

NEXT STEPS

Next steps include:

- Connecting with local educators, churches, community organizations, and early childhood support programs to share project goals and identify opportunities for collaboration and referrals.
- Outreach materials and conversation guides will be finalized before beginning one-on-one parent conversations in Summer 2026.
- Small-group community gatherings will be scheduled for Fall 2026.
- Ongoing feedback from participating families and community partners will help guide future improvements and long-term sustainability of the project.

The long-term goal is to strengthen understanding, belonging, and collaboration between families, schools, and neurodivergent learners within the community.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to the Family Leaders for Ohio Schools Academy, The Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center, local educators, community organizations, and families who continue working to create more inclusive and supportive environments for children.

This project is especially dedicated to neurodivergent children whose abilities, communication, and potential have too often been underestimated.

Most personally, it is dedicated to my daughter, Caroline, whose life trajectory could have looked very different if others' assumptions had defined her potential. Her life continues to remind me that understanding changes outcomes, and that belonging begins when children are fully seen, accepted and loved for who they are.



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

A Foundation for Belonging

**Building Understanding
Between Families, Schools, and
Neurodivergent Learners**



**THE OHIO STATE
UNIVERSITY/Ohio Statewide
Family Engagement Center**

**Holly
West Milton, OH**

INTRODUCTION

True inclusion of neurodivergent people in schools and community spaces begins with understanding that neurodivergence is not a flaw, but a different way of learning, communicating, and experiencing the world. When families understand and accept their child’s neurodivergence as something to support rather than fear, they are better prepared to partner with educators and advocate for supportive environments. As schools adapt curriculum, expectations, and supports that respond to diverse learners, neurodivergent students are more likely to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Ultimately, my project goal is for children to recognize their own strengths, needs, and value so they can move through the world with confidence, self-advocacy, and a true sense of belonging.

GOAL and OBJECTIVES

This project takes a parent-first approach, recognizing that children thrive when the adults closest to them understand how they learn and experience the world. The goal is to help families feel informed and confident in supporting inclusive environments where neurodivergent children feel understood and valued. From May through November 2026, the project will include one-on-one parent conversations, small-group gatherings, and collaboration with educators and local support organizations focused on understanding behavior, navigating supports like IEPs and LRE, and connecting families to resources.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

May-November 2026

“A Foundation for Belonging” will offer one-on-one conversations, small-group gatherings, and community collaboration to support families of neurodivergent children. Families will be connected through direct outreach, social media, community relationships, and referrals from local educators or support organizations when appropriate.

One-on-one conversations will provide space for parents to share concerns, ask questions, and better understand their child’s communication, learning, and sensory needs. Small-group gatherings will focus on building relationships, trust and connection between parents and their children. It will allow for shared learning around neurodivergence, behavior as communication, educational rights, IEPs, Least Restrictive Environment, and local resources.

This project will also connect families to existing supports such as Help Me Grow, Head Start, ESC preschool services, school-based teams, and community agencies. The purpose is not to replace professional services, but to bridge families toward them with confidence, clarity, and support.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1. Increased parent confidence in understanding and supporting neurodivergent children
2. Stronger family-school communication, and greater awareness of educational rights and local resources. Families will feel more prepared to advocate for accommodations and inclusive learning environments that meet their child’s needs.
3. Reduce stigma surrounding neurodivergence by encouraging communities to view behavior, communication, and learning differences through a lens of understanding rather than limitation.

Long-term Outcome: Children will feel seen, supported, and able to belong within their schools and communities.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

- Stigma and misunderstanding surrounding neurodivergence and hesitation from families who may feel overwhelmed discussing their child’s needs.
- Schools are navigating significant pressures related to curriculum requirements, state testing, staffing shortages, budgeting, and levy-dependent funding, which can make individualized supports and inclusive practices more difficult to implement consistently.
- Additional barriers may include limited awareness of educational rights and available resources. This project will address these challenges through relationship-building, flexible conversations, and collaboration with existing school and community supports.