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CONTACT Kristi Jackson
Autism Alliance of Michigan
kristi.jackson@aaomi.org
248-915-6675

Autism Alliance releases working paper calling for new framework to special education finance in Michigan

Michigan is not adequately meeting the needs of students with disabilities, leading to poor outcomes in education.

SOUTHFIELD, Mich. — The Autism Alliance of Michigan (AAoM) today announced the release of a working paper highlighting the importance of addressing inequities in the way special education supports and services are funded in Michigan.

The working paper, “***Funding Our Future: The Call for a New Framework in Special Education Finance***,” provides research and analysis on the current system in Michigan which produces disappointing educational outcomes for students with disabilities. The call for reform through this working paper was validated by results from the nonprofit advocacy organization’s recent release of their Special Education Experience survey (SEE) results. The SEE Survey was completed by more than 900 respondents across all regions of the state, including; parents, guardians, and individuals with disabilities and identifies the most pressing needs for those who receive special education services and support through Michigan schools.

In March 2024, AAoM called for special education finance reform urging the state’s top education leaders to work together to transform how the state funds special education. AAoM successfully advocated for legislative appropriation in this current budget cycle to fund an in-depth study of special education funding in Michigan to develop an implementation framework which outlines the cost of fully providing special education services and support to students with disabilities through an equity-driven model.

“Our students deserve more than half measures and partial solutions. Instead, Michigan must pursue a new framework and model for how we equitably allocate special education funding to support an education system worthy of our students with disabilities,” said **Colleen Allen, President and CEO of the Autism Alliance of Michigan**.

The working paper also demonstrates an equally important issue; determining how to equitably allocate resources to benefit students receiving special education most effectively. The paper outlines core principles for redesign and critical steps to move this effort forward to create a pathway to prosperity for students with disabilities from PreK through post-secondary so they are college and career ready.

“We can and must do better,” said **Heather Eckner, Director of Statewide Education for the Autism Alliance of Michigan**. “It is clear, our current education system in Michigan is under-serving students with disabilities and our outdated funding model is part of the problem.”

The Michigan Parent, Advocate & Attorney Coalition (MiPAAC), a statewide student-centered advocacy group powered by the Autism Alliance, is working together to identify advocacy priorities to address existing issues across the special education system. By convening and catalyzing multiple stakeholders, AAoM is working to transform Michigan’s education system into a top 10 state for special education outcomes, producing results for students with disabilities on par with their neurotypical peers.

The working paper makes clear that Michigan’s current funding model is failing our most marginalized students. For more information and to read the working paper, visit:

<https://aaomi.org/education-initiatives/special-education-finance-reform>.

About the Autism Alliance of Michigan

The Autism Alliance of Michigan (AAoM) is a 501(c)(3) organization serving as a trusted ally and partner for thousands of families across the state. AAoM’s mission is to lead efforts to raise expectations and expand opportunities for people connected to autism across their lifespan. The organization’s Education pillar drives initiatives that address systemic barriers to education, focuses on student-centered advocacy, and educates families on related topics – working towards its goal to make Michigan a top 10 state for special education outcomes. For help finding resources, providers and information contact our AAoM Navigators at 877-463-2266 (AAOM) or email at navigator@aaomi.org. More information about AAoM’s Education pillar can be found at www.autismallianceofmichigan.org/education-initiatives.

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