Unity in COMPLEXITY
2026 MASE Best Practices Conference
May 13-15, 2026 • Brainerd, Minn

Unity Through Preparation:

A Comprehensive Paraeducator Training Model for Diverse Populations

Cheryl-Marie Manson, Project Manager
MAASE

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advocacy. learning. leadership.

MAASE

MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF ADMINISTRATORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE) is a statewide professional organization dedicated to advancing the field of special education leadership.

MAASE supports educational leaders by:

- Promoting effective, inclusive practices for all learners
- Providing professional learning, collaboration, and mentorship
- Advocating for equitable special education policy and systems
- Developing leadership capacity across Michigan

MAASE plays a key role in shaping the vision and practice of special education across the state — supporting administrators, educators, and now, through this project, paraeducators.

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CHERYL-MARIE MANSON

MAASE, PROJECT MANAGER

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- Special Education Teacher (LD, CI, EI)
- Special Education Supervisor
- Building Principal
- Local District Curriculum and Technology Director
- Director of Instructional Services, Van Buren ISD
- Adjunct Professor at Grand Valley State University & Western Michigan University
- Project Manager for Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Educators (MAASE)

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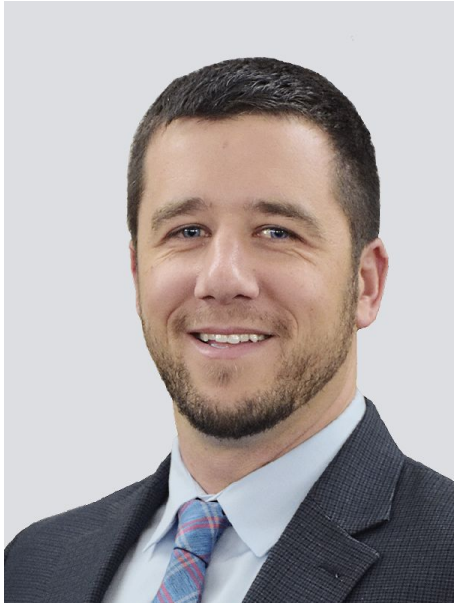
Ben Hicks

MAASE, Associate Executive Director of Training and Development



- Special Education Teacher (LD, EI)
- Special Education Supervisor
- Director of Special Education - Char-Em ISD
- Associate Executive Director of Training and Development - MAASE

Who's in the Room?

- Special Education Teacher
- General Education Teacher
- Paraprofessional
- MASE First-Timer
- Administrators
- Parents
- Ready for Summer
- Related Service Provider
- Students

- Elementary
- Secondary
- Early Childhood
- Transition
- General Education Building
- Center-based Setting

Why are we here?

Statewide Paraeducator Training Initiative

- Paraeducators often lack access to high-quality, standards-based training
- We developed a comprehensive program grounded in **CEC standards for paraeducators**
- Designed to strengthen skills, consistency, and student support across schools

Our Goal

Expand this work to reach more districts—both within Michigan and beyond

Get Involved

- Attend a *Train-the-Trainer* event
- Partner with us to host a training in your region
- We'll customize materials (including for Minnesota) so you can implement locally

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Paraeducator Bootcamp

16,000 paraeducators in the state of Michigan
First statewide training of its kind

Launched January 2025

Paraeducator Project
MAASE
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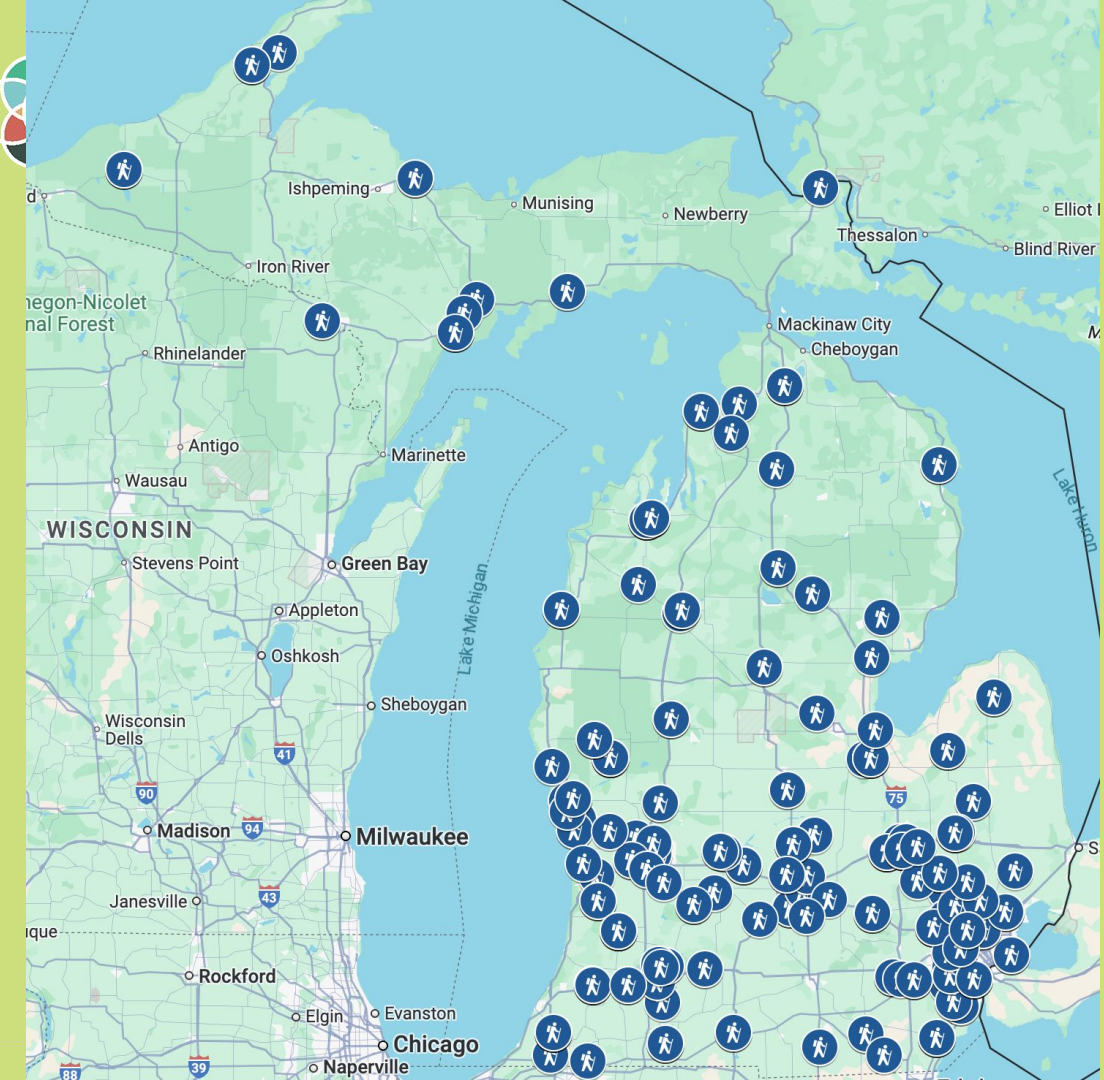
Building Capacity by Establishing Trainers



Find your MAASE Paraeductor Trainer!

500+ Trainers

Level 1: Paraeducator Bootcamp

Topics

- *MTSS & Special Education Basics*
- *What is an IEP?*
- *Roles & Responsibilities*
- *Academic Supports*
- *Behavioral Supports*

Participants will also receive:

- Bootcamp Manual
- Face to Face Training Manual
- Badging (Digital and Physical)
- One Year CEC Membership

SNEAK PEEK

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05 Behavioral Supports

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Behavior Is Communication

Let's explore an important concept in our work as paraeducators: behavior is communication. This is a foundational idea that shapes how we understand and respond to the students we support.

To start, it's essential to recognize that **behavior is a form of communication.** Often, when we observe certain behaviors, especially challenging ones, it's easy to focus on the behavior itself. However, we must look beneath the surface to understand what the student is trying to communicate through their actions.

Behavior IS Communication:

Behavior is often a way for students to express unmet needs or challenges. **As a Paraeducator, it is important to look beyond the behavior** to understand the underlying issues like frustration, confusion, or anxiety.

Principles Of Challenging Behavior (Adaptive)

Students Would Follow Routines & Instructions If They Could

- A common explanation for student behavior is that they are being manipulative and deliberately planning out their actions and organizing their responses with forethought and impulse control. Truth is, most behavior that results in not following expectations is a either a symptom of a dysregulated nervous system resulting in a reduction in working memory or underdeveloped executive functioning skills due to maturation or trauma.

Behavior Is Learned And Is Malleable.

- In most cases, behaviors have taken years to develop and it may take some time to see a significant change, even when strategies are being implemented as designed. But ultimately, this is good news!! Knowing behaviors CAN change over time and having this principle keeps staff motivated to implement strategies even when the student is not always responding to their interventions.

Behavior Is A Symptom Of An Underdeveloped Skill

- As outlined in the first principle, behaviors are often a symptom of an underdeveloped social, executive function, or regulation skill. So when we see behavior, we should get deeply curious about what is going on to help identify the underdeveloped skills and how we might teach them.

Behavior Is Communication and Serves a Function

All behavior is **communication in that it sends a clear message that something isn't working** for the student. That is another reason to get deeply curious when we see behavior! Identifying what the student is trying to communicate also cues us into the purpose or function of the behavior. A caution is that it is human nature to presume most behaviors are attention-seeking or work avoidance.

Behavior Is Communication and Serves a Function

The fact is, **most behaviors are more complex than that** but let's assume for the sake of argument this were true. If the student really is seeking attention, then that should drive our intervention. How do we ensure they are getting heavy doses of attention.

Behavior Is Communication and Serves a Function

An even better way to frame attention-seeking is connection-seeking and in that frame, **how can we ensure the student is receiving a lot of connection opportunities.** If the student is truly avoiding work, then how do we determine why the work is so averise and find creative way to make it more engaging.

The Neuroscience

(Jessica Minahan)

ANXIETY

WORKING MEMORY

13-20 IQ Points

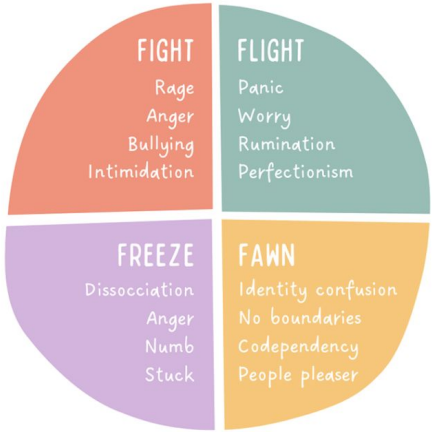
Root Cause Logic (Vs. Function)

Reflexive nervous system activation (survival brain) due to perceived threat to survival (survival drive for)

- Loss of autonomy / control
- Loss of equity (stature, power, authority)

Triggers:

- Expectations / instructions
- Direct questions / choices
- Initiating conversation
- Perceived demands



And here is one of the primary reasons it is important to avoid those aversive side effects. Every time you have to deliver a punisher, it chips away at your relationship and relationship is what gives you and teachers influence. So let's unpack that some.

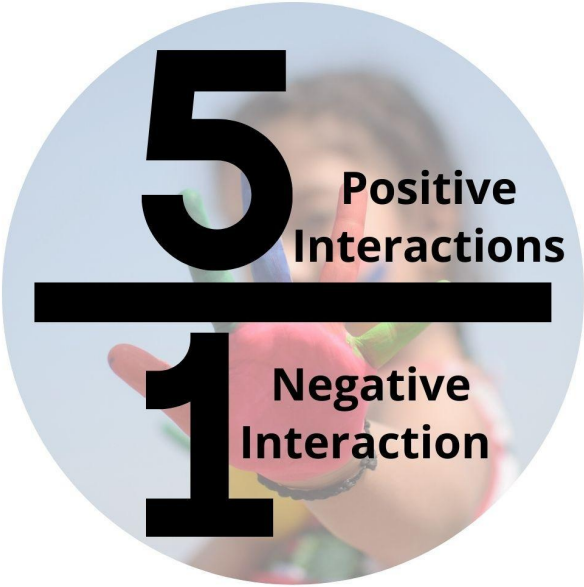
What is the ratio of positive to negative interactions needed to enhance relationships?

1. **5:1**
2. **9:1**
3. **20:1**
4. **More than 20:1**
5. **All of The Above**

If you selected any answer, you would be correct!!

And on a side note, setting up instruction and support so students get the right answer actually builds self-efficacy which buffers frustration over time. The more success they have, the more they have the bandwidth to attempt work that takes cognitive effort over time. But we digress!

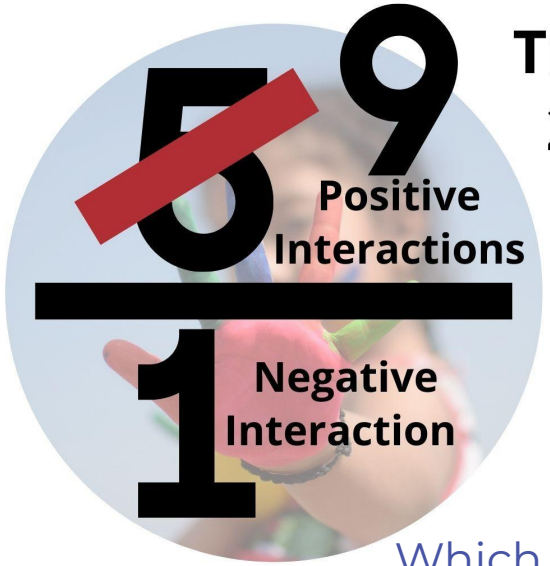
Back to the ratio – For many years, this ratio has been framed that typical students need 4 or 5 positive interactions to every one negative interaction to build positive relationships and for the negative interaction to not become aversive.



Root Cause Logic (Vs. Function)

But post-COVID, according to Jessica Minahan, a BCBA and author of the book "The Behavior Code," that ratio has shifted to 9 to 1 meaning typical students need 9 positive interactions to every 1 negative interactions.

And for students with histories of trauma, that number increases to 20 to 1. And you are likely serving students who need more positive interactions than that for every 1 negative including students with demand avoidance or what has been termed "Pervasive Desire for Autonomy" who may not be able to tolerate even the 1.



Trauma 20 to 1

Which leads us right into the Neuroscience

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Ethical Practice

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Paraeducators Are Representatives Of The School

All school employees, including paraeducators, are **representatives of the school.** Every school employee must:

- **Limit discussions regarding school issues** and **confidential matters** to authorized personnel and **avoid discussions of school issues and confidential matters** to anyone outside of the educational team.
- **Avoid discrimination** based on a **student's disability, race, sex, language, cultural background, or religion.**
- **Follow communication guidelines** when interacting with parents and **maintain professional boundaries.**
- **Treat all students, families, and staff members** with **dignity, respect their privacy, and recognize their individuality.**

FERPA

- **The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)** is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S.Department of Education.

- **FERPA** gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records.These rights transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. Students to whom the rights have transferred are"eligible students."

FERPA

Examples of confidential information that must be protected:

- Assessment Results
- Academic Records
- Behavioral Records
- Family Information
- Reports from agencies, like truancy or probation officers
- Qualification for Medicaid
- Medical Records
- Truancy Records
- Probation Records

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Let's Apply our Learning to these Three Scenarios

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Activity #3

Student Confides In You

Parent Approaches You

Do You Write The IEP?

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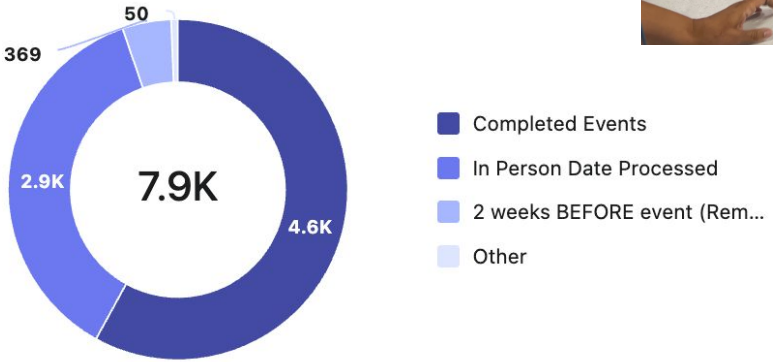
# of Paraeducators trained by Event Status

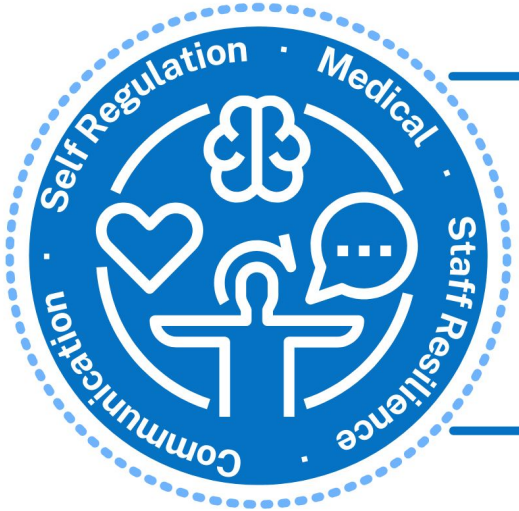


CTE Programs - Pipeline for Paraeducators

Early Entry to Career Pathways
By using the MAASE Paraeducator Bootcamp curriculum, Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs introduce high school students to the field of special education.

Workforce Pipeline Strategy
This program is a proactive solution to Michigan's paraeducator shortage—engaging students early, equipping them with foundational skills, and creating a pipeline into the profession.

MAASE Paraeducator Programs



- Early Childhood (3-5 Years Old)
- Bootcamp Level 1 (K-12 Inclusive Setting)
- Bootcamp Level 2 (K-12 Inclusive Setting)
- Transportation (Students who ride a School Bus)
- Transition & Job Coaching (18-26 Years Old)

How can you get involved?

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Who Should Attend:

- Current MAASE Paraeducator Trainers
- Educators and professionals interested in becoming certified trainers

What to Expect:

Attendees will learn how to lead trainings in their selected topic area for paraeducators in their region. There are now five distinct training courses available. Trainers must choose one to be trained in during this event:

1 *Early Childhood*

Learn to train paraeducators supporting young learners in inclusive early childhood environments.

2 *Transportation*

Gain the tools to prepare paraeducators for safe, supportive, and effective student transportation.

3 *Transition-Aged Students*

Prepare paraeducators to support students moving toward adulthood, including employment, independence, and postsecondary goals.

4 *Paraeducator Bootcamp Level 1*

Learn how to equip paraeducators with essential skills in academics, behavior support, and special education fundamentals. Paraeducator Bootcamp provides practical tools to strengthen classroom instruction, support student success, and foster effective collaboration with teachers in inclusive settings.

5 *Paraeducator Bootcamp Level 2* (Current Trainers only)
A deeper-level training course designed for trainers to support paraeducators who have completed the initial Bootcamp.

Create a trainer in your district:

- For current staff
- New Hires
- Hires throughout the year
- Fit your district calendar

JUNE 17, 2026
MAASE Paraeducator Train the Trainer

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Launching Fall 2026: Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) and Behavior Technician (BT) Pathway

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How might you use this program within your district?

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Thank you! Special Education can be complicated, but we're here to help…

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