

Building Leader Working Conditions Action Team Executive Summary

Here's What

The OPTIMISE Task Force solicited feedback from special educators regarding perceived barriers to attracting, preparing and retaining special educators, including para-professionals, psychologists, speech pathologists, certified teachers, social workers, and other ancillary staff.

The Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) and the Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE) co-lead an action team consisting of PK-12 leaders to examine a set of barriers current special educators identified that are directly or indirectly related to the work of school leaders.

The work initiated with a [Google Sheet](#) that organized the 128 identified barriers (here's what), why the special educator feels it's a barrier (so what), and determine whether they had a nexus to the building principal. To do so, each barrier was categorized within one of the subdimensions within the research based 4 Dimensions of School Leadership framework or noted as unrelated. To further drill down, each barrier was linked to a specific vision statement within the framework that defines the specific knowledge and behaviors expected of school leaders. The next step was to determine the degree of perceived responsibility and/or influence school leaders have in relation to their day-to-day work. Each was labeled, "primary, secondary, tertiary, or limited/no influence/responsibility." Ninety-nine of the barriers were identified to have a nexus to the work of school leaders. Additionally, MAASE linked the behaviors to the Special Education Administrator Standards (CASE) to determine whether or not there was a nexus to the role of special education administrators.

MASSP, MAASE and the OPTIMISE Task Force Members identified key stakeholders to examine the barriers, nexus, level of influence and responsibilities, provide feedback, and then identify actions to overcome barriers special educators face and building leaders have influence to change. The Building Leaders Working Conditions action team was inclusive of a diverse membership (see list at end of summary), including LEAs, ISDs, and PSAs. Membership included central office and building leaders from center-based schools and local schools in suburban, rural and urban schools, ranging in size from 31 students to over 15,000 students. Membership was balanced by levels preK12, as well as gender, ethnicity and race, and geography.

The action team engaged in two rounds of synchronous meetings online, while working independently outside of meetings locally with trusted colleagues between April 1 and June 30, 2023. During each of the synchronous meetings members engaged in reading, writing and discussion about the identified barriers and recommended solutions. Members then identified administrative and/or special educator colleagues to work with individually to identify and prioritize strategies to address and/or mitigate the barriers. Hundreds of practical strategies and activities were identified and documented into the master sheet. The research based strategies and top twelve practices prioritized are published in our recommended [knowledge, behaviors and practices](#) to address barriers to attracting, preparing and retaining Special Educators.

So What

We know that when students are not learning, they are not being afforded powerful learning opportunities. We know that the collective efficacy of teachers is the number one school level factor that impacts learning and achievement, followed secondly by building leadership. We further recognize that teaching and leading are highly complex and sophisticated and will only improve in a culture of reciprocal accountability that embraces inquiry, equity and strength-based leadership.

Now What

The work product of the Building Leaders Working Conditions action team provides valuable action items and practical input on the content and delivery modes that will lead to greater support to the educators and staff that provide programs and services to students with IEPs. This work contributes data to the work being led by MAASE with the issuance of the 27j budget legislation to address the Building Leader needs for knowledge and skills in this particular area.

Knowing leaders can't lead what they don't know, we believe our best investment to address the identified barriers to attracting, preparing and retaining special educators, is to strengthen building leadership. To do so, we must develop systems of resources and support. It is recommended that districts work with stakeholders to:

1. Adopt a common language and shared vision for
 - Improving teaching and learning for ALL students using an instructional framework.
 - For example the [5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning Instructional Framework](#) that lays out a vision for high-quality teaching and aligns the work of instructional improvement across the school system. The 5D provides a common language and shared vision for teaching and learning, description of teaching behavior linked to improved student learning, summary of research and work of practitioners, and reflects the Instructional Core.
 - Improving school leadership using a leadership framework.
 - For example the [4 Dimensions of School Leadership](#) that illustrates what school leaders need to know and be able to do to ensure that each student, particularly those furthest from justice, has a school experience that prepares them for a limitless future. The 4D framework integrates the research base on instructional leadership with research on culturally responsive leadership, equity leadership and social justice leadership. The framework offers a set of vision statements and guiding questions to help lead for student experiences and outcomes that are socially, emotionally and academically meaningful for every child.
 - Improving special education services using a specific frameworks for
 - Paraprofessionals
 - School Psychologists
 - School Social Workers
 - Speech and Language Pathologists
 - Other Special Educators
2. Provide building leaders initial and follow-up training specific to the identified frameworks, IDEA, FAPE, inclusive leadership and specially designed instruction, and related special education topics, including legal foundations, programming and services, discipline, communication and partnering with parents and advocates, etc.

Additionally it is recommended that state policy makers fund or utilize current funding for:

3. Development and implementation of modules for building leaders specific to IDEA, FAPE, inclusive leadership and specially designed instruction, and related special education topics, including legal foundations, programming and services, discipline, communication and partnering with parents and advocates, etc. Furthermore, we recommend the foundational work from this action team be used by the recipients of the one-time \$5 million SAF allocation of the Special Education Capacity Building (section 27j) "to provide personnel with training on special education processes, including evaluations, instruction, legal requirements, and other topics" to strengthen special education knowledge and skills of building leaders.

4. Costs associated with providing all teachers, building leaders and central office administrators a mentor/coach that meet state mentor/coach standards for each of their initial 3 years of practice, as well as those rated less than effective. We recommend a change in MDE interpretation, or the boilerplate of the Mentoring Grants (Section 27h), to allow for \$3000 per educator annually of the \$25 million SAF “for mentoring to support and retain new teachers, school counselors, and administrators and improve their instructional practices.”

Building Leaders Working Conditions Membership

- Rural
 - Elementary (Admin and Teachers):
 1. Sandy Hargreaves (AP Larson Elementary) shargraves@harrisonschools.com (Former SE teacher in Clare)
 2. Amy Peterson (Mackinac Island School District PreK12 Principal/Supt) apeterson@eupschools.org
 3. Tawny Hisscock, Atlanta Elementary, Principal thisscock@atlantaschools.us north di
 - Middle Level (Admin and Teachers):
 1. Brad Hale (Brown City, JR/SR HS Principal) bhale@browncityschools.org
 2. CJ VanWieren (Whitehall Middle School, Principal) cjvanwieren@whitehallschools.net
 3. Brent Jandron (Oakridge MS/HS Assistant Principal), bjandron@oakridgeschools.org
 - High School (Admin and Teachers):
 1. Cheryl Price, Concord High School, Principal Cheryl.Price@concordschools.net
 2. Sarah Allen, Grayling High School, Principal sallen@casdk12.net
 3. Todd Simmons, Cedar Springs High School, Principal todd.simmons@csredhawks.org
 - Central Office:
 1. Lou Steigerwald, Norway-Vulcan Area Schools, Superintendent lsteigerwald@nvknights.org
 2. Carol Greilick (NorthWest Ed, Special Education Director), cgreilick@northwested.org
- Suburban
 - Elementary:
 1. Kristina Tepper (Principal, Havel Elementary, UCS) Kristina.Tepper@uticak12.org
 2. Jack Dodd (Principal, Maple Lane Elementary, Macomb ISD) jdodd@misd.net
 3. RosaLeigh Johnson (Principal Walled Lake Schools), rosaleighjohnson@wlcsd.org
 - Middle Level:
 1. William Jones (Hillside MS, Northville) joneswi@northvilleschools.org
 2. Jacqueline Goosen (Adaptive PE teacher at Macomb ISD center based program) presidentmift2144@gmail.com
 3. Sid Bailey IV (Portage West Middle School, AP) sbailey@portageps.org
 4. Kimberly Hodsdon (Malow Jr HS, Principal) Kimberly.Hodsdon@uticak12.org
 - High School:
 1. Nicole Carter (Novi, Principal) nicole.carter@novik12.org
 2. Vernon Burden (Lake Orion, Assistant Principal) Vernon.Burden@lok12.org
 3. Gina Schmitt (Grand Haven High School, AP) schmittg@ghaps.org
 - Central Office:
 1. Christina Hinds (Deputy Superintendent, Northview) chinds@nvps.net
 2. Sue Toth, (Special Education Director, South Lyon Schools) toths@slcs.us
 3. Bradley Paddock, (Assistant Superintendent, Talent Development Farmington) bradley.paddock@fpsk12.net

- Urban
 - Elementary:
 1. Todd Jones, (Pine Grow Learning Center, Principal KISD / Grand Rapids Public Schools, Principal ToddJones@kentisd.net)
 - Middle Level:
 1. Kenyatta Hill-Hall, Grand Rapids University Preparatory Academy (6-12) HillK@grps.org
 2. Amy Hendry, Carter Middle School, WCSD HendryA@wcskids.net
 - High School:
 1. Heyam Alcodray (Dearborn, Principal Fordson HS) alcodrh@dearbornschools.org
 2. Val Boggan, Kalamazoo Central, Principal bogganva@kalamazoopublicschools.net
 3. Lance Sumpter, Flint Beecher High School, Principal lsumpter@beecherschools.org
 - Central Office
 1. Rukshana Ilahi (GRPS, Special Education Director) ilahir@grps.org
 2. Crystal Cutler (Ingham ISD/Lansing, Special Education Director), crystal.cutler@inghamisd.org