



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

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

Good morning, Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the committee. I am Dr. Lynette Scotese-Wojtila, president of S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism, a non-profit agency in Northeast Ohio dedicated to individuals with autism by promoting neurodevelopmental care through highly specialized treatment and education practices.

I am a proud Ohio licensed occupational therapist, with a specialty in both Sensory Integration and Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96 in support of S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism's funding request, an amendment which would appropriate \$300,000 in each fiscal year within the Department of Higher Education for the purpose of training general educators to administer The S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Approach across Ohio. We are currently included in the House version of the budget at \$50,000 in each fiscal year and are seeking additional dollars in the Senate so that this program can build upon and expand S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism's current pilot program funded by the last General Assembly.

As a professional in the field for nearly four decades, I am aware of the challenges Ohio workers face to holistically serve people with special needs, and autism in particular. The incidence of autism is now 1:31 (CDC, 2025), which is a staggering 32,158% increase since I entered the field. This population swell has led to an overspill of autistic students into general ed where staff are equally overwhelmed as their special ed counterparts, but with far less foundational understanding of the learning and behavioral needs of the population. This gap in knowledge is evident

in a 2019 study by the US Department of Education that reported that while 40% of students with disabilities were placed in general education classrooms, 80% of their teachers felt unprepared to provide neuro-flexible instructional methods. Moreover, 50% reported feeling that they would not be able to get the students to grade level.

S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for Autism is positioned to bridge this knowledge gap. The aim of this new project is to offer a remedy of relief to general ed personnel in need of training and mentorship to best educate students with autism, while maintaining excellence in educating their equally important neurotypical classmates.

We are confident we can help general ed staff because of the positive outcomes with special ed staff who we are currently training in Cuyahoga County to apply theories and methods unique to our model that many are unfamiliar with. I quote this written testimony excerpt of a current trainee after completing just a few of our online training modules. She writes, “I have a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, and 29 years of teaching experience... One of my most favorite modules was 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 more calm 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”.

As its founder, I can share that efficacy of The S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Approach model has been demonstrated in a 2019 study where autism severity scores in preschoolers dropped 18 points ($SD = 18$) in just 8 weeks, and 12 points school age children, in just 4 weeks (2022). In this current pilot program, although data analysis of autism severity scores is not complete, teacher self-rated efficacy scores jumped 12% in just 9 weeks, in the domain of teacher efficacy of instructional strategies.

I respectfully ask you to help us further replicate the positive outcomes of these studies and afford us the privilege of providing Ohio general educators a remedy of relief in their quest to educate the students with autism now in their charge. Thank you for your consideration of our amendment of \$300,000 in each fiscal year within the 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 in Ohio schools.