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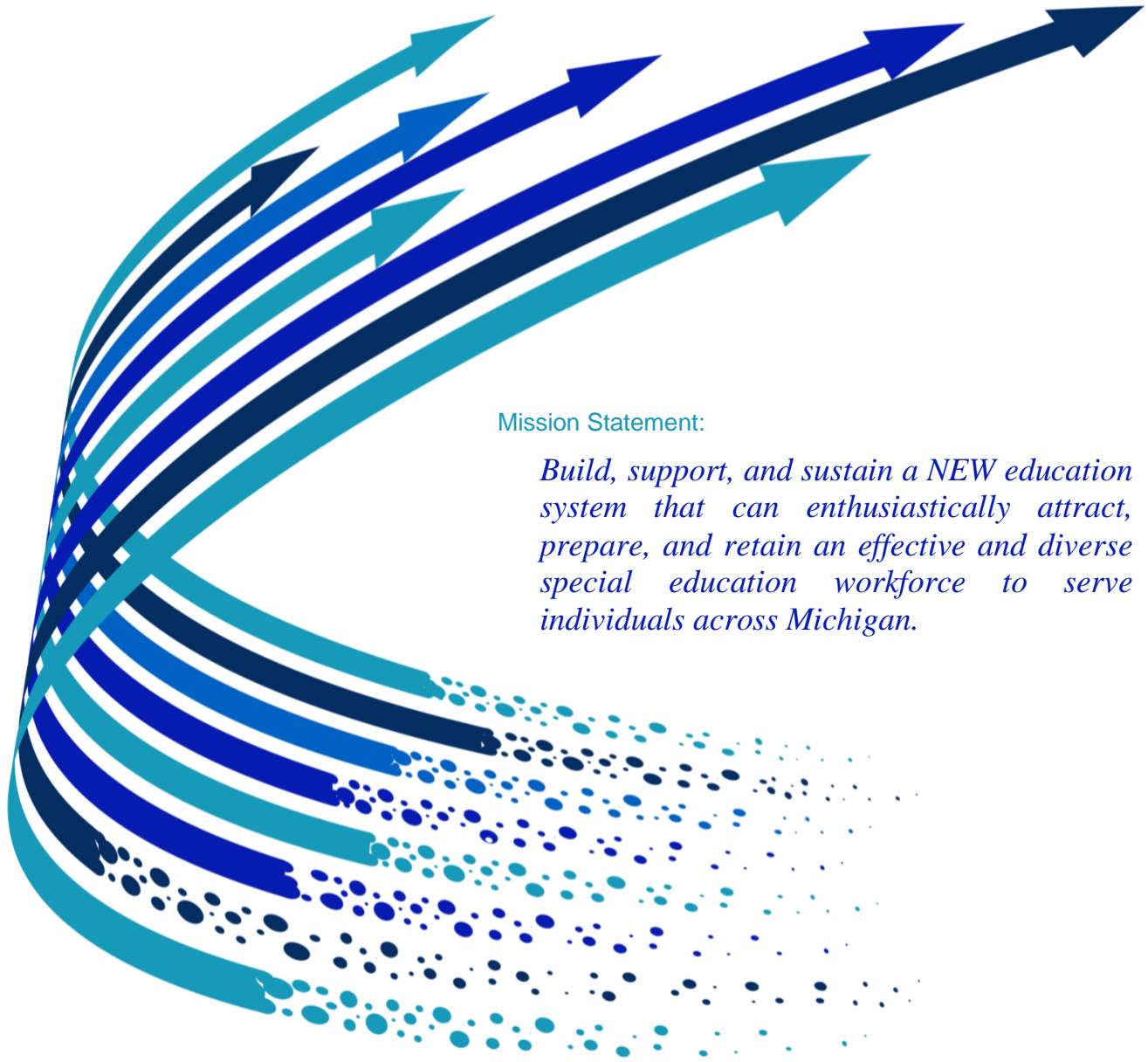
RETAIN



# OPTIMISE

OPENING THE PIPELINE OF TALENT  
INTO MICHIGAN'S SPECIAL EDUCATION

ENERGY INTO ACTION



Mission Statement:

*Build, support, and sustain a NEW education system that can enthusiastically attract, prepare, and retain an effective and diverse special education workforce to serve individuals across Michigan.*

## Summary of Work *January 2024*

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## SUMMARY OF WORK TO DATE

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### LISTENING SESSIONS:

#### ORGANIZATIONS/INSTITUTIONS\*:

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- Autism Alliance
- Disability Rights of Michigan
- General Education Leadership Network (GELN)
- Launch Michigan
- Mental Health Workgroup
- Michigan Alliance for Families
- Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE)
- Michigan Association of School Administrators (MASA)
- Michigan Association of School Psychologists (MASP)
- Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP)
- Michigan Association of School Social Workers (MASSW)
- Michigan Department of Education, Office of Educator Excellence
- Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education
- Michigan Education Association (MEA)
- Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association (MEMSPA)
- Michigan Speech-Language Hearing Association (MSHA)
- Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)
- Special Education Instructional Leadership Network (SEILN)
- Early On, Start Early and a director of the Early On Michigan Foundation Board of Directors.
- American Federation of Teachers- Michigan
- Michigan Council for Exceptional Children

#### SUMMARY OF LISTENING SESSIONS

##### **Identified Barriers:**

- Public perception
- Staff perception
- Out of state transfers
- Certification/approvals/endorsements
- Lack of respect, voice, support
- Working conditions
- Workload/*Case load*
- Pay and benefits
- Retirement security
- Restrictions on bargaining, placement
- Evaluation system
- Decline in enrollment in teacher prep
- Disconnect between current preparation programs and the need at the school level

- Size of some university programs
- Lack of MTSS
- Behavior/violence in schools

**Additional Input:**

- All shared a willingness to help and support the work of the task force
- Role of ISD's
- Positive about the design of the task force including task force leads not affiliated directly with any Michigan organization, MDE or school district
- Substitute teacher crisis
- Diversity of workforce

**EDUCATOR PREPARATION INSTITUTIONS - HIGHER EDUCATION**

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A total of forty invitations were sent to participate in three virtual sessions to gather input and feedback regarding the special educator shortage. The sessions had a total of twenty-one participants from the following colleges and universities:

- Alma
- Calvin
- Central Michigan University
- Cornerstone
- Eastern Michigan University
- Ferris State University
- Grand Valley State University
- Madonna
- Michigan State University
- Northern Michigan University
- Saginaw Valley State University
- Siena Heights
- University of Michigan - Flint
- Wayne State University
- Western Michigan University

**SUMMARY OF LISTENING SESSIONS WITH COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES**

- Barriers:
  - Credentialing/MARSE rules
  - Childcare
  - MTTC
  - Funding for teacher prep programs
  - Length of SE prep programs
  - Tuition costs
  - Teacher wages
  - Induction
  - Hiring of student teachers, not prepared, lack of support
  - Lack of supervising teachers
  - Travel distance to college/university
  - Negative perceptions of teachers

- Staffing at university to offer so many categoricals
- Difficulty accessing funding that is available to students
- Other:
  - Incentives for declarations and completers
  - Recruit from the field
  - Build relationships with locals/ISDs
  - Regional support
  - Grow Your Own
  - Online universities—fewer credits (out of state?)
  - Lack of diversity of applicants
  - Scholarships needed for key positions
  - EO personnel standards

## GOVERNMENTAL BRIEFINGS

- Senate Republican Caucus Education advisor-Anne Blankenhorn
- House Republican Caucus Education advisor-Eva Cline
- Education Advisor to the Governor-Stephanie O’Dea
- Chief of Staff for Senator Polehanki, Chair of the Senate Education Committee
- Rep. Shannon
- Rep. Weiss, Chair Appropriations subcommittee on School Aid and Education
- Rep. Glanville
- Rep. Wegela
- Rep. Markkanen
- Chief of Staff for Rep. Johnson
- Legislative Director for Rep. Paquette
- Rep. Koleszar
- Stephanie O’Dea

## SUMMARY OF LEGISLATIVE MEETINGS:

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- Current focus is on the budget
- Interest in Grow Your Own, student teacher support
- Teacher recruitment
- Want feedback/language suggestions
- Submission of a set of Task Force Recommendations to the Governor’s Education Advisor
- Shared website, budget recommendations
- Received support for our work
- Reviewed all action teams’ work; coordination with Dr. Rice/MDE
- Met with Rep. Koleszar and provided a briefing on our work to date. He indicated his support for our work and will assist us with policy items as we move forward. Indicated that we should meet with Rep. Weiss before Nov. about any budget related items.
- Reviewed the Elevate campaign, expiration of 94d, supply and demand database recommendation, credentialing timeline with Stephannie O’Dea

- **Credentialing Action Team**

- Meeting held with Rebecca and Gina to identify policies and rules
- Action Team Member identification-June 9 with Core Team
- 20 members selected to represent stakeholder groups
- Meetings held in June, July, August and September
- Recommendations for B-5 and K-12 went to go to Core Team Oct. 13
- Core Team discussions completed
- Meeting with Dr. Rice to share initial recommendations re: Credentialing
- Met in February to plan the standards setting work needing to be done regarding the credentialing recommendation; process planning underway with Office of Educator Excellence (OEE).
- Met with OSE/MDE to determine next steps regarding concepts for change; meeting again in April with OSE and OEE.
- Joint meeting held in April with OSE and OEE to discuss timeline for credential and standards work.
- Plan to have an update meeting with Dr. Rice and to have an all day meeting with IHEs/OSE and OEE.
- This work has moved on to OEE currently for the convening of a workgroup of stakeholders per the OEE process to consider new standards for IHE preparation of special education teachers. This work is beginning this summer.
- Draft credentialing rules will be developed and out for public comment after the new standards have been approved per OSE.
- Held a meeting with Dr. Rice to provide him an update about our credentialing recommendation and the work that is going on.
- The first meeting was held on June 16 to give the stakeholders an overview of the process.
- A letter was sent to Dr. Rice providing an overview of this work and the potential timeline.
- Discussion with Dr. Rice, Dr. Harmala, Rep. Koleszar about the status of this work and length of the timeline.
- OEE has begun work on new standards for SE teacher preparation.
- OEE Standards group is very close to having the standards written. When ready, they will get public input. It is anticipated that they will go to the State Board of Education some time this summer. After SBE approval, work will begin on any changes or additions to the MARSE rules.
- *OEE has indicated that the standards are ready to go out for targeted feedback.*

- **School Psychologist Action Team**

- This action team has concluded with 4 recommendations. Two of them have been shared with the core team and will go to the Task Force at the June 30 meeting.
- Co-leaders of this group met with the Task Force and presented 2 recommendations. The first was regarding having a separate budget line for mental health workers in the SMART budget. This has been approved by the legislature at \$15 million along with 1 fte at MDE to support this work. The action team also recommends that an advisory panel be set up to support the work. The second recommendation was regarding increasing IHE school psychology programs including online options. The Task Force approved moving these recommendations forward.

- A third recommendation from this group was approved by the task force related to yearly bonuses for nationally certified school psychologists. This recommendation will be posted to the website soon.
  - We will move these recommendations to the legislature for consideration in the next budget cycle.
  - *We are working with MAASE, SEILN, MASP and our lobbyist to make recommendations to the legislature regarding funding for additional school psych programs in the state.*
- **Paraeducator Action Team**
    - This action team has commenced their work by holding focus group sessions to hear from the field around the barriers to attracting, preparing and retaining paraeducators.
    - The co-leads held a Paraeducator Summit on June 23 to hear more directly from paraeducators directly. This work was supported by the MEA.
    - Update meeting held with co-leaders to hear more about this work and talk about next steps toward recommendations.
    - Meeting held with MAASE leadership to consider coordination of the Paraeducator Action Team recommendations with paraeducator training MAASE has been working on.
    - This team is just concluding their recommendations which should go to the Task Force at their next meeting.
    - Coordination of the Paraeducator Action Team recommendations with a MAASE workgroup has occurred. It is anticipated that MAASE will pilot training for paraeducators before moving forward with widespread implementation.
- **Building Leader Support Action Team**
    - This action team has commenced their work asynchronously with various principals, assistant principals and special education personnel from around the entire state. Their focus is on the Dimensions of Leadership for building administrators and how they can support special educators.
    - This team has developed recommendations which were submitted to the management team for review. An update meeting will be held with the leads in July.
    - Update meeting held with co-leads to review the submitted recommendations and to discuss what else is needed to move this work forward. Anticipating recommendations for the September Task Force meeting.
    - Began discussion with co-leads and CR Marketing around storytelling about building leader support. Discussion with MAASE around identifying storytellers to videotape.
    - Discussion started with MAASE leadership around the potential for training.
    - This team is just concluding their recommendations which should go to the Task Force at their next meeting.
    - These recommendations were approved to move forward by the Task Force. This work is being coordinated with MAASE and MASSP.
- **Behavior Support Action Team**
    - This action team will meet for 2 days at the end of June and 2 days in early August. Stakeholders have been invited and confirmed.
    - This team met for 2 days in Lansing to begin to address recommendations in this area. They started with developing an ideal vision and then outlining barriers to

achieving this vision. The barriers were then organized in an influence map. The group meets again in August.

- Behavior Support Team will meet August 2 and 3 in Lansing to begin the process of defining next steps and recommendations.
  - Meetings held with the group identifying potential next steps to further refine recommendations with new action teams. Planning meeting scheduled for early September.
  - Action Team leaders have met and begun to outline the 3 sub-action teams that will likely begin their work in January.
  - The January meeting of the sub-action teams is underway with these new teams meeting January 16 and 17.
  - *Approximately 60 people met in January to continue our work on developing recommendations to support schools across Michigan. We have begun the work of outlining the recommendations and next steps in the process.*
- **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Action Team**
    - Co-leaders have been determined. Determining a facilitator for this team.
    - Facilitator has been identified. They are beginning planning for this team's work.
    - The DHH Action Team members have been selected with the team meeting on January 17.
    - *The January 17 meeting was canceled due to weather. It is now rescheduled for February 19.*
  - **Speech and Language Pathologists Action Team**
    - Action Team leader has been identified with planning in the works. Nov. 2 is target date for the first meeting.
    - Invitations are out for meeting on Nov. 2 in Lansing.
    - This team met in Nov. and has completed a draft of the recommendations. This draft went to the Core Team for input. This input will go back to the team for consideration and potential changes.
    - *We met with the leader of this action team about steps to move this work forward. He will take some questions to the MSHA Board to help us better outline the work that is needed.*
  - **Special Education Administration Credentialing Action Team**
    - Co-leaders were identified and began to meet with a variety of perspectives to make recommendations. These recommendations went to the Task Force at their December meeting and approved to move them forward. They should be posted on the OPTIMISE website soon.
    - *Here is the link to the recommendations. We are working with MAASE and MDE about moving this work forward. <https://optimise.education/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/OPTIMISE-Special-Education-Administrator-Recommendation.pdf>*



## **BRANDING**

- Branding Completed – OPTIMISE
- Working on addition to our branding to include our social media and website links.- completed.

## **SUPPLY AND DEMAND**

- Connection with the Governor’s office and the Indiana Department of Education on this data collection in Indiana and need in Michigan.
- Task Force approved recommendation to request funding for a supply and demand system for Michigan. The recommendation has been shared with the governor’s office and legislators in the House and Senate Education Committees.
- Meetings were held with individuals from MDE to discuss how to begin work on this type of system for Michigan.

## **IDENTIFICATION OF PRIORITIES**

- Large Stakeholder group meetings to assist in prioritizing future work-Convening for virtual work beginning October 18.
- Core Team meets Nov. 28 to finalize recommendations for work priorities.
  - To be shared with the OPTIMISE Task Force on Dec. 2, 2022
- January-have begun to set up action teams around Early On, School Psychologists, Credentialing/Standards, Paraeducators, and Principal Support
- Action Teams—School Psychologists have submitted recommendations for review, possible editing and then will move forward to Core Team and Task Force. More information on Action Teams is located on our website. Met with School Psych co-leaders to hear their recommendations. They will work on some more detail for their recommendations and anticipate having some recommendations for the June 30 Task Force meeting.
- Other action teams in the works and beginning to meet-Principal Support, Paraeducators, Behavior Support and just beginning conversation about school social workers.

## **PARTICIPATION IN GELN/SEILN VIRTUAL MEETINGS TO ASSIST WITH COORDINATION OF WORK**

- Monthly coordination by Cheryl-Marie Manson, VanBuren ISD
- Presentation to SEILN by Laurie
- Met with this group on April 26. This was our 4<sup>th</sup> meeting.
- Met with this group to give an update and to hear what others are doing regarding the educator shortage on May 24.

## **ELEVATING THE PROFESSION CAMPAIGN**

- Meeting with Gerri Allen (MSPRA) to begin to outline components of a campaign
- Development of rfp underway

- Discussion underway with a PR firm regarding components of a campaign to elevate the profession
- CR Marketing is developing our website and beginning the work around the campaign
- Video storytelling will be done at the MCEC conference in March
- Website launched—OPTIMISE.education
- Elevating the Profession campaign has begun with video storytelling filmed at the Michigan CEC conference and various other sites around the state. Videos are done with various special educators around the state about their role in the profession and why they love being a special educator. Videos shared on website and Facebook.
- New videos have been made with several posted. We have reached 133,000 people since the postings began with almost 26,000 reactions, comments and shares.
- New pages are being developed with information for many of the different professionals serving students with disabilities.
- Campaign continues with more professions added and more videos.
- Videos continue to be completed. A newsletter was developed and sent to stakeholders for distribution to their respective organization's members. The website continues to be updated. It now contains much information about different special education careers.
- Work continues to grow in providing information and stories for varying special education professions. A partnership has occurred with Handshake to access college students who have an interest in special education.
- As of July 21, we have had over 3 million impressions to our social media accounts and they have led to 23,000 clicks to our website.
- The website and social media continue to grow now reaching about 4 million impressions. Focus on the website has been about providing information about specific professions in special education; colleges and universities that have programs, scholarships and funding, support organizations. Anticipate that our website will also contain job posting information from around the state.
- <https://optimise.education/career-paths/>
- Have had a focus on high school recruitment in the past month. They are developing some ideas to reach out to Legislators when they are in their home districts to do video storytelling with local special educators.
- We continue to have a large number of impressions to our website and social media. We anticipate that in January we will roll out a new feature in which any individual can come to our website to see any job posted for a special education position in the state of Michigan.
- *The job board is up and running providing one place for individuals to search any job in special education that is open. <https://optimise.education/jobs/>*

## **SURVEY REGARDING VACANCIES**

- Survey questions developed in conjunction with MAASE
- Working with MAASE, MAISA and SEILN to finalize development and deploy the survey
- Survey deployed; preliminary results anticipated at the end of November; follow-up likely to occur in early December
- Survey completed; preliminary results determined outlining several areas of very high need. Preliminary results shared with MAASE and the core team.
- Further analysis under way of survey results-CR Marketing assisting with display of data.

- Several displays of the survey data were completed this month.
- Have begun sharing these infographics with groups that we meet with.

## BRIEFINGS WITH GOVERNOR'S EDUCATION ADVISOR AND LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS

- Held on October 29, November 1, 2022 and January 18, 2023
- Meeting scheduled for early September 2023 with the Governor's Education Advisor.
- Met with the Governor's Education Advisor in September. Notes are above in governmental briefings.
- Met with the Governor's Education Advisor in November to discuss data systems, school psych recommendations, the behavior action team, a no cost extension of the 94d funding and a convening of ed organizations.

## BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

- Development in process for GYO, Induction and Mentoring, Supply and Demand system, recruitment efforts
- Task Force has approved; shared with governor's office, legislators and on the website.
- The legislature approved the 2023-24 budget which contained language and dollars for mentoring. OPTIMISE has previously made a recommendation to the legislators regarding the need for high quality mentoring. We will follow up with MDE about how we can support this work. The budget also contained dollars for mental health professionals as a separate line item in the SMART grant. This was also a recommendation from the OPTIMISE School Psychologist Action Team.
- These recommendations will be posted to the website soon.
- Task Force recommendations on our website: <https://optimise.education/recommendations/>

## COMMUNICATION

- Website development-have begun discussion about a website to communicate with ALL stakeholders; funding request made to engage marketing firm to assist with landing page; domain name purchased
- All day presentation to MAASE on Dec. 6- OPTIMISE activities to date and in the future
- Updates given to E-CAN
- Discussion with Talent Together around GYO work
- Website development is underway
- Meeting held with Disability Rights of Michigan to give them an update
- Website launched
- Newsletter under development
- Looking at contracting with someone to assist in communication with legislators. This person will begin attending our core team meetings for briefings that can be shared with legislators.
- Matt Kurta, Karoub Associates, will be working with us to assist with communication with legislators.

- The first newsletter has been sent to Task Force, Core Team members and several other stakeholders. We will continue to add people to the newsletter distribution list.
- Presentation was made to SEAC on June 7 to provide their membership with an update on our work.
- Provided an update to Dr. Rice on our work to date.
- Update meetings were held with Disability Rights of Michigan and the Autism Alliance of Michigan.
- Met with Dr. Rice and Dr. Harmala to provide an update. Our first meeting with Dr. Harmala in her new role at MDE.
- Met with Rep. Koleszar.
- A presentation was made to SEAC in October.
- OPTIMISE participated in a virtual meeting with the Michigan Health Council.
- OPTIMISE met with leadership from Growing Michigan Together.
- We also had update meeting with Disability Rights of Michigan and the Autism Alliance.
- A presentation was made to the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services with the United States Department of Education about our Elevate the Profession campaign.

## **FUTURE ACTIVITIES**

- Follow up workgroup to be convened to continue future work related to the credentialing recommendations
- Core Team to make recommendations to the task force regarding prioritized barriers-completed
- RFP for campaign to change the perception of being a special educator
- New Action Team planning underway-OPTIMISE Lead and Project Manager have developed a list of potential future action teams to roll out over the next few months.
- Beginning development of action teams around SE Administrator credentialing, DHH, SSW and SLPs. This work continues in the planning stages.
- Leads identified for SLP and DHH Action Teams. Planning for those teams have begun. We anticipate that the SLP Action Team will hold its first meeting on Nov. 2.
- Just started discussion on an action team around school social workers. SE Administrative group has begun planning and plan to meet in the near future. Perspectives have been identified.
- OPTIMISE is working on a plan a convening with other education organizations to discuss shared interests.
- Looking at the potential of convening a new action team around working conditions/paperwork.
- OPTIMISE met with individuals at MDE to consider looking at a data system that would address supply and demand of school personnel.
- *Work is moving forward around a convening of education organizations to discuss shared interests regarding special education. We are hoping for a date in March for this meeting.*
- *We are beginning discussions on action teams around paperwork reduction and caseload/workloads.*

## **TASK FORCE**

- Document completed to outline task force, core team and action teams' role and composition

- Shared with core team
- Invitations sent to Task Force member organizations and other required members
- To date, 20 Task Force members confirmed
- First meeting held Dec. 2 from 9-11; update provided on our work. Approval given of budget recommendations around GYO, Induction and Mentoring, Supply and Demand system, PR campaign around elevating the profession.
- Meeting held March 31. Updates were provided to the task force.
- Next meeting is June 30.
- The Task Force met on June 30. They heard a presentation from the school psychologist action team and approved their recommendations.
- Next meeting is Sept. 29.
- Meeting held on Sept. 29. A recommendation from the School Psychologist Action Team was approved along with adding an additional meeting on Oct. 20 to consider some additional recommendations.
- A Task Force meeting was held on December 15. Information was shared around our website and social media, our presentation to OSERS, action team work. The Task Force also provided input about OPTIMISE hosting a convening of education organizations. We discussed the paraeducator training and the MAASE pilot. Action was taken on the SE Administrator credentialing recommendations.

## **TASK FORCE MEMBERS\***

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**Shailee Patel** - LEA

**Earl Wiman** - MEA/MFT

**Tina Kerr** - MASA

**Abby Cypher** - Executive Director - MAASE

**John Severson** - MAISA

**Colin Ripmaster** - MASSP

**Kanika Littleton** - Michigan Alliance for Families

**Teri Pettit** - SEAC

**Rachel Toloday** - Student

**Joe Lubig** - IHE

**Rebecca McIntyre** – MDE

**Stephanie O’Dea** – Governor’s Office

**Alexa Kramer** – Small Business Association

**Renee Brunette** - Launch Michigan

**Jennifer Gard** – Parent

**Sarah Robinson** - Parent

**Lauren Mangus** - MASP

**Kathy Weaver** – MASSW

**Anthony Strevett** - MSHA

**Cheryl Levine** - S. E. Mediation Svcs.

## **CORE TEAM MEMBERS**

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**Abby Cypher**

Executive Director/MAASE

**Rachel Fuerer**

Director of Special Education/Eastern UP ISD and Director SEILN

**Gina Garner**

Educator Preparation and Accreditation, Michigan Department of Education

**Scott Koenigsknecht**

Superintendent, Clinton County RESA

**Paula Lancaster**

Dean, College of Education and Human Services, Central Michigan University

**Kanika Littleton**

Director, Michigan Alliance for Families

**Dave Manson**

Superintendent/Van Buren ISD

**Teri Rink**

Director, Office of Special Education, Michigan Department of Education

**Michele Harmala**

Deputy Superintendent, P-20 System and Student Transitions, Michigan Department of Education

**Kathy Fortino**

Project Manager

**Laurie VanderPloeg**

Consultant