



OPTIMISE Task Force Meeting Summary

June 26, 2026

Attendees: Laurie VanderPloeg, Kathy Fortino, Cheryl-Marie Manson, Laura Zangara, Emily Fishkin, Kimberly Gillow, Carol Glanville, Christi Edge, Lauren Mangus, Shailee Patel, Teri Pettit, Colin Ripmaster, Eleanor Harris

Guests: Tara Kilbride, Salem Rogers, Vivian Crumlish, Alissa Hofstee, Cheryl Granzo

Members of the Task Force were welcomed by Laurie VanderPloeg.

1. Presentation by EPIC

EPIC workforce findings showed recent growth in special education teacher counts but mixed trends for other roles; paraprofessionals paused growth during COVID and resumed recently. Mobility is highest for teachers and pupil support/mental health staff, early childhood staff most likely to change role (often into K–12), and paraprofessionals have the highest exit rate from the public school workforce — in some cases double other roles. Special education attrition has been consistently higher than general education attrition over the last decade. Licensure analyses reported the experienced licensed special educator share fell from ~80% to ~70%, and about 13% of special educators lacked a special-education license in fall 2025. Total initial certificates are recovering, but recovery in traditional in-state preparation programs is weak; growth is driven by out-of-state/online programs and alternative-route licensing.

Two EPIC preparation-pipeline analyses compared course-progression across 11 public institutions and major-persistence across a subset of seven programs. Both approaches showed similar intro-to-upper progression (~50%) but a sharper drop for special education at clinical-experience/student-teaching stages, with institution-level finish rates roughly

49%–71% and special-education persistence worsening beginning in year three when clinicals start. Data gaps include exclusion of some programs lacking special-ed course prefixes, later-entry pathways, and limited coverage of private and out-of-state providers; the team flagged investigating whether out-of-state certificates represent transfers or Michigan residents using online providers.

2. Early Childhood Action Team Recommendations

The Early Childhood Action Team Co-leaders reviewed systemic birth-to-five challenges and recommended aligning eligibility definitions, modernizing MARSE and MCL rules, removing prescriptive minimum service-hour thresholds, expanding inclusion in mixed-delivery preschool, and increasing personnel capacity. Presenters emphasized coordination issues across Early On, Mi-LEAP, and MDE OSE, noted that expanding eligibility and inclusion will increase demand for early childhood special education staff, and urged targeted funding, coaching, standardized professional development, and public messaging to elevate early childhood services. A statewide preschool inclusion collective action plan from five years prior was cited as an implementation resource.

The Task Force supported moving this work forward with the addition of including MAASE in Strategy 5.

3. Action Team updates

Funding, policy, and implementation updates included a \$6 million behavior allocation request currently in House and Senate K-12 budgets, ongoing legislative outreach with identified supporters. OPTIMISE has plans to form a multi-agency SIG with a convening scheduled for October 16. We are also anticipating convening of an IHE Team.

4. Other updates

The group noted an upcoming OPTIMISE framework presentation at the Education Commission for the States conference (July 9 session). Rule packages (MARSE Special Education Teacher endorsement) remain pending public comment, with timing uncertain. CR Marketing adding over 50 charter postings. OPTIMISE leadership had a great introductory meeting with State Superintendent Glen Maleyko.

5. Member updates

MAASE shared that paraeducator training has reached 13,000 paraeducators with about 615 trainers and demand for further Train-the-Trainer events.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:36 p.m.