



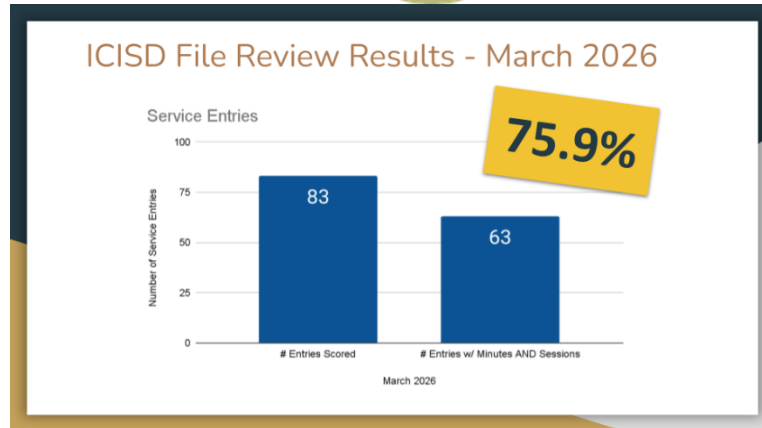
Special Education Report April, 2026

Natalie Fuller – Trisha Hassett – Mark Sly – Jody Pung –
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Administrators for Accountability & Program Improvement (T. Hassett, M. Sly, J. Pung):

● **General Supervision Grant Team Updates:**

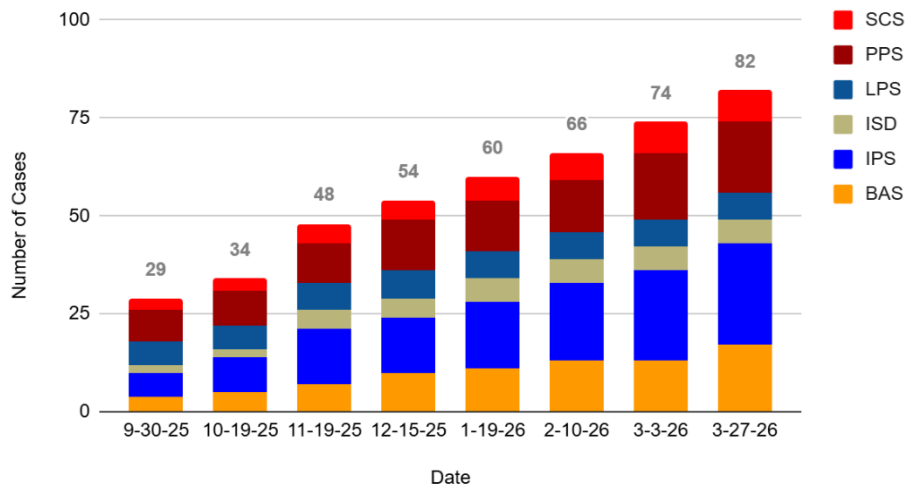
- The GSM team hosted their second SE Teacher PLC on March 26th. This month's focus was high-quality goal writing and unpacking the goal writing guidance from MDE. We had participants from all 5 districts and various grade levels. Our final PLC of the year will be on May 7th and focus on Co-teaching models.
- The MDE desk audit related to the discipline of students with disabilities, specific to Hispanic/Latino descent, has been completed in March with no findings.
- The ISD and MDE are continuing to work through the IPS B4 Closeout review.
- B-13 Checklists were submitted to MDE.
- The GSM team is continuing to partner with general education staff to identify work and initiatives that can be addressed collaboratively.
- The GSM team hosted a MiMTSS Dyslexia Summit watch party, and the recording and materials were shared with local special education coordinators if they were unable to attend.
- The GSM team completed spring file reviews. We reviewed 60 IEPs with a focus on writing clear SAS statements and writing related service entries that include both number of sessions and number of minutes.
 - IEP teams maintained their ability to write clear SAS statements by earning 93% of the points possible using the IEP scoring rubric. In December, staff earned 92% of the points possible for writing clear SAS statements.
 - In January, staff were asked to write related service entries using the number of sessions and the number of minutes per month. For example, school social work service will be provided 3 times per month for 15-20 minutes each. In December, 18.6% of the related service entries were written in this format. The slide below shows the dramatic increase in documenting in this format that were made by March of 2026. What outstanding improvement!



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

- The next Ancillary staff meeting will be on April 16; our focus will be on ensuring IEP notice statements include a data based rationale. School social workers Tips and Tricks was moved to this month and the DHH Teacher Specialist will also provide Tips and Tricks in April.
- The engagement consultants have supported 82 cases throughout the ISD, ranging from providing consultation during office hours as well as shoulder to shoulder student focused team coaching. The graph below shows the number of cases per district during the 25-26 school year.

2025-2026 Engagement Consultant Cases



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- The next Infinity New User Group meeting will be held on April 16, 2026.
- The Mentor/Mentee Wrap Up celebration will be held in April.



- **New Hires or Current Vacancies**

- Current Vacancy: We are contracting with a virtual school social worker. Another school social work position is filled with substitute school social workers. We will be actively looking to fill these positions for the 26-27 school year.

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

- ASD Family Bowling Night is scheduled for April 29th. This annual night gives families in the county an opportunity to enjoy pizza and bowling in a movement and noise friendly, judgment free environment. It is free for all families who register and funded fully by our START grant.

Early Childhood Programs (C. Granzo)

Early On: During the month of March the program received 41 referrals to the program. During this month staff who were on FMLA have returned (just in time!) so we are very happy to have them back. We have been working on documenting support provided within our playgroup settings. We are exploring what we would need to do to submit for FTE next year for the children that are receiving home visits and attending the playgroup opportunity. Staff have received their ipads and are actively utilizing some of the AAC apps that they have been provided. The response by many of the students has been incredible to see. The staff have received two PD's this winter, one in February on the SETT framework and ICISD processes for acquisition of devices within our program. In March we partnered with Alt Shift and they came and delivered day two of their training that was customized for our program. It was very beneficial and helpful to the team. We still have a lot to learn but we are well on our way.

Challenges continue to be the number of children that are presenting with ASD characteristics and need an ASD evaluation. A required team member is a school psychologist. The Early On team has a .5 PSY assigned to the program and we have been consistently using a retired psychologist to help support this need. Though we continuously have 2-3 ASD evals going at any one time, the number of toddlers needing an eval has stayed between 15-20 all year.

Cheryl continues her state level work with the Early On System Reform Committee. The committee has completed its work for the moment and has sent their recommendations to the Early Childhood Administrators Network (ECAN) and the Special Education Instructional Leadership Network (SEILN) for feedback. We will resume our work based upon the feedback received. In coordination with this effort, Cheryl and Alissa Hofstee from Kent ISD are initiating a workgroup with OPTIMIZE for early childhood special education providers. As the main opposition to any of our reform efforts is typically that there is not enough staff, we are pursuing this avenue in an effort to problem solve a major block to our efforts.



Early Childhood SPED Programs and Services;

The special education directors met at the end of February and are implementing procedures this spring to assure that children exiting ECSE and entering gen ed pre-k programs get the support they need. So far, the reports of the process have been positive by districts as well as our partners such as HS and the LEAs who are implementing GSRP. As a group we are planning to meet again at the end of April. One of our last policies to be put into place is how we will support children that are residents of our ISD but attending a PreK program in a district OUTSIDE the ISD and vice-versa.

Carol Gunderman and Lauren Hengesbach provided training to all of the ECSE teachers in the county and itinerant staff that serve those programs on March 27th. The topics were crafting IEPs that reflected the support a child needs as they transition to a general education program and strategies for good quality data collection to inform instructional decisions.

DPIL:

There were a total of 1994 children that received books during the month of March. There were 48 children that were newly enrolled and received their first books. The total cost for the month was \$4556.97.

March was a big month of activity for DPIL as we conducted our quilt raffle and sale and also solicited financial support from over 250 businesses. The quilt raffle was a success raising \$5334.00 for the program. This included a new initiative directed at the schools to provide a donation or to be able to purchase tickets. This effort yielded a total of \$925.00 which was likely new funds we would not have received. The letters to businesses in the community yielded \$1720.00 so far. Community members that sent us checks included: Dr. Harshman, Sanborn Reality, Dr. Barker, Dr. Tift, Youngs Chevrolet, Ostrandors Roofing and Siding and CL trucking. I still would really like to increase our business investment. Investment in literacy is economic development! If 100 of the business targeted just provided enough for one child for a year (\$30.00) then we would secure approximately \$3000.00. The funding plan would be to have businesses in the community collectively fund at least one month of distribution. There is still plenty of time to spread the word. If you have connections with any businesses in the community it would be helpful to share information about this program.

Finally, we do have annual donors. These are entities that on an annual basis have dedicated funds to the program. These annual donors are Michigan One Community Credit Union, all of the local school districts and the ICCF (which is a grant but they have consistently provided an annual award). In addition, this year we received a \$10,000 check from Michigan Education Transportation Services (METS). Historically we had received annual checks from PCMI and ESS which are affiliates of METS. As we had not received a donation the last couple years, they provided a very generous gift this year to make up for the years they missed. We are so grateful to have them back on board. Annual donors are so important to help develop a revenue plan for the program. Finally, we also received a \$3000.00 grant from the Portland Community fund. An intent to apply was submitted to United Way but we will have to wait to see if we are invited to submit an application.



Freedom Acres School Programs (A. Miller):

Celebrating Growth, Connection, and Our Shared Mission

Department Updates

The SCI (Severely Cognitively Impaired) and SEI (Severely Emotionally Impaired) programs are preparing to launch into Michigan state testing upon return from Spring Break. This requirement carries a unique and significant impact within a center-based setting.

All learners in our SCI program, including those who are medically complex, profoundly cognitively impaired, homebound, or hospitalized, are required to participate in MI-Access. Each assessment requires both a trained proctor and a dedicated shadow, resulting in the need to secure substitute coverage across classrooms during testing. Assessments are administered individually across multiple environments, including school, home, and hospital settings, to meet required state participation rates.

Learners in our SCI program in grades 3–8 and 11 complete ELA and mathematics assessments, with science and social studies added in grades 5, 8, and 11. Currently, social studies is administered using a district-developed assessment for participation and supported independence levels due to the absence of a finalized MI-Access version.

The SEI program supports administration of M-STEP for grades 3–8 and 11, with 11th-grade students also participating in the SAT and the newly updated WIN assessment, formerly known as ACT WorkKeys, now administered online.

This season requires significant coordination. Staff must simultaneously prepare detailed testing schedules and classroom plans for substitute coverage while identifying optimal testing windows when students are regulated, medically stable, and ready to engage. This work is carried out with exceptional professionalism, empathy, and strong relational capacity.

In addition, scheduled summer days for 2026 within the SCI program, designed to meet the required 200-day calendar, will center around an engaging games-themed learning experience. Stay tuned for the amazing activities as they continue to develop.

Our incredible COTA, Kara Collier, launched this planning with an exciting Mario Kart track activity that has inspired the broader instructional design for summer programming. Building from this momentum, SCI teachers and itinerant staff collaboratively developed weekly themed units, while our speech pathologist, Sue Wizorek, thoughtfully aligned core language vocabulary to each theme to strengthen communication and language development across settings.

At the heart of this work is a commitment to making learning joyful, meaningful, and highly preferred for students. Creating motivating experiences that foster engagement, communication, and skill development remains foundational to our approach.



Additionally, on April 22, a building administrator and EA representative will begin calendar pre-planning for the 2026–27 school year. This process must align with state requirements for both programs, including the SCI program's extended 200-day requirement.

Staffing Updates

Freedom Acres remains fully staffed. We are pleased to welcome a new virtual school social worker, Ambrean Ford, who will have assigned time supporting our building.

Highlights of Positive Work by Staff and Students

Emily Stall, Adaptive Physical Education Teacher, implemented an engaging March Madness unit. Each student was celebrated through a personalized poster modeled after a *Sports Illustrated* cover. Our PTO generously provided frames so these could be sent home to families. Parent feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing appreciation and sharing their pride on social media.

Initiatives & Capacity Building

As we look ahead to the 2026–27 school year, we are strengthening our FAME (Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators) team and identifying next steps to deepen formative assessment practices across programs.

State-Level Work or Involvement

The Ionia ISD will host the statewide PoHI–SXI Conference on April 20. Registration reached capacity early, reflecting strong statewide interest. SCI teachers, Autism Education Center staff, and ISD itinerant teams will participate. This event provides an opportunity to showcase the Ionia ISD campus, build professional networks, and deepen learning aligned to supporting students with the most complex needs.

Additionally, I had the opportunity to attend an AAC Parent Night at Livingston ISD. The keynote speaker, Mateo Moreno, shared his lived experience as an AAC user, offering powerful insights into communication, autonomy, and dignity. A concurrent parent session provided valuable perspective on family experiences and advocacy.

Michigan PoHI–SXI has also begun planning Lunch and Learn opportunities for the 2026–27 school year, which continue to be well attended by teachers and itinerant staff.

Past or Upcoming Events that Showcase Programs

- Michigan State Testing (Spring 2026) across SCI and SEI programs
- PoHI–SXI Statewide Conference hosted by Ionia ISD (April 20)
- 2026–27 Calendar Development (beginning April 22)
- Continued engagement in statewide Lunch and Learn professional learning series



Barriers & Challenges to Address

The needs of our learners in the SCI program continue to evolve as students grow and develop. The program has grown by 7 learners this school year! As a result, adaptive equipment needs remain ongoing in order to match the prescriptive physical and medical needs of students. Equipment such as gait trainers, standers, Hoyer lifts, slings, prescriptive toileting equipment, and augmentative and alternative communication tools are used daily by staff during instruction and care routines.

The cost of this equipment remains high due to its medical-grade design and the limited number of manufacturers producing specialized adaptive equipment. Continued planning and resource allocation will be important to ensure students have access to the equipment necessary to support safe mobility, communication, and participation in learning.

PI-OHI & Assistive Technology Department (K. Foote)

Department Highlights

- Follott Destiny lending library conversion kick off was March 31st. Assistive Technology Lending Library inventory has been uploaded for Follott to start phase one of the conversion to a web-based lending library.
- Working with Alt +Shift to implement Assistive Technology policies and guidelines for IEP teams. Thank you, Portland Public Schools, Early On and AEC for stepping up and being the first Cohort implementation teams.
- Continuing to work with IEP teams throughout the districts regarding fading adult support for PIOHI students.

Transition Training Sites/MoCI Programs (M. Sly):

- No Report

Deaf & Hard of Hearing (J. Pung)

- Our teachers and students are enjoying using the new [Foundations for Literacy Curriculum](#), which encompasses English and ASL.
- Both Hannah Wilson, DDH Teacher, and Charity Last, DHH Teacher Specialist, will participate in Finger Spelling Our Way to Reading training on May 1st.
- Part of the DHH team will head to Michigan School for the Deaf on April 20th to take a tour to learn more about the school and meet the new principal at MSD.
 - Austin Todd from Lakewood was named the student athlete of the month for MSD for his outstanding contributions to the varsity basketball team.
- Camp T is quickly approaching on May 21st. This is an exciting time for our students to engage in fun camp activities such as fishing, hiking, and rock climbing, while connecting with others from the DHH community.



Upcoming Events

POHI/SXI Statewide Conference - April 20
PAC Awards Banquet - April 23 5:30-7:30pm