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To: Shawn Petri, Superintendent

From: Melisa Akers, Director of Special  
Education

Date: March 5, 2026

Subject: Special Education Update

### **A Message from our Director, Melisa Akers:**

Our department supports local districts (LEAs) by hiring and assigning therapists and other ancillary staff as needed.

While districts are ultimately responsible for staffing their special education programs, the ISD provides additional support to meet their needs efficiently.

#### Increased Demand

- The number of ancillary staff placed in districts has grown from 24 in 2022–23 to 36 in 2025–26, a 50% increase.
- Districts are choosing this model because it:
  - Is cost-effective through billback credits
  - Provides shared staffing for positions that are not full-time
  - Reduces the time and effort needed for hiring, supervision, and evaluation
- This year, LEAs have been actively exploring the implementation of behavior intervention programs and district-level self-contained classrooms.

#### Impact on ISD

- Strong relationships with districts have increased requests for our support, placing added demands on our team.
- To manage this workload effectively, I proposed the hiring of a Special Education Supervisor.

### Primary Responsibilities

- Supervise 36 ancillary staff, including formal evaluations for 19 current staff
- Lead hiring and onboarding of new ancillary staff
- Support staff during complex or challenging meetings and IEPs
- Assist with self-contained programs or classrooms at the district level
- Take on additional responsibilities as workload and needs evolve

### Benefits of Adding a Supervisor:

- Ensure consistent, visible support for ancillary staff in the field
- Meet district needs more efficiently
- Allow current leadership to focus on system-level support while the supervisor handles day-to-day staff supervision and on-site presence

For your reference, attached is the [Special Education Department Organizational Chart](#), now including the new position, which illustrates roles and supervision responsibilities.

In addition to the Supervisor position, we will be posting for a new Early On Coordinator as Michele Cochran will be retiring at the end of this school year.

### **A Message from our Principal, Joe Moore:**

Ms. Hutek's students spent the month exploring the human body through engaging and hands-on learning experiences. Throughout the lessons, students were introduced to different body systems and learned about the important roles each one plays in keeping our bodies healthy and functioning. Ms. Hutek used a variety of instructional strategies to help students connect with the material, including visuals, discussions, and interactive activities that encouraged curiosity and participation. Students demonstrated growing understanding as they identified body parts, discussed how their bodies work, and made connections to their own daily experiences. It was exciting to see their enthusiasm as they asked questions and discovered new things about how the human body works.



Ms. VanCura's students spent time developing important cooking and life skills through hands-on learning in the classroom. During these lessons, students practiced following simple recipes, measuring ingredients, and using basic kitchen tools with support from staff. The activities provided opportunities for students to build independence while also working on communication, sequencing, and cooperation with their peers. Ms. VanCura created a supportive and engaging environment where students could safely explore new tasks and celebrate their successes. Through these cooking experiences, students not only learned how to prepare simple foods, but also strengthened practical skills that will support them in their daily lives.



**A Message from our Transition Coordinator, Kerri Smitz:**

Beginning on March 9th, B-13 data collection will begin. In Michigan, B-13 monitoring refers to the state's review of secondary transition services for students with disabilities under Indicator B-13 in the Michigan State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR).

Specifically, B-13 focuses on ensuring that students ages 16 and older (or younger if appropriate) with an IEP have measurable postsecondary goals in the areas of education/training, employment, and, if appropriate, independent living, and that these goals are supported by transition services and activities.

During B-13 monitoring, the ISD typically reviews:

- IEPs for evidence of measurable postsecondary goals
- Alignment of transition assessments and services with those goals
- Documentation of student involvement in transition planning
- Compliance with federal and state IDEA requirements related to transition planning

It is part of the overall compliance and results monitoring process to ensure students are prepared for life after high school. Nicole Grace and I will be collaborating to complete this monitoring cycle, which is expected to be finished by April 14th.

## **A Message from our Compliance Monitor, Nicole Grace:**

### **Current Focus Areas:**

- **Secondary Transition (B-13)** – Reviewing postsecondary goals and services alignment
- **Timely IEP Compliance** – Ensuring annual reviews and evaluations are completed on time
- **Discipline (B-4)** – Monitoring suspensions/expulsions and procedural safeguards for students with disabilities

### **Monitoring Progress:**

- This is our most intensive review cycle to date
- Reviews include student record audits, staff interviews, and data verification
- Majority of reviews expected to be completed by the end of March
- Follow-up support and technical assistance will be provided as needed

### **Staffing Update:**

- A virtual School Social Worker has joined Roscommon and is providing effective support to students

#### **District Collaboration:**

- Participating in Special Education Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to clarify compliance, review updates, and improve documentation
- Available to districts for consultation on eligibility, discipline, transition planning, and procedural safeguards

#### **March Priorities:**

- Complete monitoring reviews and issue feedback reports
- Provide targeted technical assistance based on findings
- Continue recruitment for 2026–2027 school year
- Maintain collaboration with the Parent Advisory Committee

#### **Closing:**

- This monitoring cycle demonstrates strong collaboration between the ISD and member districts
- Thanks to district teams for professionalism and responsiveness

### **A Message from our Early On Coordinator, Michele Cochrane:**

#### **Playgroups**

During February and March, hearing, vision, and developmental screenings are offered during Early On playgroups. One of the main goals of these playgroups is Child Find—identifying young children who may have developmental delays. Offering screenings during playgroups helps us identify potential concerns early and connect families with the appropriate supports and services.

#### **Professional Development**

Amber Larrison and Amber Akin are currently completing the *Teach Me to Talk Strength-Based Autism Course* as part of our commitment to evidence-based practices. The goal is to strengthen and align strategies used across the Early On team when supporting children with autism characteristics. They will share key strategies with the full team during the May 1st Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting.

