

A Task Force of the Michigan Legislature

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OPTIMISE

OPENING THE PIPELINE OF TALENT
INTO MICHIGAN'S SPECIAL EDUCATION

OPTIMISE Task Force Minutes

Fri, Mar 27, 2026

9:00 a.m.

Present: Beth Kohler (for Laura Zangara), Teri Rink, John Severson, Kimberly Gillow, Tina Kerr, Abby Cypher, Diane Katakowski, Kanika Littleton, Rep. Carol Glanville, Shailee Patel, Kirsten Myers

Guests: Salem Rogers, Vivian Crumlish, Tara Kilbride-EPIC

Laurie welcomed the Task Force members and introduced 2 new members-Laura Zangara, SE Mediation, and Kimberly Gillow (MEMSPA)

1. Presentation by EPIC to review Michigan State University EPIC's analysis of statewide teacher and Special education staffing, focusing on vacancy and turnover patterns, certification trends, and geographic placement gaps. The EPIC presentation highlighted special education vacancy rates above 5%, turnover and mid-year exits higher than other subjects, a recent recovery in initial Special education certifications to 694, and placement shortfalls in northern Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula; the EPIC team agreed to share the slide deck and full report for further review. Participants probed causes of mid-year departures and agreed MSU EPIC will examine those exits more granularly, while also noting regional recruitment patterns and the limited redistributive effect of teacher relocation without incentives.

Discussion emphasized that financial incentives alone have not stabilized retention and that working conditions, administrative support, caseload, mentoring, and professional development drive turnover; members observed that a \$50M statewide

allocation funded roughly 30% of district applicants and is insufficient to meet mentoring needs.

2. The School Social Worker Action Team recommendations were shared and approved to move forward. The recommendations were around developing a workload/caseload calculator, expanding role-specific training, building a statewide behavioral-health training with MASSW involvement, strengthen mentoring aligned to licensure, and pursue non-salary compensation options along with licensure and approvals concerns.
3. Action Team Updates:
 - a. The Behavior Action Team recommendation to form a multi-agency Special Interest Group on blended school behavioral-health funding was discussed.
 - b. We are holding an early childhood action team meeting on May 6 co-led by Alyssa Hofstee and Cheryl Granzo.
 - c. SE Teacher endorsement MARSE rule change-MARSE rule is likely to be presented for public comment this summer
 - d. DHH-Wayne State University is starting an endorsement program for DHH teachers. It was suggested that we look at promoting Sign Language Interpreter programs.
 - e. School Psych-We are working with Andrews University to promote their new hybrid program which starts this Fall. WMU also is starting a new program for Fall 2027.
 - f. Education Commission of the States-Laurie announced that Michigan OPTIMISE was accepted to present at the Education Commission of the States conference in Washington, D.C., July 8–10, and that Laurie, Kathy, Joe (CR Marketing), and Representative Carol Glanville will present the OPTIMISE playbook on attracting, preparing, and retaining special educators. Laurie emphasized the statewide collaborative progress that led to the invitation.
4. Marketing, social media, magazine and accomplishments-information was provided to members about the status of our work with CR Marketing.
5. MDE School Behavioral Health and Michigan Health Council is hosting a meeting in Lansing on April 8 to discuss ways to promote behavioral health careers in CTE programs. Kathy will represent OPTIMISE. Members were told to share any names of individuals that might want to attend.

6. Member updates and questions

- a. Abby reported that MAASE has received GYO dollars from VanBuren ISD and plans to train 16,000 paraeducators in the next 18 months with no charge.
- b. Diane shared that MSHA held their annual virtual conference and promoted their updated guidelines.
- c. Kirsten provided SEILN updates.
- d. MAISA has resources for PA146 <https://www.gomaisa.org/projects/pa146-dyslexia-resources/>
- e. Teri Rink shared that they are working on a Q & A around PA 146 for special education; also they are going to stop monitoring separately for overdue IEPs and going to focus more on the role of general education with special education in quality IEPs. There has been a large increase in state complaints. They on track to receive 900 this year (typically 300/year).
- f. Mediation is doing PD on developing trusting relationships in language parents can understand.
- g. Kanika shared that they are working with families on their rights and working collaboratively with schools.
- h. Shailee shared that MEA is working with MAASE on paras, bargaining and instruction.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:03 a.m.