



Special Education Report

February, 2026

Natalie Fuller – Trisha Hassett – Mark Sly – Jody Pung –
Cheryl Granzo – Angela Miller – Ben Woolston – Kathy Foote

Administrators for Accountability & Program Improvement (T. Hassett, M. Sly, J. Pung):

- **General Supervision Grant Team Updates:**

- The GSM team continues to use information from the District Data Portrait conversations to guide professional learning opportunities, initiatives, and resource development.
- The GSM team and one of our local district special education teams are working together to improve procedures around discipline. This month, one of our team members attended training with MDE on how to complete corrective action to improve policies and practices related to the discipline of students with disabilities.
- File Review data from December of 2025 is available. There was qualitative and quantitative improvement in writing clear and specific Supplementary Aid and Service statements in IEPs. We reviewed 60 IEPs and scored almost 93%. Improved clarity and specificity of these statements leads to improved implementation and ultimately improved outcomes for students.

SAS File Review Data - Percent of Points Earned

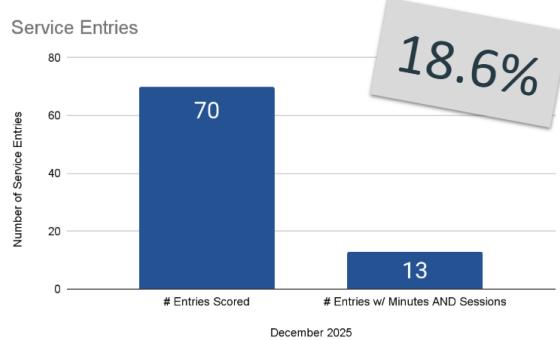


Thank you everyone for all of your hard work on improving our SAS statements!

- MDE LRE Capacity Building file reviews identified that improvement was needed in our documentation of related services in IEPs. As a result, the GSM team utilized file reviews to collect baseline data related to our current performance. In December of 2025, only 18.6% of related services entries in IEPs were written correctly using number of minutes and number of sessions. We set a goal for 75% of related service entries to be written this way by March of 2026. The GSM team trained all ancillary staff to enter service times this way in January. Local district special education staff will receive training in February.



ICISD File Review Results - Baseline



- The GSM team is working through a desk audit with MDE to review procedures related to the discipline of students with disabilities, specific to Hispanic/Latino descent.
- Based on 24-25 data, two local districts were 100% compliant with their IEP timelines. The other 3 were greater than 95% compliant. The GSM team will be partnering with them to improve compliance.
- Special education directors and coordinators and ISD admin will attend a training related to Increasing the Use of Personal Curriculums to improve graduation rates.
- **Ancillary Team Updates and Upcoming Trainings:**
 - February 26th, the GSM team will host a virtual SE Teacher PLC focused on Specially Designed Instruction. This is open to all special education teachers across the county.
 - The next Ancillary staff meeting will be on Feb. 19th; our focus will be on improving practices and guidance on the requirements of Prior Written Notice.
 - The engagement consultants have supported 60 cases throughout the ISD, ranging from providing consultation during office hours as well as shoulder to shoulder student focused team coaching.
 - Infinity New User Group met on Thursday, February 5th, to review Infinity Updates.
 - Inclusion Coaches' Training will be on March 3rd.
 - The engagement consultants and their supervisors are attending a START series called Coaching STARTS here. The purpose is to improve and grow a culture and system for coaching.
- **New Hires or Current Vacancies**
 - New Hire: Megan Johnson was hired as an Engagement Consultant. She will serve Freedom Acres and support IEP Teams throughout the county beginning February 11th.
 - Current Vacancy: Two school social worker positions - both are currently filled with substitutes or contracted virtual staff.
 - Current Vacancy: DHH Interpreter



Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Program (B. Woolston):

- Our Engagement Consultants have received 63 requests for support from local district IEP teams to date. This is a very valuable and well appreciated service!

Early Childhood Programs (C. Granzo):

Early On

During the month of January, the program received 32 referrals. Early On staff received their iPads and had training by a peer in one of the AAC programs. Staff have been utilizing technology much more on their visits and introducing it as an option to families to support and augment their child's communication skills. For some children, it is a slow process much like trying to develop verbal speech. For others, it is like we just put their words in front of them and they understand the symbols and the function of it within a single presentation. It has been truly an amazing process to watch. Staff were trained in an overview of introducing AAC to families and the basics of LAMP.

Early On Staff have been challenged by the weather and by the staff members that have been on FMLA. I have witnessed a lot of commitment by staff and parents this month. During January, school was in session but the blizzard raged during the day as staff were driving around all the backroads trying to do their visits. One parent met an Early On staff member on the dirt road and plowed in front of her a path so she could get to her home visit! Another staff member got stuck in a driveway during January and the family was able to push her out. With two staff out and 32 referrals, team members have spoken up and taken evaluations that would have normally been assigned to a different staff member based on location and to help ease their workload burden. I love it when the team puts into practice the motto of the geese—when one flies forward and works harder to let another go to the back for some rest. We all need to do this from time to time. We have one more month and our staff on leave will be returning!

Work at the state level with MARSE rule changes continues, but is in a stage of gathering feedback from the state early childhood directors and special education directors.

Preschool Special Education:

We have made progress with our policies for enrollments with GSRP and HS to assure that children with disabilities are enrolled in general education in a timely manner and that adequate supports are in place in these settings. We have an agreed upon process to expedite the application process for GSRP and HS eligible children and also provide security that the child can remain in their current SPED program as well as provide clear notice within the IEP of how the IEP will be amended if enrollment in a general education program happens. We have written some procedures for serving children with IEPs that reside in a different district within our ISD, however, we do not yet have an agreed upon process for children that reside outside the ISD but are enrolled in general education prek programs within our district. This is something we will need to develop per MDE-OSE guidance before the next school year.



Dolly Parton Imagination Library:

For the month of January, 1997 children received books at a cost of \$4656.52. During the month we received notification of an award of \$4000.00 from the Ionia County Community Foundation for a grant that was submitted in December. A grant to the Portland Community Fund was also submitted this month. In addition, we completed our bi-annual consumer survey and created our year in review newsletter. As was noted earlier, due to the loss of funds from literacy funds that were eliminated by our state legislature this will be a loss of about \$45,000. We will need more outreach to community partners to keep the program viable. The date of our annual quilt raffle and sale is March 28th, the theme is Let's Take a Ride.

Freedom Acres School Programs (A. Miller):

Celebrating Growth, Connection, and Our Shared Mission

Department Updates

The SCI program welcomed two new learners. Staff demonstrated strong enthusiasm and readiness to wrap around the learners to ensure a smooth transition and continuity of services. When new learners arrive, the SCI team convenes in the conference room to review class lists and collaboratively determine the most appropriate plan to maintain compliance with age-span requirements.

As part of this review, two learners will transition from Ben Croel's classroom to Lindsay Seal's classroom, and one learner will transition from Lindsay Seal's classroom to Kate Alcook's classroom. Teachers and ancillary staff worked collaboratively to explore these changes, ensuring that any proposed adjustments respect MARSE rules and maintain full compliance.

The SEI team has successfully adjusted to a new instructional alignment, with Abby Bailey supporting elementary-age learners and Lisa English supporting high school-age learners. This alignment strengthens developmental responsiveness and allows for more targeted instructional planning aligned to student age, readiness, and postsecondary considerations.

Following recent PC training, Lisa and Abby collaboratively gathered and applied information related to content standards, future-focused planning, and instructional strategies that support students in envisioning pathways beyond high school. Their work emphasizes building awareness of careers and future possibilities, including exploration of options such as the Michigan Career & Technical Institute (MCTI).

This intentional focus supports students' educational journeys by integrating academic instruction with transition-minded thinking, ensuring students are exposed to meaningful opportunities that align with their interests, strengths, and long-term goals.

Staffing Updates

Freedom Acres remains **fully staffed**, and we are excited to welcome a new School Social Worker in the coming weeks. We continue to be grateful for the dedication, passion, and spirit of service demonstrated daily by our team.



Highlights of Positive Work by Staff and Students

Stephanie Brown's team recently welcomed a new learner whose parent speaks Spanish exclusively. The team has demonstrated exceptional commitment to honoring family diversity by utilizing translation technology and intentionally learning and recognizing Spanish words to support communication and connection.

The learner resides in the North LeValley School District, and two dedicated Health Care Aides voluntarily offered to ride the IGO transportation with the student. This support aligns with the student's documented need for an aide during local district transportation and reflects staff dedication beyond assigned duties.

Initiatives & Capacity Building

This month, we focused on strengthening our capacity to manage medical needs when nursing coverage is limited. Substitute nurses remain scarce, and our team responded with innovation and proactive planning.

Nurse Rebecca Sterzick and the administrator collaborated to ensure classroom staff have the knowledge and confidence to support routine medical needs, especially when prioritizing the supervision of our vented student. One of our SCI floaters has spent two dedicated days shadowing Nurse Becky to deepen her understanding and prepare for emergency backup to walk beside our RN.

Building this collective competence enhances safety, ensures continuity of care, and empowers staff to support our most medically complex learners—with calm, clarity, and confidence.

State-Level Work & Professional Learning

Rashell Bowerman joined the January SEI staff meeting to present on personal curriculum. Freedom Acres staff welcomed local district partners, with a virtual participation option provided for LEAs. Both Portland and Ionia districts joined the conversation, strengthening cross-district collaboration and shared understanding.

State-Level Work or Involvement

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is scheduled to visit Freedom Acres on Monday, January 27. The visit will include a guided tour and scheduled observations, with each area visited for approximately 5–15 minutes. Scheduled areas include:

- Adapted Physical Education
- Speech / Core Language
- SCI (Team Brown – Preschool through Early Elementary)
- Physical Therapy / MOVE
- Occupational Therapy / Motor Labs

Past and Upcoming Events Showcasing Programs

On February 26, Building Principal Angela Miller will host PAC parents and the Freedom Acres PTO during the statewide PoHI/SXI Lunch and Learn. Participants will share lunch and engage in a presentation by Kelsey Laskowski, published author, parent of a child with Angelman Syndrome, and respected parent advocate.

On April 20, the statewide PoHI/SXI Conference will take place on the Freedom Acres campus and at the ISD Administration Building.



In addition, Angela Miller, Building Principal, and Rachel Selby, Right Door School Liaison, are offering monthly Youth Mental Health First Aid training to Freedom Acres staff. The goal is to ensure all staff are trained and equipped to support student mental health needs in a caring, informed, and proactive manner.

Barriers & Challenges to Address

Winter weather has resulted in multiple school closure days, which creates challenges related to rescheduling IEP meetings, parent conferences, and maintaining consistent routines for students. The team continues to work collaboratively with families and districts to minimize disruption and ensure continuity of services.

PI-OHI & Assistive Technology Department (K. Foote)

Department Highlights

- Contacting other ISD/RESA's to learn more about their purchasing process for their Assistive Technology lending libraries.
- Assistive Technology is moving forward with requesting Lending Library software demos through myTurn and Follotte.
- PIOHI Mentor Rebecca Patrick and Kathy Foote are working on creating a working guide for the PIOHI HCA On boarding process. This aligns with Train the Trainer program through MAASE
- Kathy Foote will be attending the Train the Trainer through MAASE February 19, 2026

Department Concerns

- Training time for ISD PIOHI HCA's when there are not aligned district calendar's
- ESS Willsub shortage for substitutes

Transition Training Sites/MoCI Programs (M. Sly):

- (No Report)

Deaf & Hard of Hearing (J. Pung)

- (No Report)

Upcoming Events

MDE-OSE LRE Building Capacity Visit January 26-29