



Special Education Report December, 2025

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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 local district special education leadership continue to work toward creation of Valid and Reliable Data procedural documents.
- The GSM team is planning for winter and spring IEP file reviews. Similar to last year, the focus will be improving the implementation and documentation of supplementary aids and services within IEPs across the ISD.
- The GSM team is developing ISD guidance on Notice and Functional Behavioral Assessment procedures for release by the end of January.

- **Ancillary Team Updates and Upcoming Trainings:**

- The first week of November was National School Psychologist Week. Notes of thanks and gratitude were sent to our school psychology team. School psychologists held a PLC in November.
- School social workers are scheduled for a PLC meeting December 5.
- The engagement consultants have supported 48 cases throughout the ISD ranging from providing consultation during office hours as well as shoulder to shoulder student focused team coaching.
- The Infinity User Group met December 4 to review Infinity updates.
- A webinar to provide guidance and a Q&A related to the 1% Alternate Assessment Cap has been scheduled for December 8.
- Infinity New User Training for any new staff is scheduled for Thursday, January 8
- Medicaid training for ancillary staff will be held Jan. 20.
- Inclusion Coaches' Training will be March 3.

- **New Hires or Current Vacancies**

- New Hire: Raquel Brace was hired as a school social worker. She will serve Ionia Middle School and Emerson Elementary beginning December 8.
- A school social worker resigned as of November 30. Aliana Warren, a contracted virtual school social worker, will fill this vacancy on December 8.
- New Hire: Caroline Barthel is a substitute SLP who will be supporting Belding, SSPP, Oakwood, and Orleans over the next three months. Caroline began on November 17th.
- Current Vacancy: Two school social worker positions - both are currently filled with substitutes or contracted virtual staff.
- Current Vacancy: Additional behavior coach position
- Current Vacancy: DHH Interpreter



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

- No Updates

Early Childhood Programs (C. Granzo):

Early On

For the month of November, the program received a total of 22 referrals.

Cheryl as part of her work with ECAN held another statewide system reform committee meeting in November and recently presented to the MAASE board of directors as well as to the MAASE membership. The group has proposed some MARSE rules changes that they would like to make to improve the overall birth to five special education services in our state.

Preschool Special Education:

The LEA special education directors as part of our preschool services committee confirmed our policies around child find and services for public preschool programs within our ISD and included those in our GSRP contracts. We are waiting on some state guidance around services for children that reside outside but attend public preschool programs within the Ionia ISD. Our next meeting is scheduled for December 15th, we will be looking at FAPE offers within the context of our continuum and providing IEPS that are crafted to support children in these unique settings.

Dolly Parton Imagination Library:

November distribution was 1996 children received books, 52 children were newly enrolled and the total cost for the month was \$4477.50. We did complete the DPIL survey during this month and 90% of the participants shared that they are reading MORE to their child as a result of participating in the program. More data will be shared later.

Freedom Acres School Programs (A. Miller):

Celebrating Growth, Connection, and Our Shared Mission

Department Updates

Our SCI (Severely Cognitively Impaired) and SEI (Severely Emotionally Impaired) classroom transitions are now complete, and both programs have spent the past several weeks centering on relationships, routines, and the specialized instructional needs of learners. This intentional, student-focused approach has helped ensure smooth transitions for everyone involved.

The SEI program is preparing for a transition as our current School Social Worker begins a new professional journey. We wish her well and appreciate her service to our learners.



Our SEI program also welcomed two new elementary-aged students, expanding our learning community. Additionally, a family from our Early On program visited our SCI classroom for our youngest learners—a wonderful connection that highlights the continuum of care and support within our ISD.

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.

Staff & Student Highlights

The flexibility, collaboration, and professionalism across the building were truly commendable during recent classroom changes following the first marking period. Our staff continues to model resilience and teamwork in ways that directly benefit our students.

SEI Team:

- Recertified in NCI: De-escalation and Safety Response
- Demonstrated strong teamwork and consistency through shifts in student composition

SCI Team:

- Engaged in updated **MOVE** training facilitated by Brenda Brown, ISD PT & MOVE Coordinator
- Participated in health updates and medical procedure refreshers led by Nurse Rebecca Sterzick, who visited each SCI classroom
- Embraced reflective conversations and instructional alignment with MOVE during our district-provided professional development day

The commitment shown by both programs reflects our unwavering belief in safe, nurturing, and highly skilled learning environments.

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

We are excited for our case managers and teachers to participate in the **MAASE Paraeducator Bootcamp** in February. This fully funded training offers rich learning to strengthen the coaching, development, and support of our health care aides.

Case managers work side-by-side with our health care aides, and this training underscores our commitment to building strong, knowledgeable teams that uplift each classroom. It honors the essential work of paraeducators and reinforces the high expectations we hold for student learning and staff collaboration.



Celebrations & Upcoming Events

Our dedicated PTO launched our **first Santa Shop**, offering students the opportunity to shop for loved ones at minimal cost. The PTO ensured equity by providing a base budget for any learner who needed support—another beautiful example of our community’s heart.

On **December 18**, we will hold our annual Christmas celebration, featuring:

- Donuts for staff
- Live Christmas music performed by Breanna Sterzick
- Visits with Santa
- A holiday lunch supported by generous donations and our committed veterans

This season has also been filled with meaningful acts of kindness:

- Turkey dinners were provided to families in need, thanks to a “Turkey Angel” and VFW 12082
- Several families have been matched with Christmas Elves ensuring holiday joy and connection

The compassion shown by our partners, families, and staff demonstrates the true spirit of Freedom Acres—community, care, and shared celebration.

Barriers & Challenges to Address

Our high school SEI teacher, Lisa English, continues to collaborate closely with LEAs to clarify credit requirements and support students experiencing credit deficits. She is building individualized paths to graduation or transition goals intentionally aligned to each learner’s strengths and future aspirations.

Our SCI program continues to navigate the high costs of adaptive equipment essential for meaningful access and instruction. We remain grateful for the unwavering support of ISD leadership and generous parent donations. These contributions ensure that students receive the tools, resources, and mobility aids they deserve.

Collaboration remains the cornerstone of our success—within our staff, across programs, and with our families and community partners.

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

Department Highlights

- The PIOHI Department welcomes Michaela Tameling to our team. She is assigned to a classroom in the Belding Early Childhood Center.
- Assistive Technology is moving forward with the development of an Assistive Technology Lending Library. The collection will include a range of tools and devices—from high-tech solutions to low-tech support to meet diverse student needs. The ISD Technology Department is partnering with us to help update and organize the lending library, ensuring that it is accessible, current, and easy to use.

Department Concerns

- The PIOHI Department has one full time position in Saranac.



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

- **Transition Services**

Our students will visit MCTI with our local districts in January.

Stepping Forward students will visit Emerson Elementary on December 17th to deliver gifts to the preschool classroom.

- **MoCI**

We will hold our Christmas party for students on December 17th at the ISD.

Deaf & Hard of Hearing (J. Pung)

- Our DHH teacher specialist, Charity Last partnered with Michigan's Resources for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students to help our student build virtual connections across the state. This month, one of our Oakwood students in Portland had the exciting opportunity to participate in an event called "Let's Get Together" where they joined other DHH students from around the state in educational games and connection building activities, and our student even won a prize!
- We have one open position for a full-time interpreter at Bulldog Beginnings.

Upcoming Events

December 16, 2025 - 3rd Annual Jingle Mingle Christmas Party