

The Ability Connection

Fall 2026

A Newsletter by the Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities

Sensory Exploration Day

Our Early Intervention Providers are essential in partnering with parents and other caregivers to nurture children's learning and development. They recently held a sensory exploration day, along with members of the therapy team, for children to explore different textures through play.



Ohio Early Intervention is a statewide system that provides coordinated services to infants and toddlers with disabilities or developmental delays. It is based on the belief that every child is unique and develops at their own pace. Early Intervention (EI) builds upon and provides supports and resources to assist parents and caregivers to enhance children's learning and development through everyday routines.

For parents who have questions or concerns regarding their infant or child, making a referral for EI Services is essential. One simple referral can unlock a variety of programs that offer support to families.

To begin the process, please call 1-800-755-4769, or visit our website to complete a referral form:



In This Issue

Early Intervention	1
Superintendent's Message	2-3
Honoring DSPs	4
BusRight	5
Fairhaven School	6-7
Car Seat Safety	8

Funding the Future: Progress at the State Level Makes Local Action Even More Critical

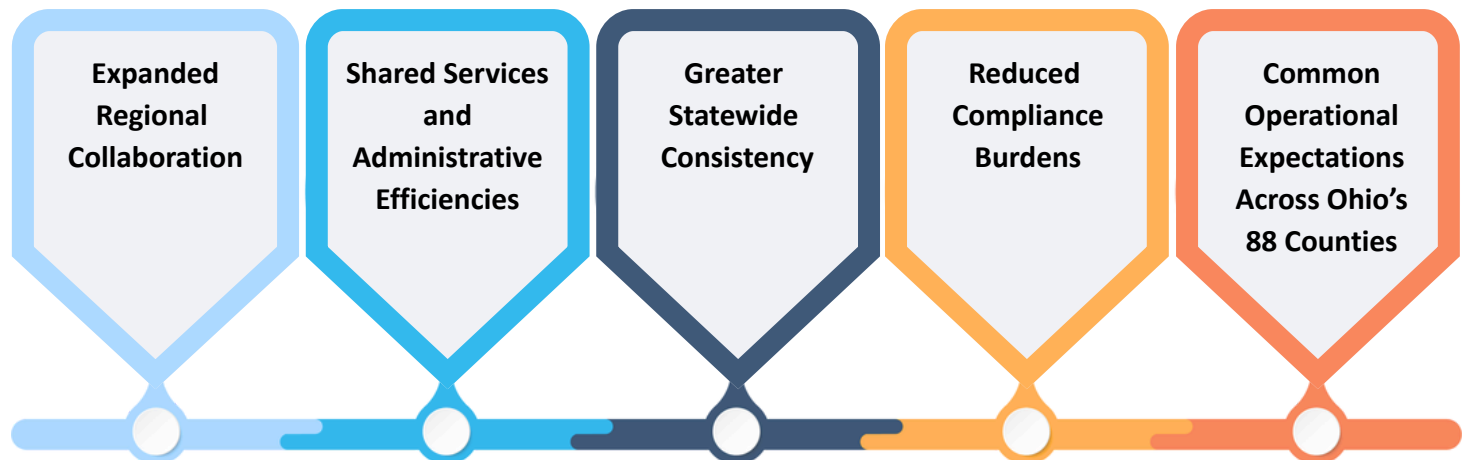


Ohio's Funding the Future initiative continues to gain momentum as county boards of developmental disabilities work together to develop a comprehensive strategy for strengthening the long-term sustainability of Ohio's DD system.

The goal is to develop a single, comprehensive strategy that combines meaningful county board commitments with the long-term funding reforms necessary to create a more sustainable system. Once finalized, the strategy will be presented to Ohio's current and future administration and members of the General Assembly.

Moving Toward Greater Statewide Consistency

As this work progresses, county boards are exploring opportunities to strengthen “statewideness” without unnecessary restructuring of the county board system. Areas under consideration include:



Each potential reform is being evaluated based on several important questions:

- Will it improve statewide consistency?
- Will it strengthen the long-term sustainability of the DD system?
- Can it reasonably be implemented across all 88 counties?
- And, importantly, will it strengthen the county board system rather than create greater opportunities for services to be shifted to private managed care organizations?

Why This Work Is Even More Important for Trumbull County

The urgency of Funding the Future has become even more apparent locally following action by the Trumbull County Commissioners to increase the Homestead Exemption.

While this action may provide property tax relief for eligible homeowners, it also reduces the property tax revenue available to the Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

As I have described previously, the Trumbull County Board of DD already operates primarily on fixed-dollar levies, meaning that rising property values do not automatically translate into additional revenue. At the same time, the cost of providing essential services continues to increase because of growing demand, Medicaid waiver costs, provider rates, and workforce challenges.

For TCBDD, this reinforces why thoughtful, long-term reform at the state level is so critical. Local property taxpayers cannot be expected to absorb every increase in the cost of a statewide Medicaid-funded service system. When state policy decisions and Medicaid rates drive significant increases in local costs, the State of Ohio must be an active financial partner in ensuring that services remain sustainable.

A Critical Opportunity

Funding the Future represents an opportunity to address these challenges before they become a crisis. Rather than waiting until financial pressures force difficult and disruptive decisions, we are working proactively to modernize operations, improve consistency and efficiency, and establish a more sustainable partnership with the State of Ohio.

The work underway today will shape the future of developmental disabilities services for generations. With increasing financial pressures at both the state and local levels, the need for a comprehensive and sustainable solution has never been more important.

The Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities will continue to follow and participate in these statewide discussions while advocating for reforms that protect the services and supports individuals and families depend upon every day.

As always, thank you for your continued support and partnership.

Edward J. Stark

Superintendent,
Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities



**Department of
Developmental
Disabilities**

Honoring the People Who Make a Difference Every Day



Each September, National Direct Support Professional (DSP) Appreciation Week gives us an opportunity to recognize the dedicated individuals who provide essential support to people with developmental disabilities. The Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities is proud to join communities across the nation in celebrating our DSPs and the tremendous difference they make every day.

Direct Support Professionals are at the heart of the services we provide. They support individuals in achieving greater independence, developing meaningful relationships, participating in their communities, pursuing employment and enjoying the everyday experiences that make life fulfilling.

Photo: The Trumbull County Commissioners passed a resolution proclaiming September 13-19, 2026, as Direct Support Professional (DSP) Recognition Week in conjunction with National DSP Recognition Week 2026. This event honors the dedication and vital work of DSPs who assist individuals with disabilities. Ashley Handel, Director of Provider Relations for TCBDD, attended to receive the resolution.

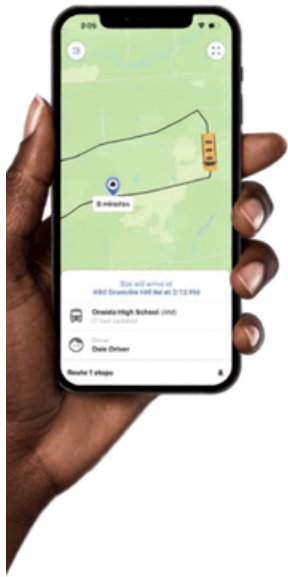
The work of a DSP goes far beyond a job description. DSPs build trust, encourage independence, advocate for the people they support and often become an important and trusted part of an individual's life. They celebrate successes, provide encouragement during challenges, and help ensure that each person has the opportunity to live the life they choose.

Their work also requires patience, compassion, flexibility and a commitment to seeing the abilities and potential in every person. Whether supporting someone at home, at work, at school or throughout the community, DSPs make a lasting impact.

To all of our Direct Support Professionals: Thank you. Thank you for your dedication, your compassion, your patience and your commitment. Thank you for the countless ways—both big and small—that you make a difference in the lives of the people we serve.

During National DSP Appreciation Week, and throughout the year, the Trumbull County Board of Developmental Disabilities proudly recognizes and celebrates you. Your work matters. Your relationships matter. And the difference you make matters.

BusRight Improves Real-Time Bus Location Information



TCBDD Transportation is excited to introduce BusRight, a new transportation technology designed to improve bus operations, communication, and visibility for our families.

What is BusRight?

BusRight is a school transportation management and GPS platform that will help our Transportation Department manage routes and provides real-time bus location information. Our buses are equipped with BusRight technology that allows transportation staff to monitor routes and helps keep everyone better connected throughout the school day.

How does the Parent App work?

Throughout September and October, families will gradually receive invitations to access the BusRight Parent App. Once your student's route is activated, you will receive instructions for getting started.

Through the app, parents and guardians can:

- See the location of their student's bus while it is actively running the route
- Receive notifications and transportation updates related to their student's bus
- Follow the bus's progress along the route, helping families better anticipate its arrival
- Access transportation information conveniently from a smartphone
- Stay better connected when delays, traffic, weather, or other circumstances affect transportation

Please remember: GPS information is a helpful tool, but bus arrival times can still vary due to traffic, weather, student needs, loading and unloading times, and other unexpected circumstances. This is especially important in specialized transportation, where our drivers and bus aides may need additional time to safely assist individual students.

Team Building Moments

The transportation team invited members of our administrative team to join them in viewing the newest addition to our fleet of buses this summer, and experience a ride around the block.



Back-to-School at Fairhaven



There is a lot to be excited about as we kick off the 2026–2027 school year at Fairhaven! Our staff has spent the past several weeks preparing classrooms, completing professional development, planning new opportunities, and getting ready to welcome our students back for another year of learning, growth, and fun.

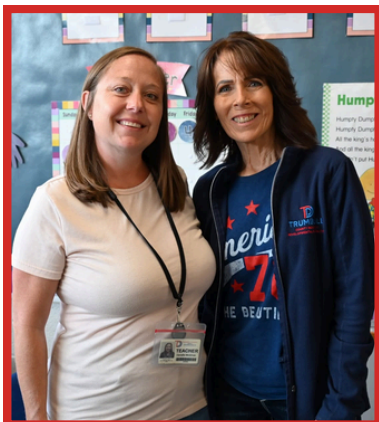
We are welcoming some new faces to the Fairhaven team this year! Amanda Brookbanks joins us as an Upper Elementary teacher, while Kayley Peace will be teaching in our Lower Elementary program. Another new face in the classroom may actually be a familiar one! Bridget Drotar, one of our fabulous Fairhaven bus drivers, has transitioned into a classroom assistant position this year and will be working with Mrs. Kassos. We are thrilled to have them joining our school-age team.

This year, our school-age students will once again participate in music therapy, providing opportunities to build communication, engagement, movement, social-emotional skills, and self-expression through music. We are also excited to continue and expand our partnership with SMARTS. For half of the school year, students will participate in the BEATS program, with programming specifically adapted to meet the unique needs and abilities of our students. During the other half of the year, students will have the opportunity to explore dance, visual art, or theater, again with instruction designed to make the arts accessible, meaningful, and—most importantly—fun!

Beyond the classroom, we have a very fun year ahead! We are planning special events and activities for our students, opportunities to bring families into the building, and events that will help our students connect with and participate in the larger community. There will be some returning Fairhaven favorites, some new ideas, and hopefully a few surprises along the way!

At the heart of everything, of course, are our students. We are looking forward to seeing them learn new skills, discover new interests, build relationships, take on challenges, and celebrate accomplishments both big and small throughout the year.

The classrooms are ready, our staff is ready, and we cannot wait to get started. Here's to an exciting 2026–2027 school year at Fairhaven!



First Day of School Excitement

Students at Fairhaven School are excited to return for another enjoyable year of learning. Here's a glimpse of some of their "first day" fun shared with friends.



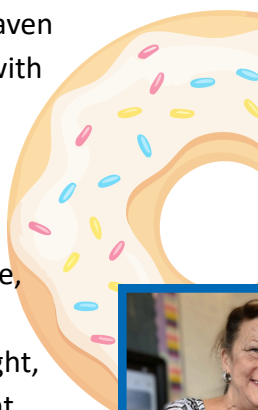
Celebrating "Someone Grand"

Students in the preschool program at Fairhaven School invited loved ones to share donuts with them on "Someone Grand Day".

A Hole Lot of Love

We are a perfect match, it is plain to see,
You are the sprinkles on top of me!
Like a wam, sweet donut, round and bright,
Spending time with you is a pure delight.

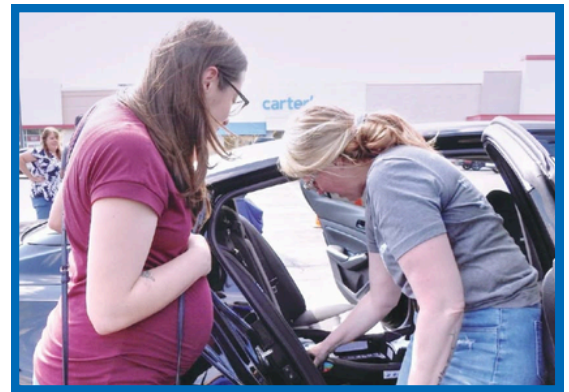
With a hole in the middle and frosting so sweet,
Having you in my life is the ultimate treat.
I loe you whole-bunch, yes I really do,
Happy Someone Grand Day, from me to you!



Teams Collaborate on Car Seat Safety Inspection

Our transportation team, led by Director Jennifer Durno, held a car seat check event this month in front of Carter's in the Eastwood Mall complex. Collaborative partners for the event included Akron Children's, JFS Trumbull County, Niles Fire Department, and Public Health Trumbull County.

For more information on future events contact Jennifer Durno:
330-652-1432



45 North Road, Niles, OH 44446
Return Service Requested