



Special Education Report August, 2026

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Administrators for Accountability & Program Improvement (T. Hassett, M. Sly, J. Pung):

- **General Supervision Grant Team Updates:**

- The state complaint with Lakewood Public Schools resulted in various findings. The GSM team will support the district on developing corrective action plans and training to address the findings.
- The GSM team will be continuing our work related to creating safe learning environments for all students. A variety of professional learning opportunities have been developed for delivery during the 26-27 school year.
- A professional learning opportunity will be provided for district leaders, interventionists, and special education coordinators titled, "Addressing Absenteeism: Strategies and Solutions." It will be held on September 11, 2026.
- District data portraits are being completed. Data analysis with district leadership will be held the week of September 21.
- The 2026-2027 General Supervision System Grant was submitted for approval in July. The focus is continuous improvement in the areas of MTSS and discipline. The focus area is improvement in the number of students with disabilities who have access to and participate in tier 2 reading and math interventions.
- A state complaint was filed against Belding Area Schools. The investigation is being completed. Any findings will be reported by August 8, 2026.

- **Ancillary Team Updates and Upcoming Trainings:**

- Ionia ISD New Staff Training will take place on August 13th. Staff will have an opportunity to learn about the Infinity Platform, IEP development, and connect with their mentors.
- Infinity New User Group Training will also take place on August 13th. This is open to district staff around the county who would like to learn more about the Infinity Platform.
- PLC meeting dates are being finalized for ancillary staff and early childhood educators, as well as the inclusion coaches training.
- Special education teacher PLC dates have been released for the school year; the first date will be on October 15th.

- **New Hires or Current Vacancies**

- Current Vacancies:
 - Full-time school social worker
- New Hires:
 - School Social Worker - Jackson Karwoski



- Speech and Language Pathologist- Caroline Barthel
- Speech and Language Pathologist-Allie Anticuar
- Speech and Language Pathologist- Gracie Patterson
- Visually Impaired Teacher Specialist-Katie Olson
- School psychologist-Tiffany Copeland
- School psychologist-Angela Coyle
- School Psychologist - Kaylee Sheridan
- Service Monitor (HCA to support virtual staff) - Tara Matthyse

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Program (B. Woolston):

- Opening week, we will be renewing our NCI certifications and having our Welcome Back meeting for all ASD staff, engagement consultants and support staff mentors. Our guest speaker at our welcome back will be Deb and Benjamin Prince. Benjamin is an autistic adult, and Deb is his mother. Deb has valuable insight on inclusion during the school years as well as the value of paraprofessional support. Benjamin is a talented artist and together they have authored and illustrated the children's book [Trenton the Turtle](#). The book is a fictional and creative description of the lived experience of those among who need a little extra time.

Early Childhood Programs (C. Granzo)

Early On: Summer is a time that the annual Early On grant is due which requires a look back at the data for the past year. Our data points are from July 1 of 2025 to June 30, 2026. There was a total of 348 referrals to the program this project year. Of those, 5 were for children that resided in a different service area and 4 were already enrolled in the program and 1 was a duplicate referral. This left 338 referrals to respond to which: **28 were over age 3 and referred to their local district**, 8 moved prior to the evaluation being completed, 41 were in process at the time of the data capture, **36 were unable to contact** **62 were not interested** in an evaluation and/or services. There were 42 of the referrals for drug exposure, 7 of those families engaged in services. The average age of referral was 13 months which was the same as last year. Often times the unable to contact families and the not interested individuals resurface later as re-referrals. We always recontact all drug exposed families at the one-year point, send a developmental screening and remind them of our services.

Our EOY count indicated that there were 202 children eligible and in service at that time; 129 were MMSE eligible and 75 were Early On only eligible. This is a snapshot figure indicating the number of children in service at the time of the count. This is about 15 more children than we ended with last year. This is a phenomenon we are seeing that is directly related to the age at referral. While the number of referrals were similar to last year, the age of referral is younger and children are staying in the program longer. For the early intervention program 15 additional children is equal to the caseload of one provider. In order to adequately service children we are still advocating for additional staff. This next year we will be continuing to provide our parent-child playgroup opportunities for families in the program with spots also available to the general public for a nominal fee. We will be making an effort to capture FTE for the MMSE eligible children that attend playgroups and also get a home visit. This will be a small number of the total number of kids served but could generate much needed funding for our program since 54d funds have not kept pace with allowing for staff



expansion. This does come with a great amount of extra work on the part of staff to capture the data the way that the state wants it documented. We will evaluate this year to determine if the financial reward is worth the resource investment. For now, our staffing remains stable, I have an unofficial notice of a retirement in December. I anticipate this will be put in an official format in the next couple of months. This individual carries a caseload of 17, so hoping as soon as I receive notice I will post for this opening as we also have a FMLA coming from December to March as well.

The EO team over the summer continued with their ALT shift training and implementation of new practices for securing AT with children in the program. I highly recommend you look at the Early On of Ionia County Facebook page to see a description and video of one of our children using his device at the Ionia Free Fair with his provider.

Cheryl continues her work with MAISA and OPTIMIZE to secure system change and support for children in the Early On system.

Preschool:

Carol and Cheryl have continued work with policies for all districts to lean into as they launch their 1755 services. Each district will have a 1755 teacher. Carol will serve as the Lakewood teacher and collect the FTE for the children she serves there. She will also function as a coach to the other 1755 teachers, holding collaborative meetings as well as meeting with them one on one in their district if they desire.

The ECSE PLC schedule this year for LEA classroom teachers will utilize the START early childhood training as the basis for their work. The goal is to help support these teachers in implementing high leverage practices within their classroom to improve outcomes for students and build skills for the teachers. Following each live virtual session, a collaborative zoom meeting will be held where teachers can talk about the content and think about what practice they would like to implement in their classroom. Ideally each teacher would make a plan then have a coach if they desire that will support them in implementing the practice.

DPIL:

During the spring/summer months Cheryl applied for a grant for \$2000.00 from the Portland Community Fund and the Portland Federal Credit Union. We were notified that we received these funds. A grant application was also submitted to United Way which we are waiting to hear if we will receive an award.

June Distribution 1994 children 30 newly enrolled \$4574.46

July Distribution 1972 children, 26 newly enrolled \$4524.55

In July there were only 66 children birth to age one that received books and over 400 4-year-olds. We need to once again target and advertise to families with younger children. To that end, a mailing went out at the beginning of August to all physicians, daycares, schools and agencies within the county informing them of the child find resources for children birth to age five as well as the Dolly Parton Imagination Library of Ionia County.

Freedom Acres School Programs (A. Miller)

Staff Updates

- **Freedom Acres Welcomes New Staff:**
 - **Seth Munroe (Adapted PE Teacher):** Seth brings vibrant energy and a strong commitment to building rapport with students and staff. A career-changer from the business sector, his background includes special education compliance with PCG (monitoring IEPs and Medicaid),



substitute teaching, paraprofessional experience, and his current role as a football coach for Lowell Schools.

- **Health Care Aides:** Welcoming Cynthia Dukes and Katelyn Sowles to our Severely Cognitively Impaired (SCI) program team.
- **Open Positions & Recruitment:**
 - **SCI Teacher (HS/Transition):** Currently reviewing two applications, with interviews scheduled for August 19.
 - **Library Position:** Currently vacant and actively open for recruitment.

Projects & Funds

- **Ukeru Host Site & Cost Savings:** Freedom Acres/Ionia ISD is serving as the host site for an upcoming two-day Ukeru Train-the-Trainer event, hosting 34 new trainers and 60 recertifications. By hosting, Ionia ISD secured one free recertification and one free slot for a new trainer, creating direct cost savings on required annual training.
- **Safety Training & Crisis Prevention:** Recently hosted the CPI NCI Advanced Physical Skills training at Ionia ISD for the first time.
- **De-escalation & Safety Benchmarks:** Upholding our commitment to reserve physical intervention as a strict last resort, Freedom Acres closed out the 2025–26 school year with 0 days of suspension, 0 restraints, and 11 seclusions.
- **Statewide Professional Development:** Continuing our partnership with the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) through FAME (Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators), providing high-quality professional learning to staff at no cost to the ISD.

Impact

- **MDE Leadership Collaboration:** Rashell Bowerman from MDE will visit Freedom Acres on August 18 to support SEI program staff with Personal Curriculum and prepare for annual transcript meetings with local district partners.
- **SCI Summer Program Highlights:** Summer programming successfully wrapped up on August 6, centered on an interactive "Games" learning theme. Highlights included a visit from the Bignall Farms mobile petting zoo on July 29, which was shared collaboratively with peers from the Autism Education Center (AEC).
- **Community Engagement:** Hosted Community Team meetings at Freedom Acres over the summer, which will continue into the 2026–27 academic year.
- **Safety Preparedness:** Following the July 1 start of the new school year, the SCI and MoCI programs successfully completed 5 summer emergency drills.

Assistive Technology (K. Foote)

Ionia ISD Assistive Technology Implementation Team Update:

- The Ionia ISD Assistive Technology (AT) pilot teams, which include Early On, AEC, and Portland Public Schools, are currently working through Steps 1–3 of the AT Journey in partnership with Alt+Shift. Members of the pilot teams, along with the Ionia ISD AT Implementation Team, have successfully



completed the AT Journey Train-the-Trainer program and are certified to facilitate the training within their respective programs.

- Alt+Shift will continue partnering with Ionia ISD and the pilot team trainers throughout the implementation of the AT Journey. This ongoing collaboration will help ensure that training materials are presented consistently, best practices are followed, and AT processes and guidelines are implemented with fidelity across participating teams.
- The Ionia ISD Assistive Technology Lending Library is also being updated with current equipment and barcode inventory. The lending library will provide Ionia ISD staff and local LEA staff with the opportunity to check out assistive technology devices and tools for student trials, allowing teams to make informed decisions based on individual student needs before considering long-term implementation.

Transition Training Sites/MoCI Programs (M. Sly

Getting ready for Opening Day.

Open Houses set for Transition and MoCI programming for August 7th. We had our MoCI and Transitions graduation last week. Moci had one graduate and Transitions had five.

Deaf & Hard of Hearing (J. Pung)

- Due to low enrollment, starting in the 26/27 school year, the DHH program will no longer be available through Ionia ISD. We will continue to offer services through the support of our DHH teacher specialist, who will be Hannah Wilson next year.
- Camp T took place on May 21st, and we had one of our students attend. The day was a huge success!

Upcoming Events

August 17, 2026-Opening Day

August 18 & 19th-PowerSchool Professional Development