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To: Shawn Petri, Superintendent

From: Melisa Akers, Director of Special Education

Date: June 3, 2026

Subject: Special Education Update

A Message from our Director, Melisa Akers:

May was a busy and rewarding month! I had the opportunity to travel to each of our local districts to observe our ancillary staff working with students. This is truly one of my favorite parts of my job. There is nothing more rewarding than seeing students learn new skills, gain confidence, and make progress toward their goals. I continue to be impressed by the dedication and expertise our staff demonstrates every day, and I am incredibly proud of the positive impact they are making in the lives of students across our districts.

As we move into the final weeks of the school year, my focus has shifted to several important end-of-year responsibilities, including:

- Preparing billbacks for ancillary services provided to local districts
- Meeting with staff to complete end-of-year evaluations
- Recruiting and hiring staff for the 2026-2027 school year
- Determining staffing needs and service allocations for each district for next year

While this time of year is busy, it is also an exciting opportunity to reflect on our successes and prepare for another great year of supporting students and districts.

A Message from our Compliance Monitor, Nicole Grace:

Over the past month, I have continued to complete staff evaluations and support constituent districts with end-of-year responsibilities, including state reporting requirements and planning for student transitions. Significant time has also been spent in districts assisting teams with programming and service planning for the 2026–2027 school year to ensure student needs are appropriately addressed.

Melisa and I attended the second Seclusion and Restraint Summit, which provided valuable updates and discussion regarding best practices, compliance, and student-centered supports. Additionally, we also conducted interviews for open School Social Worker and Special Education Supervisor positions as we continue efforts to recruit and retain qualified staff.

To expand opportunities for students across the region, representatives from the ISD met with the Special Olympics Area 4 Director to discuss strategies for increasing participation and engagement in Special Olympics programming throughout our districts.

As the school year concludes, the focus remains on supporting districts with compliance activities, staffing needs, program planning, and ensuring a smooth transition into the upcoming school year.

A Message from our Transition Coordinator, Kerri Smitz:

Over the last several months, students from the C.O.O.R. ISD have been preparing for the Michigan Rehabilitation Services Summer program. This past Monday, the Job Club began in person and via Zoom. I teach four sessions focusing on job searching, interview preparation, timesheets, work permits, and workplace etiquette, to name a few topics.

The program will run for five weeks from June 22nd to July 23rd, Monday through Thursday. The students are placed at Hartwick Pines, North Higgins Lake State Park, South Higgins Lake State Park, Rifle River Recreation Area, and the Village of Roscommon. This year's program has 24 students, 5 job coaches, and one supervisor (myself).

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) partner to offer paid summer work programs designed for students with disabilities. Participants gain hands-on experience in state parks, nature centers, or wildlife areas while developing crucial work-readiness and life management skills.

Key Program Details

- Purpose: Provides students with disabilities a paid, real-world summer work experience in natural resources and state parks.
- Target Audience: Typically high school students or young adults preparing to transition into the workforce.
- Responsibilities: Participants assist DNR rangers and staff with duties like landscaping, trail maintenance, cleaning fire pits, and registering campers.
- Structure: Programs are usually collaborative and local, requiring a referral from a vocational rehabilitation counselor.