Behavior Action Team (BAT) Recommendations

The Why:

The mission of OPTIMISE is to 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. To accomplish this work, it was important first to develop a robust list of barriers to attracting, preparing, and retaining special educators. Student behavior quickly surfaced as a key barrier to teacher preparation and retention. For example, a survey from the American Psychological Association (APA) found that ⅓ of teachers reported that they experienced at least one verbal harassment or threat of violence from students during the pandemic. In Michigan, an MEA Educator Survey from September 2023 also found that 81% of respondents experienced verbal outbursts by students that significantly disrupted learning, 59% reported verbal aggression or threats from students, and 49% reported evacuating students due to unsafe behavior. Couple these statistics with the increasingly low teacher efficacy in addressing behavior challenges, and it is clear why student behavior has become a focus in OPTIMISE work. Please access the *Behavior Action Team Recommendations: The Why* paper for additional information.

The What:

Given behavior as an identified need, a Behavior Action Team (BAT) representative of diverse perspectives from both community agencies and educators was created to take a closer look at the barriers related to behavior and identify potential action areas to address these barriers. During the summer of 2023, two rounds of in-person meetings were designed to deeply examine barriers and identify preliminary action areas to address the key barriers. Through a process of group facilitation and influence mapping, this initial group identified three priority recommendation categories: Intensive Behavior Supports, Professional Learning in Behavior Science, & Building Behavioral Expertise. In January 2024, Sub-Action Teams for each of the three recommendation categories were developed. These diverse Sub-Action Teams included representatives from various areas of Michigan (e.g., rural, suburban, urban), with backgrounds in higher education, pre-K to 12th-grade education, and community mental health organizations. They came together in person for a two-day session to develop specific systems recommendations in each of the three categories through the lens of attracting, preparing, and retaining special education professionals.

The How:

Each Sub-Action Team developed recommendations for their area, recognizing that overlap and connections between each group's recommendations would likely exist. From there, the recommendations have been further refined and organized into three broad categories (listed below) with specific recommendations and implementation actions:

- *Large-Scale Required Professional Learning & Coaching*
- *Cross-Agency Connections*

● *Funding Barriers*

While OPTIMISE focuses on recruiting, preparing, and retaining Special Education professionals, the Behavior BAT (Behavior Action Team) recognizes that it **takes a full school staff approach** to adequately address and support behavioral needs in schools. As such, the recommendations for professional learning are not limited to preservice and in-service special educators and are intentionally **inclusive of all school and district staff**. The behavior support action team also recognizes that professional learning without intentional coaching does not translate to changes in practice. As such, **coaching is an integral part** of the recommendations related to professional learning.

Category: *Large-Scale Professional Learning & Coaching System*

Recommendation #1: Michigan Legislature funds the development and delivery of **required professional learning** in behavior science, neuroscience of behavior, and trauma-engaged, neuro-affirming, and intensive behavior strategies to build confidence and competence of Michigan educators and other school and district staff to support students' behavioral needs through a defined scope and sequence for in-service and pre-service learning provided by educator preparation programs. This required professional learning must be documented for initial certifications and, once enacted, certification renewals for school personnel requiring certification.

Recommendation #1 Actions:
A. The Michigan Legislature funds through an RFP the **development of and delivery system for a required behavioral professional learning scope and sequence** leveraging already available state resources (e.g. START, MiMTSS TA Center, Alt Shift), and research on effective behavioral support, neuroscience of behavior, and trauma-engaged, neuro-affirming and intensive behavior strategies for all students.
B. The funded agency **creates a cross-agency committee** to oversee the development and delivery of this recommendation (e.g., MDE, Community Mental Health, ISD, district, Grant-Funded Initiatives (GFI) projects (e.g., Alt Shift, START, MiMTSS TA Center), university educator prep program). This committee, with continued funding, could further develop resources, infrastructures, and support for sustaining this recommendation;
C. The funded agency ensures the required scope and sequence delivery includes **a myriad of access options** such as asynchronous, synchronous, and in-person to meet the needs of all certified staff and provide districts & ISDs flexibility in accessing non-certified staff if desired;
D. The funded agency outlines **trainer requirements** for anyone who would deliver synchronous or in-person training utilizing the outlined scope and sequence (e.g., Behavior Support Coaches outlined below could also serve in that role).

Recommendation #2: The Michigan Legislature funds the development of a coaching system so every school in Michigan has sufficient behavioral coaching to support the implementation fidelity of behavioral principles, behavioral interventions, FBA, and Behavior Intervention Plans. This model must clearly define required professional learning for coaches and outline micro-credentialing requirements and roles/responsibilities to support the application of learning with fidelity in the classroom and other school settings. Inherent in this recommendation is the development of several systems models to fit the needs of the diverse school structures in Michigan.

Recommendation #2 Actions:
A. The Michigan Legislature funds, through an RFP, the development of **a micro-credential for 'Behavior Support Coaches'**, which includes a **behavioral coaching curriculum** to obtain the Behavior Support Coach endorsement or certification. This curriculum could

include the above behavioral professional learning and additional professional learning in behavioral coaching techniques.

    B. The funded agency develops a **cross-agency committee** to oversee the development and delivery of this recommendation (e.g., MDE, Community Mental Health, ISD, district, Grant-Funded Initiatives (GFI) projects (e.g., Alt Shift, START, MiMTSS TA Center), university educator prep program).

    C. Michigan Legislature **funds at least 2 Behavior Support Coaches** for each ISD who would lead their system in building a behavioral support model/structure to ensure equitable access to behavior coaching in each building in their region. To build on existing structures, these positions could be filled utilizing current behavior consultants, behavior specialists, and other school-related certifications (e.g., SSW), including BCBAs or BCaBAs described in recommendation #3.

    D. The funded agency would initiate a **state-level group of funded "Behavior Support Coaches"** to grow and monitor the models of implementation needed to address the array of student behavioral needs.

Recommendation #3: To enhance implementation fidelity of behavioral interventions and FBA and behavioral intervention plans, **develop and fund BCBAs, BCaBAs & RBTs** in Michigan schools. Inherent in this recommendation is the development of several models for providing sufficient supervision for those seeking their BCBA certification that would fit the needs of the diverse school structures in Michigan. Allowing BCBAs and BCaBAs as reimbursable special education services would also benefit the hiring of individuals with these certifications.

Category: *Cross-Agency Connections*

While OPTIMISE focuses on recruiting, preparing, and retaining Special Educators, the behavior support action team recognizes that adequately supporting student behavioral needs in schools requires intentional and systematic coordination and communication with all stakeholders across the educational, clinical, and medical domains. There are several significant, existing barriers to effective collaboration, including, but not limited to, (1) an inability of providers to work collaboratively due to lack of a system or framework across stakeholders; (2) funding and billing constraints; (3) inadequate funding, staff, and space to support intensive services for students in schools; (4) limited access to and availability of mental health facilities and services; (5) inequities in student/family access to supports and services; (6) limited availability of data to accurately depict needs and gaps across systems.

Recommendation #4: The Michigan Legislature or Governor should fund and require a **structured and coordinated partnership system of multi-agency, interdisciplinary clinical teams at the state, regional, and local district levels** with a **written agreement that includes defined roles and a required and funded 1.0 FTE allocation of a Whole Child Coordinator at each ISD or District level.** The Whole Child Coordinator's responsibilities would also include building local capacity.

Within the structured partnership system would be **funding and requirements for cross-agency:**
    (1) Training and coaching, particularly on intensive behavior strategies
    (2) Development of resources and guidance documents outlining how intensive behavioral services are accessed and provided along a defined continuum of support with an MTSS Model
    3) Determination of how clear communication and collaboration will occur between schools, clinical/medical services, and facilities.

This recommendation would improve efficiency and equity in student/family access to needed intensive behavioral services, increase effectiveness in professional collaboration across stakeholders, and provide resource efficiency.

Category: ***Funding Barriers***

Based on the analysis of barriers to supporting students with intensive behavioral needs, existing funding structures often impede efficient and effective support to staff and students and impact the continuum of support for all students regardless of insurance coverage, eligibility, or diagnosis.

Recommendation #5: Create a multi-agency Special Interest Group (SIG) at the state level to analyze current funding structures and establish a proposal for flexible funding allowances across agencies (i.e., Community Mental Health, schools, family /juvenile courts, Medicaid, and private insurance). This would enhance effective, efficient, and equitable access to needed behavioral health services.