

House Bill 96: FY 2026-2027 Biennial Operating Budget

House Finance Committee

Representative Brian Stewart, Chair

Thursday, March 13th, 2025

Lisa Welsh, Parent and S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism Board Member

Good morning, Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the Committee. Thank you for granting the time to hear our family's testimony. My name is Lisa Welsh, and I am a mother of two, a pediatric nurse, and have a 10-year-old son with Autism, Henry. I would like to discuss the potency and effectiveness of the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. approach model and ask for the continued support for S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism and the expansion of the **SUCCESSful S.E.R.V.I.C.E.S learning model.**

I am standing here today on behalf of my family and our story; however, we represent many families that are pleading for help and asking for our education system to look at the education of children differently. Each child is uniquely different and therefore, the execution of education needs to translate to each child's needs in a neurodevelopmental way, and this is not limited to a child with Autism. In summary, everyone learns differently and to understand how to teach, we first must understand how a child develops.

My family and I are a digest of failed stories of the educational system utilizing models that are not comprehensive and lack specificity to each child's needs. We saw at an early age Henry had unique needs. He became over-stimulated very quickly, had significant sensory needs, hand flapped, required constant redirection, and had verbal, nonverbal, and social-emotional communication deficits. Henry was asked to leave two community-based preschools and was unsuccessful with an active IEP in the public-school integrated classroom setting. These education settings were unable to identify, intervene, and teach him strategies to address his specific neurodevelopmental needs. This made gaining access to the educational curriculum impossible. After these failed attempts, we made the difficult decision for my husband to quit his job and we started homeschooling Henry. We were lost, hopeless, felt alone, and drowning in debt. We were grieving because we questioned IF Henry would be able to reach milestones including simple ones that we so often take for granted, like making friends, driving a car, dating, going to college, or ever living on his own. We started looking for resources, models, and support that could help him, had tried several but nothing that was reaching him until we found the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. approach with Dr. Lynette Scotese-Wojtila.

Henry has been receiving the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. approach model for 6 years and to say it has been life changing would be an understatement. My husband and I took the online parent training course to translate at home as well and within weeks of starting the program, we saw immediate progression in Henry. His cognitive and processing development skills increased, his emotional regulation became more manageable, his social skills for reciprocating in a conversation started to develop, and his attention and focus was more retained, and as a bonus, his feeding palate and his willingness to eat new things expanded. We continue to see daily progress and we are no longer asking ourselves IF our son will be able to reach milestones, rather WHEN. As parents, we are no longer lost. Today, Henry is thriving, he is fully integrated into a typical school setting, he's reading above his grade level, has so many friends, and is excited for what the future holds for himself. Henry independently identifies his needs, advocates for himself and most recently, for others when having a difficult time, executes strategies to help himself when overstimulated or emotionally dysregulated, and is excelling academically. He is learning to tap into his true potential because of the strategies of the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Approach has given him and the trained educators and interventionist in this neurodevelopmental model that he otherwise would not have known he was capable of.

As parents to a child with Autism, the hardest thing to explain to educators is that Autism is a "whole person" disability that impacts every facet of your child's functioning. The approach to delivering education should be comprehensive as well. This is why The S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Approach model is not only successful for children with Autism but also any child or person. This neurodevelopmental model finds the 'just right fit' strategies to reach a child and identifies what they need to thrive as a whole individual, not just a particular educational skill to be learned and potentially lost.

We want this neurodevelopmental model to reach as many children as possible to see the same successes and progressions we have seen in Henry. We have been able to use the strategies of this model on our typically developed, 7 year old daughter as well and she is excelling in all facets, academically, emotionally, and socially. Both of my children are living examples of the success of this model but Henry's transformation gives us such hope for others that need this model in their lives. The impacts to integrating this approach into educational settings would be society changing. Again, I speak for many families and parents, we need to do something different for our children to become the best versions of themselves.

I am honored to have brought my son Henry today to give his testimony and be able to tell you more about what the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. approach has been done for him through his words.