



2025 State Legislative Priorities and Platform

Introduction

This document outlines the legislative and policy views of the Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE) as adopted by the Board of Directors.

Legislative Action Priorities for 2025

1. Modernize the Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education (MARSE) to align with current needs within the field
2. Ensure Adequate and Equitable Funding
3. Address the Shortage of Qualified Special Education Personnel

Priority 1: Modernize the Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education (MARSE)

Revisions to MARSE and related provisions in the Revised School Code Act are critical to ensuring improved outcomes for students with disabilities. MAASE emphasizes the need for policies that reflect current best practices in education and foster innovation in the delivery of services. Specific recommendations include:

- **Non-Categorical Certification for Special Education Teachers:**
Michigan's current teacher preparation programs focus narrowly on individual disability categories, limiting flexibility to address overlapping and complex student needs. MAASE advocates for the creation of a non-categorical certification option, allowing educators to be better equipped to deliver programming that meets unique student needs. This approach supports individualized instruction, reduces reliance on labels, and enhances teacher effectiveness.
- **Streamlined Administrative Credentials:**
Current credentialing requirements for special education supervisors and directors create unnecessary barriers for potential leaders. MAASE recommends creating a new single Special Education Administrator credential in MARSE aligned with the Michigan State Board of Education standards. Additionally, MAASE supports revising prerequisites for leadership roles, such as the three-year experience requirement, to remove rigid constraints while maintaining high standards for leadership quality.
- **Flexible Programmatic Models:**
Michigan's categorical approach to special education programming and caseload limits hinders the development of truly individualized services. MAASE advocates for less restrictive frameworks that focus on student-specific needs rather than rigid eligibility labels. This shift would enhance flexibility in program and placement decisions, fostering equal access to high-quality education for all students.

- **Unified Eligibility for Infants and Toddlers:**

Currently, Michigan operates separate state and federal eligibility processes for children under three with developmental delays. This system creates inefficiencies and inequities. MAASE recommends adopting a single-tier eligibility system that aligns with federal Early On criteria, providing equal access to qualified personnel and tailored services for all eligible children and their families.

Priority 2: Ensure Adequate and Equitable Funding

A sustainable and equitable funding system is essential to meet the diverse needs of Michigan's students. MAASE calls for targeted investments and policy changes to address longstanding disparities and underfunding in special education.

- **Special Education Funding Formula:**

Michigan's special education system is underfunded by an estimated \$343 million annually. MAASE supports a funding structure that includes 100% of the per-pupil foundation allowance, the Durant percentage (28.6% of special education costs and 70.4% of specialized transportation costs), and adjustments for inflation. This model would reduce the financial burden on general education budgets and ensure adequate resources for students with disabilities.

- **Universal Access to Early Childhood Education:**

Early intervention is critical for long-term student success. MAASE recommends an additional \$15 million in Early On funding (totaling \$37.2 million) to expand services and ensure equitable access to high-quality early education programs. This funding would support initiatives such as home visiting, four-year-old preschool programs, and family intervention services for children birth to age five.

- **Adjust ISD Millage Caps:**

Michigan's reliance on ISD millage funding for special education has led to significant geographic inequities. MAASE supports lifting the cap on Public Act 18 millage rates and establishing a more equitable funding formula. This approach ensures that funding for students with disabilities is not determined by local property values but instead reflects the actual needs of students.

- **Expanded Mental Health Resources:**

Students with emotional impairments and significant behavioral needs require additional support to succeed. MAASE recommends increased funding for school-based and community mental health services, including pediatric day treatment and inpatient care. Legislative support for evidence-based prevention programs, social-emotional learning strategies, and stigma reduction initiatives is critical to addressing the growing mental health crisis among Michigan's youth.

- **Categorical support for Students and Staff:**
 - **MITTIN:** Continued funding of \$3 million annually for the MITTIN program ensures that students with disabilities have access to innovative digital resources that enhance independence and life skills.
 - **Project SEARCH:** Continued funding of \$1.5 million annually for this researched based, business-focused school to work program that provides students with an immersive, real-world work internship experience, preparing them for integrated competitive employment in their community.
 - **MISERC:** MAASE supports at least a \$1 million investment into sustaining the Michigan Special Education Resource Center, which offers best-practice resources and training for educators statewide and was developed by MAISA.
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Priority 3: Address the Shortage of Qualified Special Education Personnel

Michigan faces a critical shortage of certified special education professionals, threatening the quality of services available to students. MAASE recommends a comprehensive approach to recruitment, retention, and credentialing to address this challenge.

- **Implementation of OPTIMISE Recommendations:**
The task force outlined in Section 94d of the School Aid Fund has provided actionable solutions to address staffing shortages. MAASE supports the immediate implementation of these recommendations to ensure an adequate supply of skilled educators.
- **Flexible Employment for Retirees:**
Allow retired special educators to re-enter the workforce without financial penalties, leveraging their expertise to address current shortages.
- **Incentives for Aspiring Educators:**
Expand financial incentives such as scholarships, loan forgiveness programs, and tuition reimbursement to attract and retain individuals in the teaching profession. Public campaigns should highlight the value of teaching to improve perceptions of the profession.
- **Alternative Certification Pathways:**
Provide flexible pathways for individuals with relevant experience, such as paraprofessionals and individuals working with students with disabilities, to achieve certification. Streamlined substitute teacher certification for experienced candidates can help fill immediate staffing gaps while maintaining quality standards. In addition, streamline special education administrator standards as mentioned above.