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*Partners in building full potential*

COLLABORATION INTEGRITY INNOVATION SERVICE ACCOUNTABILITY DATA-DRIVEN

## Board Report — February 12, 2026

- **MDE OSE FAPE LRE Onsite Review:** The week of January 27 saw a multiday onsite review by the Michigan Department of Education's Office of Special Education (OSE). OSE is specifically visiting all 56 ISD's in Michigan over the course of six years to conduct a comprehensive review of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) through its exhaustive Capacity Building and Improvement Effort. A team of six, including the state director of OSE, led this process.

After 17 weeks of planning and material/data submission to OSE in preparation of this review, OSE staff spent four full days in Ionia County visiting all districts, touring programs, reviewing procedures and student data; and interviewing ancillary, general education and special education staff and administration from every district. At its conclusion, the OSE team provided a high-level debrief of its preliminary findings. This included special recognitions, strengths and areas for improvement. A full report is expected to be generated in a few weeks and then a multi-year plan of improvement will be designed with OSE for strengthening and ensuring opportunities for students with special needs to be educated in the least restrictive educational environment possible.

I would like to recognize the individuals or programs cited by OSE for exemplary work:

Brian Babbit, Ellis Elementary, Belding Area Schools  
Natalie Fuller, Associate Superintendent, ICISD  
Ben Woolston, ASD Director, ICISD  
Kara Sylvery, Amy Judd, Jamie McClintock, Ionia High School  
ICISD FAPE in LRE Decision-Making Process  
Autism Education Center, ICISD

The final report will go into greater detail regarding the identified strengths and areas of improvement. I would like to note however some of the key statements, guidelines and observations made by OSE over their time with us.

1. An ISD has the legal responsibility and requirement for "General Supervision" as the direct subrecipient of federal funds from MDE.

2. ISD General Supervision of each of its Local Education Agencies (LEA i.e. School District) includes:
    - a. Professional learning/development and technical assistance
    - b. Data of results and process
    - c. Fiscal accountability and management
    - d. Policies, procedures and effective implementation of evidence-based practices
    - e. Integrated monitoring activities
    - f. SPP/APR/SSIP
    - g. Effective dispute resolution
    - h. Improvement, correction, incentives and sanctions
  3. The responsibility for a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is the direct responsibility of each LEA. FAPE is not the responsibility of an ISD.
  4. Each LEA has the sole responsibility for providing a full continuum of special education services and programs to its students.
  5. An ISD may elect to provide special education services and programs to its LEA's. These services and programs must be identified in its 1751 agreements.
  6. ISD/LEA 1751 agreements should identify programs and services it will offer. Consider the identification of the number of programs, locations, etc. within the 1751 agreement. However, an ISD is not required to continue adding 1751 service providers or classroom programs at the direction or request of its LEA's unless an ISD chooses to do so.
  7. LEA's are responsible for final placement decisions of their students into appropriate services and programs based on the needs of each individual student. An LEA cannot place a student into a special education service or program operated by another LEA, or an ISD through its 1751 plan, without the agreement of the receiving LEA or ISD. (See bullet point 3)
  8. As the subrecipient of state and federal special education funding and the recipient of local special education millage funding; an ISD has the decision-making authority and responsibility to decide how it elects to flow funds to LEAs to meet obligations for providing each district's continuum of special education services and programs.
- **Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference:** On Friday January 16, the winter Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference lowered Fiscal Year 2026 revenue estimates by \$779M and Fiscal Year 2027 by \$1.1B. Lawmakers will have less available revenues to work with in developing the next state budget after this downward revision by officials with the Department of Treasury, the House Fiscal Agency and the Senate Fiscal Agency. Members of the Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference revised downward its projected 2025-26 fiscal year revenue by \$779.4 million for combined General Fund and School Aid Fund collections compared to its last estimate in May 2025. The decrease for the General Fund was \$980.5 million while the School Aid Fund was forecast to increase by \$201.1 million.

- **Legislative Update:** There were three recent education committee hearings in Senate Education, Senate PreK-12 Appropriations, and the House Education and Workforce Committees. Although nothing was reported out from the committees, there were some votes on the House and Senate floor of interest as well. All three hearings provide some early insight into the policy and budgetary priorities of key legislators in each chamber for this year.

The Senate PreK-12 Appropriations hearing took testimony from the MSU Education Policy Innovation Collaborative on school finance, seeking to rebut the often-heard statements amongst some groups and/or individuals in Lansing that “Michigan is spending more money on education than ever, but we are still seeing low outcomes.”

The Senate Education Committee reviewed HB 4556 and HB 4557 which would eliminate the writing portion of the Michigan Merit Exam and remove that SAT score from student transcripts. This bill has already passed the House, and we expect it will also make its way through the Senate quite easily.

The House Education and Workforce Committee heard testimony about a package of bills supporting significant expansion of school choice. HB 5310, 5311 and 5312 allow students to attend any school in Michigan with seat availability, and would require schools to share estimated seat vacancies with the state in May, June and September 1.

The House passed SB 495, which allows for certain circumstances in which cell phones may be used by students during emergencies. It was tie-barred to HB 4141 which requires districts to implement a policy that prohibited students from using a wireless communications device on school grounds during the school day. Both bills will be sent to the Governor for her signature.

One bill of interest introduced in the House, HB 5480, would require a school district to accept a student from a neighboring district if certain requirements are met regarding bullying at the home school.