



Press Release

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MDE Continues to Help Districts Address Teacher Shortages

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LANSING – The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is helping local and intermediate school districts address the shortage of special education teachers, the department announced today.

“There is a critical shortage of special education teachers in many Michigan school districts,” said State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice. “Allowing for some flexibility will help districts better staff their classrooms and meet the needs of our students with disabilities.”

In support of the state’s Top 10 Strategic Education Plan goal to increase the number of certified teachers in critical shortage areas, MDE is providing intermediate school districts (ISDs) and local school districts, both traditional public school districts and public school academies, with flexibility regarding appropriately certified and endorsed special education teachers in specific special education programs. The flexibility will be available through a waiver application.

Waivers under this flexibility are designed to minimize special education program vacancies and address the current critical teacher shortage, to provide flexibility with current and newly hired special education teachers, and to reduce the use of substitute teachers in special education programs.

“The shortage of highly qualified special education teachers in Michigan is detrimental to the continued success of students with disabilities,” said Kanika Littleton, project director for the Michigan Alliance for Families and a parent of a student with disabilities.

“Often, ISDs and districts must rely on substitutes to educate students with the most significant educational, functional, and behavioral needs. These substitutes, while generous with their time and passion to support students, lack the necessary education and pedagogical knowledge to adequately teach students in need of specialized instruction and support,” Littleton added. “These waivers will provide the needed flexibility to allow students access to trained, qualified special education teachers and are a critical step in improving outcomes for our students.”

State law allows for a limited time waiver of state administrative rules governing teacher certification. MDE is creating a limited time waiver opportunity for ISDs and districts to allow a teacher with a special education endorsement in any area to be assigned to a special education program that differs from his/her endorsement area. The eligible special education programs under this waiver include programs for students with cognitive impairments, emotional impairments, learning disabilities, speech and language impairment, physical and other health impairment, and severe multiple impairments.

The executive director of the Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE) says that MAASE continues to support the MDE Path Forward strategic action plan recommendation to expand the pool of highly skilled and supportive educators by exploring flexibility in categorical endorsements.

“We believe this limited waiver, relative to endorsement, will maximize a district's ability to fill vacancies with special education teachers instead of relying on substitutes,” said Abby Cypher, executive director at MAASE. “We share the department's passion for having the most highly qualified educators in our classrooms, and we appreciate the recognition of the flexibility needed to accomplish this during this time of critical shortage in the field.”

These waivers may be approved for one year with the option to renew for any ISD or local school district that is able to demonstrate the intent of the rule can be addressed in a more effective, efficient, or economical manner, or that the waiver is necessary to stimulate improved pupil performance. The ISD or school district must also be able to demonstrate unsuccessful attempts to fill an open special education position with a properly endorsed special education teacher.

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