

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

**Dr. Richard M. Smith, Parent of 2 Individuals on the Spectrum, Educator,  
Curriculum Developer and Advanced Learning Specialist.**

To Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee. My name is Dr. Richard Smith and I am submitting written testimony in support of the amendment to H.B. 96 which will allocate \$300,000 per fiscal year to S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism within the Ohio Department of Higher Education for the SUCCESSful S.E.R.V.I.C.E.S. Learning Model.

I wear many hats in and around the world of Education and Autism. First and foremost, I am a father of 4, two of which live with Autism Spectrum Disorder and were my foray into the world of ASD. I was a classroom teacher for 12 years. I have worked in the world of professional education for more than 20 years having been a trainer for local government, in-service teachers, and as a pre-service instructor for educators as well.

The amendment I am speaking to will support educators in integrating the critical theories and methods of The S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Approach (TSA) model into their teaching in order to individualize curriculum, facilitate differentiated instruction, and align with Ohio educational practices and regulations to meet the unique needs of students with varying neurodevelopmental needs.

I have seen both personally and professionally how The S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Approach (TSA) has impacted the lives of hundreds of individuals both on and off the spectrum. With the legislature's support in the last state operating budget, the nonprofit organization S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism was able to take the principles and methods of TSA to create a replicable model for a local school district that is making strides to support their students on the spectrum. The amendment you are considering for S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism will expand this pilot program and bring it to where it is needed further still: to support our educators in the general education classroom.

TSA has enabled my family to support our two children with ASD and help them make sense of the world through their lenses. We have learned how to gauge their readiness to understand concepts, process intake for a proper output, and offer perspective to help them to rationalize outcomes given a situation and to cope with the ideas that may not go their way. In short, TSA was able to provide us a way to reach and then teach our children

that we thought was not going to be possible prior to their diagnosis. Now our oldest is in their junior year of college at Kent State and the other is making preparations to move into high school next year. They are living proof that there is something potent about these theories and methods of TSA in unlocking what Dr. Lynette Scotese-Wojtila often says, “their God-given potential”. I marvel each day as they progress through life knowing that TSA has provided me with a toolbox of strategies for the days where my children need a little support.

So impressed with what TSA was able to do for my family, I wanted to work with Dr. Scotese-Wojtila to bring this to every parent possible. In my research, time and concern for proper child care were among the key reasons parents refrained from getting the training my wife and I received to partner with the therapy team. I dedicated my doctoral capstone to researching the methods for delivering this training online. With Dr. Scotese-Wojtila's blessing, we teamed up to bring a hypothetical project to life and it continues to change the family dynamic for so many families in our area. But why stop there?

Knowing the potency of TSA, we requested funds from the last state operating budget to create a professional track for special education teams to receive training in TSA. This three-phase program provides its fellows with the key theories and strategies of TSA and a mentoring program to support the implementation of those methods. We are showing gains in just three months in the confidence those educators have in executing strategies and learning to reach and teach the children in their care. The Bedford BEAR program is putting the Bedford School District on the map as the first district to employ the TSA program to make gains on the quality of life for their students and that was a winning collaborative effort between The SUCCESS for Autism Team, the Bedford School District's BEAR program and the funded support of the state legislature. We thank you for helping us change the paradigm for students with neuro differences. Their instructional strategies confidence is up 12% in just 9 weeks of the program.

As you will see in our white paper, the incidence of Autism has increased to 1 in 31<sup>1</sup> children over the last three years. My experience in the classroom coupled with findings in the research, has seen an overburdening in the realm of special education. Many of the students with needs are more often than not streamlined back into the general education classroom and as a result, teachers feel ill-prepared to get them to grade-level capacity.<sup>2</sup> We see an opportunity where TSA can, again, help prepare in-service general education teachers with the necessary tools to help all of their students and feel confident

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/autism/data-research/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> Al Jaffal M. Barriers general education teachers face regarding the inclusion of students with autism. *Front Psychol.* 2022 Aug 22;13:873248. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.873248. PMID: 36072021; PMCID: PMC9443958.

in doing so. SUCCESS for Autism's request for the funding to research and develop the SUCCESSful S.E.R.V.I.C.E.S. Learning Model for general education. Our hope is that it will equip teachers to meet the challenges of learning differences, reduce stress for educators and learners by finding the proper balance between learning needs and learning gains.

TSA has been instrumental in providing me with the tools necessary for my family and I to help our individuals on the spectrum. I've seen it first-hand, in how it has profoundly changed my instruction, and with your support of this funding request, we can make it available to all educators and students with the research and development of this updated model. I thank you, in advance, for your consideration. I can be available if you have any questions.

Respectfully submitted,  
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