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To: Shawn Petri, Superintendent

From: Melisa Akers, Director of Special Education

Date: September 3, 2025

Subject: Special Education Update

A Message from our Director, Melisa Akers

MAASE Summer Institute

Last month, Nicole, Joe, and I attended the MAASE Summer Institute in Traverse City along with several of our district Special Education Coordinators. Each August, special education leaders from across the state gather to engage in leadership development and shared learning on critical topics in the field.

We are grateful for the dedication of our district coordinators and the work they do to ensure that students with special needs receive top-tier support from highly skilled and well-prepared providers.



Staffing

We are currently fully staffed in all districts. However, some of the vacancies were temporarily filled with virtual therapists. We are still actively looking for in-person speech and social work. Please reach out to me if you know of anyone who is looking to work for an amazing organization and department!

Construction Update

Students officially started school on Tuesday! A huge thank-you to Jared, Melissa, and Tim for all of their hard work this summer to get the building ready. While we were able to open the front of the building, the back portion is still under construction. The main delay is the arrival of new doors, expected the first week of October. Once those are installed, we should be able to secure our certificate of occupancy. Fingers crossed, we'll be moving into the new space in October!

A Message from our Principal, Joe Moore

The 2025–2026 school year is now underway at both the CEC and ATC. Staff from both campuses began the year with a full day of professional learning and collaboration on Tuesday, August 26, at the Northern Center in Houghton Lake. During this time, we also welcomed three new paraprofessionals to our team—Tracy Nicholson, Christy Lewicki, and Shari Vanscoyoc. We are excited to have them on board and wish them every success in their new roles.

On Wednesday and Thursday, August 27–28, classroom teams focused on preparing their learning spaces for students. I would like to extend a special thank-you to our maintenance team—Jared, Tim, and Melissa—for their hard work in moving equipment and furniture back into classrooms. Their efforts, combined with the dedication of teachers and paraprofessionals, ensured that the building was ready for the first day of school. We are all eager to see the completion of the renovation project and look forward to enjoying the final results.

Our staff is thrilled to welcome students back. Both campuses have quickly established routines, with students actively engaged in their learning while also enjoying themselves. The energy and enthusiasm are palpable, and we are looking forward to a successful and rewarding 2025–2026 school year!

A Message from our Transition Coordinator, Kerri Smitz

The Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) Summer Work Program had another successful season. Every student completed the program.

The students from the Village of Roscommon gave the ATC entrance area a facelift the last week of the program.



A Message from our Compliance Monitor, Nicole Grace

Over the past month, we have been busy onboarding new staff to support our students and schools. We are excited to welcome two new social workers and three new speech-language pathologists to our team. Their expertise will allow us to better serve students and enhance the support we provide across our programs.

In addition, we are continuing our work on increasing compliance and transparency through strengthened monitoring practices. This effort ensures we remain aligned with state and federal requirements while supporting schools in meeting the needs of all students.

Finally, we have begun reaching out to our Non-Public Schools to start their annual consultations for the school year. These conversations are essential to ensuring equitable access to services and fostering strong collaborative partnerships.

We look forward to a productive year and appreciate the Board's continued support as we work toward these important goals.

A Message from our Early On Coordinator, Michele Cochrane

Early On Summer Playgroups

The Early On summer playgroups were a great success! The program ran on Tuesdays from June 17 through July 29 at the Grayling Township Nature Park. Each week, 12 to 20 children and their parents participated.

We were proud to collaborate with several community partners, including the Health Department's Maternal Infant Health and Healthy Families programs, NEMCSA Early Head Start, our Great Start Parent Liaison, and the Literacy Hub Coordinator from the Northeast Michigan Family Resource Center.

While children engaged in play and learning, one of the most powerful outcomes came from the parents. Each week, parents connected with one another—sharing tips on sleep routines, potty training, and mealtime struggles. More profoundly, the playgroups provided a safe, supportive space where families navigating new diagnoses could open up, find understanding, and feel less alone in their journey.

These moments of connection and support are difficult to quantify but represent some of the most meaningful outcomes of the program.

Early On Data

Last year (July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025) we had a total of 164 referrals to Early On - 47 WBRC, 42 HLCS, 38 CASD, 28 RAPS, 7 Mio, 2 Fairview. We currently have 46 children enrolled in Early On services.

The FY 2025-26 Early On Federal grant was submitted prior to the July 15th due date.