



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 20, 2020

TO: Local and Intermediate School District Superintendents
Public School Academy Directors
Local Education Agency Principals

FROM: Dr. Scott M. Koenigsknecht, Deputy Superintendent
P-20 System and Student Transitions

SUBJECT: Improving Special Education Systems: Michigan's Path Forward

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is committed to working with our partners in the field to improve the special education systems that our children and families experience on a daily basis. Our systems are improving as evidenced by Michigan's latest federal determination. On June 30, 2019, Michigan's determination moved back into the "Need Assistance" with a score of 65.28%. This is the highest score Michigan has received since determinations began in 2014. While MDE is pleased with the trajectory of the growth, there still is much work to be done.

One year earlier, on June 28, 2018, the U.S. Department of Education had notified Michigan that it was the only state to be determined "Needs Intervention." The 2018 "Needs Intervention" determination was a tremendous opportunity to improve the current system of special education on both results and compliance. This finding created a sense of urgency amongst multiple stakeholders across the state of Michigan.

During the 2018-19 school year, MDE brought a large, diverse group together to develop ideas and implement solutions. A steering committee was developed and was made up of labor, management, elementary and secondary educators, special educators, teachers, paraprofessionals, parents, advocates, and policy makers. The steering committee met three times to develop a mission and vision for success and then recommended members of their organizations to serve on one of four work groups that are part of the results aspect of the federal determination: Increasing the Graduation Rate; Reducing the Drop-out Rate; Increasing M-STEP Participation; and increasing the NAEP Proficiency and Participation Rates. Over 40 work group members met three times to generate 18 recommendations for action around the determination areas.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

CASANDRA E. ULBRICH – PRESIDENT • PAMELA PUGH – VICE PRESIDENT
MICHELLE FECTEAU – SECRETARY • TOM MCMILLIN – TREASURER
TIFFANY D. TILLEY – NASBE DELEGATE • JUDITH PRITCHETT
LUPE RAMOS-MONTIGNY • NIKKI SNYDER

The recommendations are part of a plan that has become known as the Path Forward. The 18 recommendations focus on 8 principles: improving instruction in inclusive learning environments; creating multiple pathways to graduation for students with disabilities; increasing the awareness and use of the personal curriculum; exploring variations of educator certification for teachers of students with disabilities; providing coordinated professional learning on early warning systems (EWIMS); quality tier one instruction; data analysis; personal curriculum; utilizing data; increasing communication around the MSTEP and NAEP; and advocating for additional funding. A complete copy of the Path Forward can be found at https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Path_Forward_Strategic_Action_Plan_680915_7.pdf. The site contains information about the determination itself, the vision and mission for the work, the make-up of the committees, the recommendations and associated activities, and the metrics and timeline associated with each.

Many of the recommendations and their associated actions are not limited to special education. This is really a general education *and* special education issue. To that end, MDE is partnering with the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) and the Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE) to develop an “all ed” network similar to the General Education Leadership Network (GELN). This network will be instrumental in helping to implement the recommendations in the field. MDE encourages intermediate and local school district staff to familiarize themselves with the recommendations and activities and become involved in the activities by working with state associations such as MASA, MAISA, MASSP, MEA, AFT-Michigan, MAASE, and MEMPSA as well as MDE itself.

For more information, you may contact Dr. Scott Koenigsknecht at KoenigsknechtS@michigan.gov.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance