio Governor: <https://governor.ohio.gov/media/news-and-media/governor-dewines-2023-state-of-the-state-address-01312023>