



TAKE ACTION TO PROTECT SECTION 99AA FUNDING

Advocacy Toolkit

2026

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Project SEARCH Employment Programs partners local schools with local businesses to help young adults find work while creating financial efficiencies for Michigan.



PROJECT SEARCH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS NEED YOUR VOICE NOW

Project SEARCH Michigan is a proven workforce development program that prepares students with intellectual and developmental disabilities for competitive integrated employment through immersive, real-world internships in business settings.

After being funded for the last 4 years in SAF Section 99aa, it was left out of the FY26 budget. We are working hard to get into the state budget so we can continue to deliver meaningful returns and employment outcomes for Michigan's families and business communities.



QUICK FACTS & PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

- 01** Project SEARCH Michigan provides immersive, real-world internships inside businesses, not classroom-based simulations, to prepare students for employment.
- 02** In the last 5 years, between 73-88% of interns have found competitive, integrated employment.
- 03** The program is a proven school-to-work partnership model that connects local schools and businesses to create a pipeline to employment.

1,300+
STUDENTS
SERVED

**Since Project Search was started in Michigan in 2009, 95% of interns have completed the program.*



SECTION 99AA FUNDING AND WHAT IS AT STAKE

Project SEARCH Michigan is supported through Section 99aa of the School Aid Fund. This funding supports school districts, employers, and service providers in operating local Project SEARCH sites across the state.

These funds make it possible for students to participate in structured internships, receive job coaching, and gain the real-world experience needed to transition into employment.

If Section 99aa is reduced or eliminated:

- Expansion into new districts may stop
- Employment outcomes of existing programs may decline
- Existing programs may face capacity limitations
- Fewer students will have access to employment pathways
- Workforce pipelines for employers will shrink
- Local businesses will lose access to a trained and ready workforce

If funding is maintained:

- Demand will continue to grow for program implementation
- Continued support for new site development
- Existing programs will continue to produce high employment outcomes
- Michigan will continue to build a strong workforce and businesses will benefit from a strong labor supply

This is a decision point with real consequences for students, families, and employers across the state. Now is the time to act.

HOW PROJECT SEARCH WORKS IN MICHIGAN

Project SEARCH Michigan is built on a simple but powerful model: learning happens through real work.

Students spend their time embedded in business environments where they complete multiple internships across different departments or job roles. These experiences allow students to develop technical skills, workplace habits, and professional confidence in real time.



HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Each student receives individualized support from educators, job coaches, and employer mentors. The goal is not simulated training, but real employment preparation in real settings.

This model works because it is practical, structured, and grounded in collaboration between schools and employers.

Students do not just learn about work. They learn in work environments, preparing them for long-term success after graduation.



PROVEN OUTCOMES AND WORKFORCE IMPACT

Across Michigan, 73-88% of Project SEARCH participants successfully enter the workforce after completing the program.

This is significantly higher than traditional transition pathways and reflects the effectiveness of immersive, workplace-based learning.

This outcome is not accidental. It is the result of:

- Structured internships in real business environments
- Daily workplace experience and expectations
- Job coaching and individualized support
- Strong partnerships between schools and employers

When students are given real opportunities in real settings, they succeed at high rates.

At a time when Michigan continues to face workforce shortages across industries, Project SEARCH Michigan represents a solution that is already working. It connects students to employers, education systems to real job environments.

PARENT, ALUMNI AND INTERN VOICES

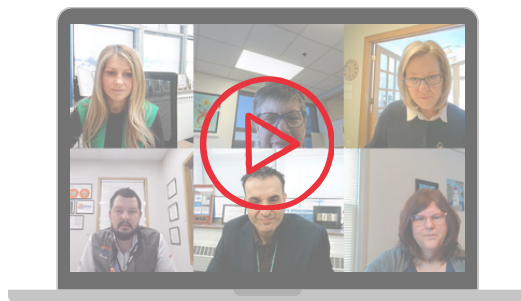
In a recent episode of the MAASE Field Notes Podcast, host Sarah Winslow explores the life-changing impact of Project SEARCH Michigan alongside co-founder Susie Rutkowski and a panel of leaders.

Through powerful firsthand perspectives, you'll hear how the program is opening doors and redefining expectations: a parent shares the emotional journey of watching her child grow into a confident, employed adult; alumni reflect on gaining independence and real-world skills through full workplace immersion; and interns describe what it feels like to be seen for their potential and become part of a team.

Together, their stories bring to life how Project SEARCH is turning opportunity into lasting success.

EPISODE #6

FROM SCHOOL TO SUCCESS:
THE POWER OF PROJECT SEARCH IN MICHIGAN



Listen on
 Spotify Podcasts

 Apple Podcasts

 YouTube

[CLICK HERE TO LISTEN OR WATCH](#)



TAKE ACTION TO SUPPORT PROJECT SEARCH MICHIGAN

Project SEARCH Michigan is at a critical moment. Funding decisions being made in the state budget will determine whether this program continues to grow and serve students across Michigan.

Public engagement is essential.

You can support Project SEARCH Michigan by:

- Encouraging continued funding through Section 99aa
- Contacting your state legislators
- Sharing your experience or story
- Helping raise awareness about the program's impact

This is a proven program with strong outcomes and growing demand. Continued access depends on collective action now.

When more voices speak up, decision makers hear the importance of protecting what is already working.

Your voice matters in ensuring that Project SEARCH Michigan remains available for future students, families, and employers across the state.

FIND YOUR LEGISLATOR

Make sure your voice reaches the right decision maker

Every Michigan resident has two key elected officials who vote on the state budget:

- A State Representative
- A State Senator

These are the individuals who directly influence whether Section 99aa funding for Project SEARCH Michigan is protected.

Knowing who represents you is the first step in taking effective action.

Once you locate your legislators, you will see their official contact information, including email and phone number. You can use either method, but direct contact is most impactful.

What to do:

- Enter your home address into the lookup tool
- Write down your State Representative and State Senator
- Save their contact information for the next steps

[Click Here To Find Your Legislator](#)



This is a decision point with real consequences for students, families, and employers across the state.

EMAIL YOUR LEGISLATOR

A brief conversation or a voicemail can have real impact.

Email is one of the easiest and most consistent ways to communicate with elected officials. Legislators track constituent messages closely, especially during budget negotiations.

We have provided a ready-to-send message that clearly explains:

- What Project SEARCH Michigan is
- Why it matters
- Why Section 99aa funding is critical

You can send it as written or personalize it with your own experience. Personal stories significantly increase impact.

What to include if you personalize:

- Why this program matters to you
- Any connection to students, schools, or employers
- Share that it is a research-based workforce development program that has between 73-88% employment outcomes

Even a short message makes a difference.

[Click Here To Email Your Legislator](#)



CALL YOUR LEGISLATOR

A 3-minute conversation can have real impact.

Phone calls are one of the most effective forms of advocacy because they are direct, personal, and logged immediately by legislative staff.

You do not need a script memorized. A simple message is enough.

Suggested talking points:

- Introduce yourself and your city or town
- State that you are calling about Project SEARCH Michigan
- Share that it is a workforce program with an 73-88% percent employment success rate
- Ask them to support continued Section 99aa funding

You may also leave a voicemail if no one answers. Voicemails are still counted as constituent input.

Simple example:

“Hello, my name is [Name], and I am a constituent from [City]. I am calling to ask [Legislator Name] to support continued funding for Section 99aa for Project SEARCH Michigan. This program helps students with disabilities gain employment, and it has an 73-88% success rate in Michigan. Please protect this funding in the state budget.”

[Click Here To Call Your Legislator](#)



SHARE YOUR PROJECT SEARCH MICHIGAN STORY

Real experiences drive real policy decisions

Personal stories are one of the most powerful tools in this campaign.

Legislators often remember stories more than statistics. Your experience helps show what funding decisions mean in real life.

We are looking for stories from:

- Students who participated in Project SEARCH Michigan
- Families who have seen the impact firsthand
- Educators and transition coordinators
- Employers who have hired participants
- Community partners supporting programs

Your story can be short or detailed. What matters most is authenticity.

Helpful prompts if you are unsure where to start:

- What was life like before Project SEARCH Michigan?
- What changed during or after the program?
- What opportunities were created because of it?
- Why does this program matter to you personally?

With your permission, stories may be used in advocacy materials, outreach, or media efforts to help demonstrate impact across Michigan.

[Click Here To Share Your Story](#)





ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO TAKE ACTION

One voice becomes many

This campaign becomes stronger every time someone else joins it.

You can help by encouraging:

- Colleagues
- Friends and family
- Educators and school communities
- Employers and business partners

Even a simple message like “I took action today, and you can too” can multiply engagement.

The more people who contact legislators, the clearer the message becomes that Project SEARCH Michigan matters across the state.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Project SEARCH Employment Programs has been delivering outcomes for 17 years.

It is a proven:

- Research based program already delivering results.
- 73-88% employment success.
- Immersive internships in host businesses.
- Project SEARCH saves the state millions of dollars each year.
- Project SEARCH provides valuable workers to Michigan's business community.

Project | SEARCH



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