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To: Shawn Petri, Superintendent

From: Melisa Akers, Director of Special Education

Date: October 1st, 2024

Subject: Special Education Department Update

## A Message from our Director, Melisa Akers

I'd like to take a moment to congratulate Joe Moore on successfully completing the college courses required to obtain his Supervisor of Special Education approval from the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). Joe is now fully credentialed as a principal for a center-based program.

I also want to recognize Nicole Grace, who has completed her coursework for Director of Special Education approval through MDE. But that's not all—she was accepted into Western Michigan University's doctoral program and began her studies this month! In just a couple of years, we'll be calling her Dr. Grace!

I'm incredibly proud of both of them; they are valuable assets to our ISD, and I feel fortunate to work alongside them.

On another note, our SCI teacher at the CEC, Hannah VanCura, welcomed a healthy baby boy on September 24th! His name is Corey Joseph Eugene VanCura, weighing in at 8 lbs 4 oz and measuring 20 ½ inches long.



## A Message from Joe Moore, School Principal

September was an action-packed month at the CEC & ATC. Students in Ms. Angie's ATC classrooms have been diligently working at their job sites throughout the community. We are incredibly grateful to the businesses that have partnered with us, providing our students with

the opportunity to learn valuable vocational skills. A special thank you to our Employment Placement Specialist, Kerri Smitz, who, alongside classroom teacher Angie Stern, coordinates the work-based learning programs for our ATC students.

Additionally, classrooms celebrated Constitution Day on September 17th. Students across all classes learned about the significance of the Constitution and its impact on shaping our nation. Ms. Pat made the day especially memorable by bringing in costumes and wigs, allowing her students to dress up as our Founding Fathers while they signed their own copies of the document. A great time was had by all!



The Gerrish Township Fire Department will visit the CEC on October 9th for their annual Fire Prevention Day presentation. This is a favorite event for students, who learn important safety tips for handling fires at home and school. They'll also have the chance to see the firefighters' equipment and explore a couple of fire trucks.

Additionally, Picture Day for CEC and ATC students is scheduled for October 11th.

We're excited for a fun and eventful October!

## **A Message from Nicole Grace, Special Education Technical Assistance**

We were excited to host Emily Rubin from the Northern Autism Network at Kirtland on October 1st. Emily, a Speech Language Pathologist and co-author of the SCERTS Model, Inc., shared insights on social communication, emotional regulation, and transactional support. Her presentation emphasized social-emotional engagement and provided invaluable strategies for building connections with all students, especially our autistic learners.

In addition, we are making great progress in revitalizing our Parental Advisory Committee (PAC) for the 2024-2025 school year. We're thrilled to welcome several returning parents from local districts, along with new members eager to serve as vital resources for families in their communities. Their involvement will be crucial as we prepare for monitoring of Least Restrictive Environments, and we look forward to their growth and collaboration with our department.

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

We currently have 55 students enrolled. In the first quarter of FY 2024-25 (July to September), we received 45 new referrals: 16 from WBRC, 10 from CASD, 9 from HLCS, 9 from RAPS, 1 from Mio-AuSable, and none from Fairview.

The Fall Early On PLC will take place on Thursday, October 3rd, with thirteen providers from all our local districts attending. The team will evaluate their coaching practices in early intervention and identify strategies to enhance their approaches. Jennifer Dakers, Hearing Consultant, and Michelle Garcia, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program Coordinator from MDHHS, will provide training on our Welch Allyn Otoacoustic Emissions (OAE) hearing screeners and share the new EHDI 1/3/6 benchmarks. The EHDI goals are: "1" - All infants should be screened for hearing loss by 1 month of age, ideally before hospital discharge; "3" - All infants who do not pass the screening must have a diagnostic hearing evaluation by 3 months of age; "6" - All infants with hearing loss should be enrolled in Early On services by 6 months of age. Hearing and vision screenings are part of the initial Early On eligibility assessment, and children with identified hearing or vision loss are automatically eligible for Early On. During the PLC, providers will learn about resources like the [Hands and Voices](#), [Guide by Your Side](#) and [U of M Sound Support](#).

Playgroups will resume in October after relocating and setting up in new spaces. The Roscommon group is moving into the CATIC building, while the Mio group is transitioning from the Early Head Start Center to Mio Elementary. The Grayling group will switch classrooms but remain at Grayling Elementary. Each month will focus on a literacy and a social-emotional target.

This year's Early On 54d SSA allocation has increased by \$12,234. Our percentage of children eligible under Early On with Michigan Mandatory Special Education (MMSE) has risen to 16.7%, a 3% increase. We are actively addressing MMSE eligibility by comparing our MMSE rates to the rate of children who exit Early On and later require Special Education services, which currently stands at 32%. Using the MMSE Guidance documents from MiLEAP/MDE, we are training staff to consider MMSE criteria when evaluating children for Early On. Early On Data Reports can be found at [earlyondata.com](http://earlyondata.com).