



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

Marian Armstrong, Supervisor of Pupil Personnel, Bedford City School District

Good morning, Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee. My name is Marian Armstrong, and I am the Supervisor of Pupil Personnel for Bedford City School District in Northeast Ohio.

I am here to share with you 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.

Since COVID, 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. One of the most profound moments in our journey was when a non-verbal 7-year-old student spoke her first word—a milestone that moved everyone in the room to tears. Moments like these, along with countless other breakthroughs, serve as a testament to the effectiveness of the SUCCESS model in fostering communication, self-regulation, and independence. This transformation would not have been possible without the invaluable support and training provided through this fellowship.

Beyond their expertise, the SUCCESS for Autism team has been an unwavering source of mentorship for our staff, providing continuous guidance, professional development, and encouragement. Their comprehensive coursework ensures that our team is equipped with the latest, evidence-based techniques to help students with autism reach their full potential. We are deeply grateful for their dedication, innovation, and the life-changing impact they have had on our students, staff, and families.

Thanks to SUCCESS for Autism, the BEAR program is no longer just a specialized setting—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 supports from the SUCCESS program. Every student deserves the opportunity to learn in the least restrictive environment, alongside their typical peers, and The SUCCESS Approach 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 testify before you. I would be happy to answer questions.