



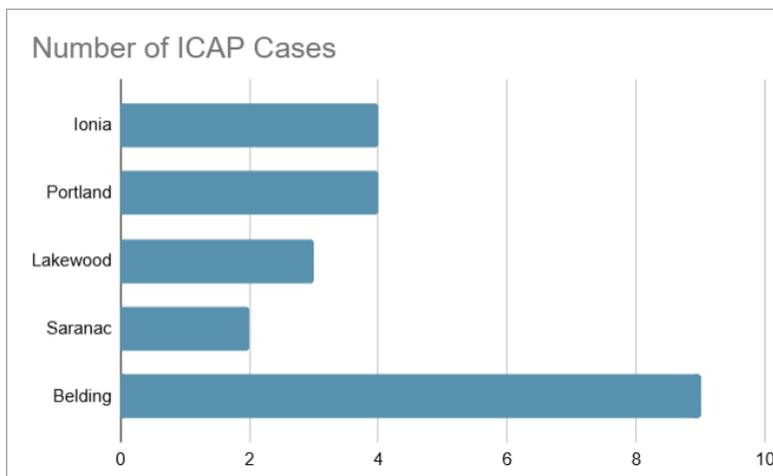
Special Education Report March, 2026

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 hosted a virtual SE Teacher PLC focused on Specially Designed Instruction. There were 9 professionals in attendance with representation from 4 of the 5 districts. Participants were actively engaged in the conversation and expressed interest in the next event. The next meeting will be on March 26 focused on writing high quality goals, unpacking the goal writing guidance from MDE.
- 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.
- The GSM team created a timeline for the implementation of Creating Safe Learning Environments. Step one is the identification of Ionia ISD value and belief statements from all Ionia ISD stakeholders. The second step is to gather input and baseline data from ISD programs and LEAs related to the level of implementation of a variety of best practices related to Creating Safe Learning Environments for all learners.
- The IPS B4 Closeout has been submitted to MDE for review and closure.
- B-13 Checklists have been released in Catamaran. Districts will receive support working through these checklists to ensure compliance and promote stronger outcomes in the area of transition.
- This year, we have had a total of 22 ICAP cases reviewed by the ICAP panel. Below is a breakdown of the number of cases submitted by district





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

- The next Ancillary staff meeting will be on March 24; our focus will be on the use of AI Tools in Special Education provided by a representative from REMC 8. School social workers and the vision impaired teacher specialist will be presenting Tips and Tricks during the meeting.
- School social workers are key contributors to student mental health, school climate, family engagement, and equitable access to services. March 1-7 is School Social Work week. We appreciate the services and support that our school social workers provide daily to students, families, and staff.
- The engagement consultants have supported 74 cases throughout the ISD, ranging from providing consultation during office hours as well as shoulder to shoulder student focused team coaching.
- The next Infinity New User Group meeting will be held on April 16, 2026.
- The engagement consultants held the final Inclusion Coaches' Training of the year. They hosted approximately 60 professionals focused on compassionate care, coregulation strategies, and behavior scripts. These professional learning opportunities are highly respected and impactful on the practices of ISD and LEA participants and their colleagues.

- **New Hires or Current Vacancies**

- Current Vacancy: Two school social worker positions - one of these positions is vacant and the other is filled with a substitute school social worker.

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

- No Report

Early Childhood Programs (C. Granzo):

- No Report



Freedom Acres School Programs (A. Miller):

Celebrating Growth, Connection, and Our Shared Mission

Department Updates

The SCI (Severely Cognitively Impaired) program welcomed a new student through an IEP meeting held on Tuesday, March 3. The Freedom Acres team collaborated with the Early On team to support a learner with complex medical needs and to develop a prescriptive plan for specially designed instruction during homebound services. Feedback received following the meeting, including communication from the parent, affirmed the team's empathetic approach and strong educational focus in supporting the student and family.

The SEI (Severely Emotionally Impaired) high school case manager, Lisa English, partnered with a transition specialist to coordinate an upcoming field trip to the Michigan Career & Technical Institute (MCTI). Angela Miller, building principal, and Rashell Bowerman, Educational Consultant with the Michigan Department of Education, will accompany the class. A key objective of this experience is to build positive momentum toward diploma attainment while expanding student awareness of postsecondary career opportunities. Following the visit, students will further practice social and life skills by sharing lunch together and navigating the ordering process.

Staffing Updates

Freedom Acres remains fully staffed, and we are excited to welcome a new Engagement Consultant, Megan Johnson, with assigned time at our school. She has been an asset and is actively engaged with students and staff. We remain grateful for the dedication, passion, and spirit of service demonstrated daily by our team.

Highlights of Positive Work by Staff and Students

The Freedom Acres team has actively supported two homebound learners during the 2025–26 school year. Ben Croel, SCI teacher and case manager, and Brenda Brown, Physical Therapist, have each served in roles that provide prescriptive instruction and ensure the delivery of FAPE to our homebound learners.

Stephanie Brown, SCI teacher, also graciously stepped forward to facilitate an IEP that not only met compliance requirements, but also reflected deep care and empathy for a family navigating a complex medical journey with their child. In addition, she will take on homebound instruction as part of her instructional responsibilities.



Initiatives & Capacity Building

Freedom Acres staff will participate in two professional learning opportunities designed to strengthen capacity to serve students with IEPs in a prescriptive and dignified manner.

On Friday, March 13, the SEI and SCI teams will participate in an Ukeru refresher, safety training, and exploration of the Michigan Transition to Independence (MITTIN) project. Ron Klumpp will lead the safety training and support staff in delivering confident, effective responses during building crises. Kristine Gullen, Ph.D., Project Manager for the Michigan Transition to Independence (MITTIN) project, will guide staff through transition supports available through the MITTIN initiative, supported by the Michigan Department of Education and MAASE.

Additionally, Abby Bailey and Angela Miller will travel to Sault Ste. Marie in June to complete Level II Paraeducator Training sponsored by MAASE. This training opportunity will equip Freedom Acres with additional capacity to provide high-quality professional learning for our health care aides.

Past and Upcoming Events Showcasing Programs

Freedom Acres recently supported itinerant staff, SCI teachers, and invited parents in a shared learning opportunity featuring a parent advocate during the PoHI/SXI Lunch and Learn on Thursday, March 26. The vision is to expand this opportunity and offer similar sessions four times during the 2026–27 school year to strengthen family engagement and advocacy.

The Ionia ISD will host the statewide PoHI–SXI Conference on Monday, April 20. Registration for the conference reached capacity by Wednesday, March 4. All SCI teachers will attend alongside staff from the Autism Education Center and ISD itinerant teams. This conference will provide opportunities to network with colleagues from across the state, showcase the work of Ionia ISD, and engage in meaningful professional learning aligned to supporting students in the most restrictive settings who often have the most complex medical, behavioral, and educational needs.

Barriers & Challenges to Address

The needs of our learners in the SCI program continue to evolve as students grow and develop. As a result, adaptive equipment needs remain ongoing in order to match the prescriptive physical and medical needs of students. Equipment such as gait trainers, standers, Hoyer lifts, slings, prescriptive toileting equipment, and augmentative and alternative communication tools are used daily by staff during instruction and care routines.

The cost of this equipment remains high due to its medical-grade design and the limited number of manufacturers producing specialized adaptive equipment. Continued planning and resource allocation will be important to ensure students have access to the equipment necessary to support safe mobility, communication, and participation in learning.



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

Department Highlights

- Assistive Technology is moving forward with Follotte Destiny cloud based software for the AT/AAC Lending Library.
- Design and execute an implementation plan for the MAASE Train the Trainer series to build capacity among PIOHI HCA personnel.
- Partnering with IEP teams to develop and implement individualized fading plans for PIOHI students to promote increased independence when appropriate.
- Working with [Bookshare.org](https://www.bookshare.org) regarding a possible training opportunity for districts

PIOHI Student Highlight



Gabe Dixon is a sophomore at Lakewood High School and he has been inducted into the Lakewood High School Circle of Excellence for the month of February.

This is from the notes from the LPS board meeting:

Gabe has consistently gone the extra mile—both in rigorous academic pursuits and in contributions to the greater community—setting a benchmark for what it is like to excel in academics, service and leadership. Very exciting to see Gabe be inducted for the hard work he is doing at school and in the community. He really is achieving many goals on his own. He works at Manna's with his class, he is in general education classes and doing academics on his own. He is in photography class and they adapted a camera for him to use. He goes with peers to take pictures for the yearbook. He is very serious about his powerlifting class. He knows his routine. He has gained so much independence. He also will be competing in track again this year. He was fitted for a racing chair and may attempt the shot putt. A big Thank you to his IEP team and his assigned PIOHI HCA Danielle Archbold for the work they have done in helping Gabe achieve his goals!

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

- New summer work partnership with Ionia Fairgrounds and MRS for our students within Ionia County



Deaf & Hard of Hearing (J. Pung)

- This month, we welcomed back Hannah Wilson, or DHH teacher, who returned from maternity leave.
- Vicki Ramirez-Smith has transitioned to Bulldog Beginnings to fill the open interpreter position and will fill that position for the remainder of the school year.
- Through funding from the LEAD K Grant, we are now able to provide an ASL at Home Curriculum that will support families interested in learning American Sign Language.
- We are also participating with MDE to receive additional assessment tools, curriculum resources, and DHH book sets through additional LEAD K Grant funds.

Upcoming Events

Personal Curriculum Training- March 12th 9:00-11:00am

AI Training, REMC 8 - March 24th 8:00-10:00am

POHI/SXI Statewide Conference - April 20th

PAC Meeting-Special Education Mediation & SEMS Overview 6:00-7:00pm

PAC Awards Banquet - April 23rd 5:30-7:30pm