

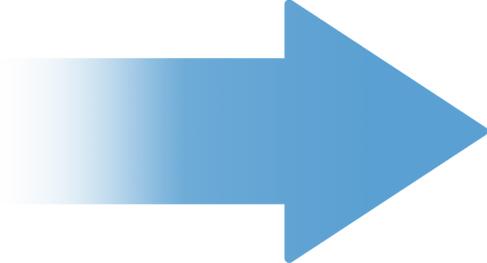


MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF ADMINISTRATORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

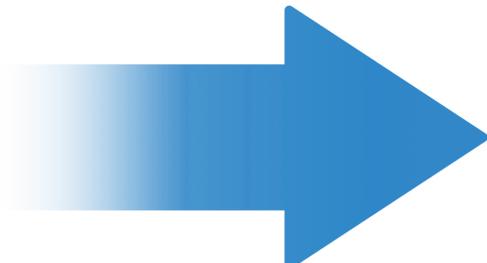
# LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM AND PRIORITIES 2026

## INTRODUCTION

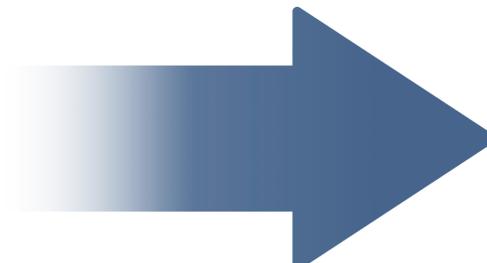
This document outlines MAASE's 2026 legislative and policy priorities, adopted by the Board of Directors. It reflects MAASE's commitment to equitable access, strong service delivery, and improved outcomes for learners with disabilities, while aligning with statewide initiatives to ensure clarity, coherence, and consistent messaging. Together, these priorities advance a sustainable special education system by aligning funding, workforce capacity, and outcomes to meet Michigan's legal obligations and long-term workforce needs.



1. Ensuring Adequate and Equitable Funding for Special Education



2. Secure \$1.5 Million in Ongoing Funding for Michigan Transition to Employment Internship Program (Project SEARCH)



3. Address the Shortage of Qualified Special Education Personnel

# Priority 1: Ensure Adequate and Equitable Funding

Michigan’s special education funding system remains structurally insufficient. Without legislative reform, districts must continue diverting general fund dollars to meet mandated special education costs, reducing resources available to support all students.

## Key Recommendations #1 MI Blueprint Implementation Study

MAASE is committed to exploring the feasibility of implementing the Michigan Special Education Finance Reform Blueprint (MI Blueprint) and believes that any final decision regarding a weighted funding model must be made within the context of this broader work. MAASE supports other core components of the MI Blueprint, including the establishment of a High-Cost Fund (HCF) and the elimination of outdated ISD millage caps. However, MAASE believes these elements should be addressed as part of a comprehensive system transformation developed over the next year, rather than implemented as piecemeal solutions prior to the Blueprint’s full adoption.

As implementation planning for the MI Blueprint proceeds, MAASE supports maintaining recent financial investments and structural protections within the current reimbursement model to ensure districts can continue delivering high-quality, legally compliant special education services without diverting additional general education funds to offset systemic shortfalls. Key elements include:

- 100% Foundation Allowance reimbursement
- Annual cost-of-living adjustments, at a minimum, are indexed to inflation
- Durant reimbursement model

## Key Recommendations #2 Categorical Investments

In addition to system-level funding reform, MAASE supports targeted categorical investments that maximize educator-to-educator support and demonstrate a strong return on investment for student outcomes.

**MAASE supports sustained or expanded funding for:**

Initiative	Recommended Funding Level	Purpose
Transition to Employment Internship Program: Project SEARCH (formerly 99aa) 	\$1.5M annually	Competitive integrated employment internship program.*
MITTIN (51g) 	\$3M annually	Digital life-skills learning tools for students with disabilities

\* See additional information in the next section.

# Priority 2: Secure \$1.5 Million in Ongoing Funding for Michigan Transition to Employment Internship Program (Project SEARCH)



Continued investment in Michigan's most effective transition-to-work program, Project SEARCH (99aa), expands work-based learning, improves post-school outcomes, and strengthens Michigan's workforce pipeline, while generating measurable state savings through coordinated partnerships among intermediate school districts, state agencies, and large-scale Michigan employers.

Project SEARCH:

- Delivers measurable outcomes, with consistently high rates of competitive employment following program completion (some of the highest in the country)
- Addresses workforce shortages by developing a ready-to-hire talent pipeline for Michigan employers
- Promotes economic stability by supporting meaningful workforce participation for young adults with disabilities
- Demonstrates a strong return on investment by reducing long-term reliance on public benefits and increasing tax contributions

Michigan currently operates 19 Project SEARCH sites in partnership with prominent employers, including Corewell Health, Meijer, Genesee County Parks, the City of Sterling Heights, Duncan Aviation, Consumers Energy, Henry Ford Health, MyMichigan Health, ProMedica Health, and Michigan State University.

Fiscal oversight and program implementation are provided through a collaborative partnership between Ingham ISD and the Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE).

Continued funding is essential to sustain and expand this internationally recognized, evidence-based, workforce development program and ensure Michigan remains competitive with other states investing in inclusive, high-impact workforce solutions.

Ongoing SAF investment in Project SEARCH School to Work programs provides state savings while ensuring parents and students have the flexibility to choose the pathway that best fits their individual needs. While Michigan students with disabilities may be eligible for special education services until age 26, Project SEARCH has shown that not every student wants or needs to stay until that age. In fact, Michigan's Project SEARCH students exit school to enter the workforce at an average age of 21.5



# Priority 3: Address the Shortage of Qualified Special Education Personnel by Implementing OPTIMISE Recommendations

More teachers exit Michigan schools each year than enter. Without targeted legislative action, Michigan's special education educator shortage will continue to undermine compliance, program quality, and student outcomes. Coordinated reforms are necessary to stabilize and strengthen the system.

## Recommendations

### **Implement Key Legislative OPTIMISE (Section 94d) Recommendations**

MAASE supports multi-layered workforce strategies that address recruitment, retention, and the development of new entry pathways to stabilize and strengthen the special education workforce. We urge the Legislature to adopt and fund the following OPTIMISE (Section 94d) recommendations:

- **Streamline Special Education Administrative Certification**

Establish a single, unified Special Education Administrator credential to expand the leadership pipeline, reduce unnecessary barriers, and improve statewide capacity.

- **Expand and Fund Alternative Certification Pathways**

Invest in accelerated, high-quality certification pathways that transition qualified paraprofessionals and professionals with relevant experience into special education roles.

- **Strengthen Financial Incentives for Recruitment and Retention**

Increase state investments in scholarships, loan forgiveness, tuition reimbursement, and stipends targeted to special education educators and administrators.

- **Stabilize and Elevate the Profession**

Support statewide recruitment and retention initiatives that strengthen working conditions, improve public perception, and promote long-term workforce stability in special education.

- **Modernize MARSE and Related Statutory Provisions**

Update Michigan's special education rules and related sections of the Revised School Code to align with OPTIMISE reforms, support workforce expansion, and reflect contemporary, evidence-based practice. While Michigan has taken meaningful steps, such as adopting a noncategorical "generalist" endorsement through OPTIMISE, existing rules have not kept pace with these reforms.