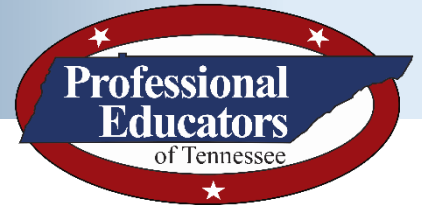


# PRESS RELEASE



April 11, 2016 Online at [www.proedtn.org](http://www.proedtn.org)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## LIGHT IT UP BLUE!

As an organization, Professional Educators of Tennessee teachers led the charge to help children with dyslexia in our classrooms this year. We were fortunate to have great policymakers like Senator Gresham, Representative Pitts, and many other legislators fighting for us. It has been a rewarding experience, both personally and professionally, for many of our teachers, members and staff. There is no greater calling than to teach. There is no better activity for an association than to help policymakers understand what our teachers experience on a daily basis, and assist them in helping our educators meet the challenges they see and get the resources they need.

My friend (and fellow Tennessee native) Candy Alford-Price has made me aware of another emerging and growing issue: Autism. Autism is one of the fastest-growing developmental disorders in the United States. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that a large number of children are living with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and they need services and support now and as they grow into adolescence and adulthood.

For a number of reasons, autism prevalence figures are growing. The definition of autism has been expanded along with a better diagnosis of the disorder. We know boys are nearly five times more likely than girls to be autistic. The CDC released data on the prevalence of autism in the United States. This surveillance study identified 1 in 68 children (1 in 42 boys and 1 in 189 girls) have some form of autism. Whether this an accurate assessment or not, Dr. Stephanie Seneff, a senior research scientist at the MIT Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, says that by 2025, half the children born in the United States will be diagnosed with autism. If that figure is even partially accurate, society better begin to prepare in earnest. The Autism Society estimates that the United States is facing almost \$90 billion annually in costs for autism. Autism costs a family \$60,000 a year on average. More importantly, there is no medical detection or cure for autism.

While significant, the data is more than just numbers; it is about real people, real families and our need as a society to address any challenge we meet head on. We are improving in identifying people with autism, as well as accepting them. Imagine the impact we can have on those whose lives are touched by autism every single day. We must recognize that all children are created in the image of God and have potential. However, as a culture, we must make certain that the support and resources they need to realize that potential are available to educators and parents.

### SUMMARY

*As Autism Spectrum Disorder continues to be recognized with increasing prevalence in children, the issues surrounding these developmental disabilities need further attention and research in order to be appropriately addressed by professionals and society.*

Autism is treatable. However, children do not “outgrow” autism. Studies show that early diagnosis and intervention lead to significantly improved outcomes. The CDC believes we must promote early identification of children with ASD. That burden is likely to fall on pediatricians, children’s hospitals and ultimately on public schools. We will need to design services for children and families affected by ASD, and increase professional learning and development opportunities for the professionals who provide services. Research will continue to be needed in this emerging field, and policies need to be developed that promote and align with improved outcomes in health care and education for individuals with ASD.

April is Autism Awareness Month. Blue is the color used to identify Autism advocacy. World Autism Awareness Day, observed on April 2, was adopted by the United Nations to shine a bright light on autism as a growing global health priority. The objective is to increase knowledge and understanding of autism; recognize the talents and skills of people with autism, and; generate awareness to the needs of all people with autism. We agree: *Light it up Blue!*

#####

**JC Bowman is the Executive Director of Professional Educators of Tennessee**, a non-partisan teacher association headquartered in Brentwood, Tennessee. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided that the author and the association are properly cited. For more information on this subject or any education issue please contact Professional Educators of Tennessee. To schedule an interview please contact [Audrey Shores, Director of Communications](#), at 1-800-471-4867 ext.102.