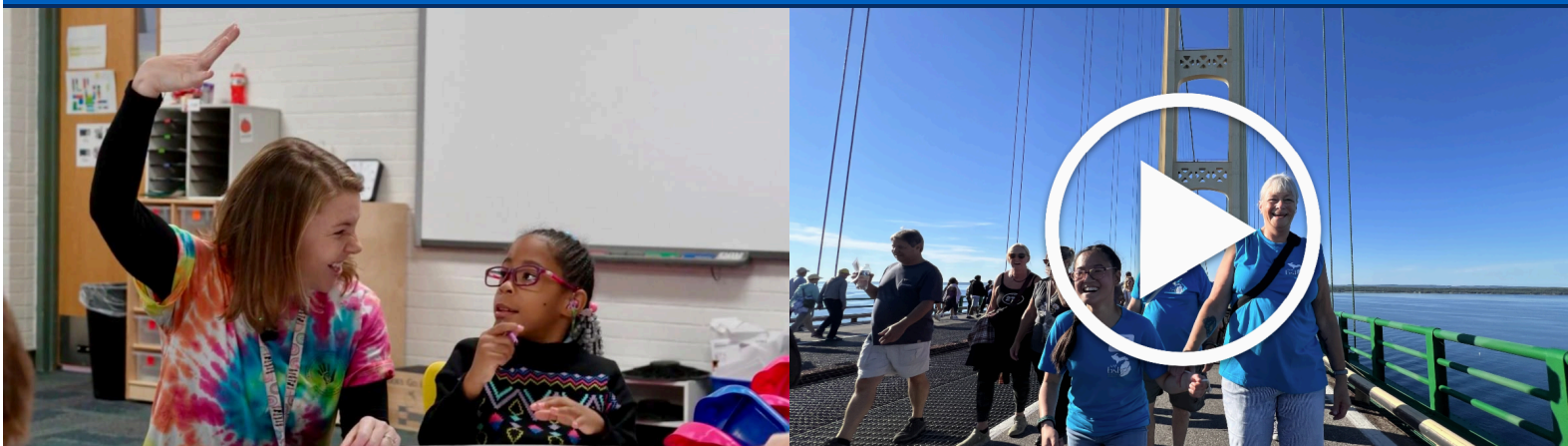




Advancing Michigan's Special Educator Workforce



Thank You!! Teachers for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Sign Language Interpreters

Thank you for making it possible for individuals with disabilities to access learning, communicate, and excel!

(picture) Reeths-Puffer Elementary - Muskegon, MI

First-Ever Bridge Brigade!

A group of over 100 Blind and Low Vision individuals (2 yrs to 77 yrs.) with their families, walked the 5-Mile Mackinac Bridge on Labor Day.

According to Josh Harrington, OMS and Teacher for the Blind & Low Vision,
"It was amazing!"

[Watch Video->](#)

Public Comment Open

Newly Proposed Special Education Teacher Endorsement - One Credential Works Across Multiple SE Programs

The work by OPTIMISE's Teacher Credentialing and Standards Action Team and MDE has moved to its public comment phase before new MARSE rules go into effect.
Public comment is due Oct. 16, 2026

[Participate in Public Comment - Click Here](#)



**Michigan's Legislature Chose to Improve Special Education,
Appointing OPTIMISE to Complete the Work**

The work of OPTIMISE's Task Force, Core, and Actions Teams has made significant progress, resulting in tangible change.

Built a Statewide Plan with Educators and Families

OPTIMISE drew on input from more than 500 Michigan educators and parents and developed a statewide workforce action plan. The numerous Action Teams within the project identified 127 obstacles across 14 categories. This work gave state leaders and education partners specific recommendations to improve recruitment, preparation, and retention.

Launched a Career Hub with other 300,000 Looking at Special Education Careers

The Career Hub is a one-stop website that highlights 12 in-demand special educator careers. Each career pathway explains the role, why the work matters, and available training and funding options, while highlighting Michigan colleges, universities and alternate route providers. OPTIMISE has attracted over 300,000 to the website: www.OPTIMISE.education

Launched a Job Board to Help Fill Jobs

To help match job seekers with open SE jobs, OPTIMISE launched a job board listing open positions within Michigan. ISD/RESA, school districts, and charter schools can post open positions for free. The OPTIMISE marketing team has attracted over 102,000 clicks on job "details." The job board is free, available to users 24/7.

Advanced New Special Education Teacher Preparation Standards

OPTIMISE Task Force recommended changes to Special Education Teacher preparation and credentialing. The State Board of Education approved new preparation standards. This new rule, when approved, will streamline preparation of new Special Education Teachers while maintaining rigorous statewide standards. One of OPTIMISE's Action Teams recommended this credential change. MDE has put the Michigan Administrative Rule for Special Education (MARSE) out for public comment - Due Oct. 16, 5 pm. EST. Provide public comment [here](#).

Created a Statewide Paraeducator Training Model

The Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE) developed a training model in response to OPTIMISE's paraeducator recommendation. Districts can train their own facilitators, join regional sessions, or enroll individual staff. The learning series covers special education foundations, instructional strategies, and positive behavior supports. To date, MAASE has 719 paraeducator-trainers and 9,719 registered to be trained by June 30, 2027.

Launched Training for School Building Leaders

MAASE and Michigan's elementary, middle, and secondary school principal associations implemented OPTIMISE's recommendation for building leader training. The Developing Inclusive Leaders program gives principals and other school leaders practical instruction in supporting students with disabilities and the staff who serve them. Its offerings include on-demand learning, in-person sessions, and coaching.

Developed an Alternate Route for Special Education Leaders

OPTIMISE worked with MAASE and the Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators to develop an alternate special education administrator preparation program. This work responds to the recommendation for another credentialing route for future directors and supervisors.

Established Mentoring and Coaching for Administrators

Following OPTIMISE's mentoring recommendation, MAASE developed support for special education administrators. Its mentorship program connects leaders in their first three years with experienced colleagues, while leadership coaching supports more experienced administrators. These services provide guidance on the demands of the role and help leaders build professional connections.

Published Guidance to Improve Workforce Data

OPTIMISE partnered with Michigan State University's Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) to examine special educator workforce data. EPIC shared preliminary results as the work moves forward with the MDE and the OPTIMISE Task Force.

Supported Expanded School Psychologist Training

OPTIMISE Task Force recommended expanding school psychologist preparation programs. In July 2025, the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity awarded \$1 million for that purpose: \$650,000 to Western Michigan University for a new program and \$350,000 to Andrews University to expand its existing program. These awards funded additional training capacity to address school staffing needs.

OPTIMISE is continuing this work, supporting your mission to improve Michigan Special Education.

Thank you,
Laurie VanderPloeg, Project Director
Kathy Fortino, Project Manager

We Greatly Appreciate Our Partners for this Collaborative Work



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