



House Bill 96: FY 2026-2027 Biennial Operating Budget
Senate Finance Committee
Senator Jerry Cirino, Chair
Tuesday, May 27, 2025

Christine Pitcock, Paraprofessional, Bedford City School District

Good morning, Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee. My name is Christine Pitcock, I have my bachelor's degree in early childhood education, I have worked in the education field for over 29 years. I am currently a Paraprofessional for Bedford City School District in Northeast Ohio.

I would like to share with you my written testimony of the impact of funding that was included in the last state operating budget within the Department of Higher Education for the SUCCESS for Autism pilot program, and to urge you to expand access to this program.

Bedford City Schools has experienced a significant increase in students with severe autism diagnoses and complex behavioral needs, making it challenging for them to thrive in traditional special education settings. In response, we launched the BEAR program, a specialized initiative designed to provide these students with the structure and support they need to succeed. The SUCCESS for Autism program has been instrumental in transforming BEAR from an unstructured and overwhelming environment into a highly effective, nurturing, and well-organized learning space. Through their research-based strategies and expert guidance, we have built a framework that enables our students to make meaningful progress in both their academic and social development.

The impact of this partnership has been nothing short of extraordinary. Student behaviors have dramatically improved, allowing for greater

engagement and learning opportunities. Social skills are expanding, and students are learning to self-regulate and navigate their emotions more effectively.

This partnership has also improved the skill level of the staff at the Bear program. The SUCCESS model provides staff with modules that allow them to gain additional tools to support the children in the Bear program. One of my most favorite modules was Information Processing. In this course perspectives from a Piagetian model are shared to familiarize staff with how both familiar and novel schemas are formed through the natural process of information processing. By the end of this module, I was able to evaluate schema development in my target child and highlight my target child's learning style and how this child forms new schemas. I have learned so much from the SUCCESS model. One of my greatest experiences was during our morning meeting. At the suggestion of my observing SUCCESS mentor, I lowered my speaking volume when leading the group and noticed that by using a lower tone when talking to the children, their voices and energy level also came down. Consequently, the children were able to become more engaged in the activity and were calmer on their carpet squares. In reflecting on this with my Mentor, she mentioned that it's not uncommon for classroom staff to attempt to talk "over" their students. In hindsight that's exactly what I had been doing till she called my awareness to how this can impact students. Moments like these, along with countless other breakthroughs, serve as a testament to the effectiveness of the SUCCESS model. Staff feel more comfortable and confident in supporting the children in the BEAR program. This transformation would not have been possible without the invaluable support and training provided through this fellowship.

Thanks to SUCCESS for Autism, the BEAR program is no longer just a specialized setting for children, it has become a hub of growth, achievement, and endless possibilities. With your continued support, we hope to expand this initiative, ensuring that students with autism can access the general education curriculum with the appropriate support from the SUCCESS program. Every student deserves the opportunity to learn in the least restrictive environment, alongside their typical peers. To that end I think it is important for general education teachers to also experience the SUCCESS approach, to gain additional supporting tools for the children that Bedford City School District serves. The SUCCESS Approach model makes that vision a reality.

Thank you for your consideration of an amendment that will expand access to the SUCCESS for Autism program, so that more school districts and their students have access to this impactful fellowship.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my written testimony.