



Capacity Building & Improvement Effort

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Capacity Building & Improvement Effort: Cohort Two Fall 2025

Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education
August 2025

Background

According to [guidance](#) issued in July 2023 by the Federal Office of Special Education, States must have a reasonably designed general supervision system where each subrecipient local education agency (LEA) of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) federal flow-through grant, which in Michigan are intermediate school districts (ISD), is monitored at least once within a six-year cycle. To be able to effectively monitor all 56 ISDs and three State agencies, which are also subrecipients of the IDEA federal flow-through grant, MDE OSE will monitor ISDs and state agencies in cohorts of 10 participants each year. The first cohort was initiated in the fall of 2024, and the second cohort will start in the fall of 2025. The focus of the capacity building & improvement effort activity will be the IDEA requirements specific to Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (34 CFR §§§§[300.114](#), [300.115](#), [300.116](#), and [300.117](#)) and those requirements most closely related to the mentioned regulations.

The entitlement of a [Free Appropriate Public Education \(FAPE\)](#) in the LRE for eligible students with a disability is a key principle of the IDEA. The central activities planned throughout this process will ensure entitlement to the civil rights requirements of IDEA is provided.

Consistent with the state’s general supervision responsibilities, the purpose of conducting the FAPE in the LRE Capacity Building & Improvement Effort is to determine the extent to which each subrecipient of the federal IDEA grant has policies, procedures,

and practices in compliance with the LRE requirements cited primarily in §§§[300.149](#), [300.2](#), and [300.224](#). Each cohort participant will receive a summary report issued by MDE OSE after completion of an on-site visit. The report will affirm positive articulate practices, articulate areas of improvement, and areas of system improvement needed to align practices with the requirements of IDEA.

Phase 1: Pre-Visit Processes

Prior to the initiation of the FAPE in the LRE capacity building & improvement effort process, MDE OSE will host a virtual kick-off meeting for all of the cohort participants and the staff of the MDE OSE. The purpose of the virtual meeting will be:

1. To introduce State leaders of the FAPE in the LRE capacity building & improvement effort activities, including the LRE Technical Assistance (TA) Coordinator, who will be assigned to each cohort at the onset of the monitoring cycle.
2. To confirm the schedule of the capacity-building & improvement effort dates.
3. To review the steps involved in the monitoring process.
4. To distribute and provide an overview of the data profile to be used as part of the capacity building & improvement effort discussions.

The following activities will occur after the virtual kick-off meeting and prior to the scheduled on-site visit for each cohort participant:

1. MDE OSE will provide a data profile for each cohort participant. This profile will contain charts, graphs, and data at the aggregate ISD level to which MDE OSE has access. The data profile will objectively describe the cohort participant in terms of compliance and results. The data profile will also contain a graphic depicting the placement/location of each student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) assigned within the jurisdiction of the cohort participant. The data profile will be used as part of the overall analysis.
2. Each cohort participant will be asked to provide a detailed description in response to the following three questions:
 - a. What system is in place at the ISD to ensure everyone within the jurisdiction of the cohort participant knows the LRE requirements of IDEA?

- b. What system is in place at the ISD to ensure everyone within the jurisdiction of the cohort participant verifies everyone is implementing the requirements correctly?
 - c. What system is in place at the ISD to ensure everyone within the jurisdiction of the cohort participant supports any identified area of improvement needed?
 3. Student-level program Review completed prior to the on-site visit
 - a. The IEP selection process is completed according to MDE OSE established business rules.
 4. The review will be conducted collaboratively with MDE OSE and the individual cohort participants.
 5. The IEPs selected and the outcome of the review may be, but are not limited to:
 6. Inform additional or specific discussions to be completed as part of the interview activity.
 7. Inform additional capacity building & improvement effort process activities, as appropriate.
 8. Correction of identified non-compliance resulting from the IEP review will need to be completed within one year.
 9. Policies and procedures review.

Phase 2: MDE OSE On-site Visit Process

The FAPE in the LRE capacity building & improvement effort process is comprised of the following two separate activities:

1. On-site discussion with ISD and Member District Educators
2. Discussions will take place on-site and as much as is reasonable at both the ISD and designated member district locations.
3. MDE OSE, in collaboration with individual cohort participants, will determine specific general and special education administrators and providers, including general and special teachers, ancillary service staff, and School Board Members, to talk with.
4. Discussion questions are designed to determine the level of awareness and understanding of the IDEA requirements of the public agency to provide and ensure a FAPE in the LRE to eligible students with a disability, as well as the role of the public agency in the education of students with disabilities enrolled in their district.

5. MDE OSE and cohort participants will facilitate conversations with the selected staff.
6. The result of the discussions will NOT lead to identified noncompliance. This information will be used to determine future planning and technical assistance needs for improved practices.
7. Parent Focus Group
8. Conducted on-site at a date and time determined by the ISD and their confirmed Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) members, based on the scheduled events of the on-site visit.
9. To increase and/or incentivize PAC attendance and participation, the host ISD will be asked to consider:
 - a. Reimbursement options for transportation costs to PAC members
 - b. Free on-site childcare as needed.
 - c. Light refreshments (dinner, cookies, cheese and crackers, a drink option, etc.)
 - d. Individual cohort participants from the ISD, in collaboration with MDE OSE, will convene a discussion with the ISD's PAC members. ISDs are required to establish and support a PAC as defined in Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education ([R 340.1838](#)).
10. Feedback from the PAC members will focus on the LRE requirements. A brief review of the requirements will be shared with the PAC members for clarification. Retractable banners for each requirement containing the specific language from IDEA will be used for this purpose and will remain with the cohort participants for future use. A one-page Family Matters document will also be shared with the PAC members to provide further clarification on the LRE IDEA requirements.
 - a. The PAC members will be asked to share, based on their experiences and their participation in the IDEA required activities (IEP Team meetings, evaluations, Manifestation Determination Reviews, etc.), relevant issues related to their child's education and the extent to which they have seen the district practices aligned with §300.114-300.117.
11. The results of the Parent Focus Group discussion will NOT lead to identified noncompliance. This information will be used to inform further planning and technical assistance needs for improved practices.

Outcomes of FAPE in the LRE Capacity Building & Improvement Process

There will be three outcomes of this process:

1. When student-level program reviews result in identified noncompliance, correction will be required as soon as possible, but in no case greater than one year.
2. The LRE TA Coordinator assigned to the cohort at the onset of the capacity building & improvement effort cycle will support the cohort for the ensuing five years of the remaining six-year cycle.
3. Each participant of the cohort will be required to develop and implement a two–five year improvement plan focusing on areas identified in the final report.

MDE OSE Team

- Teri L. Rink, Director, Office of Special Education
- Rebecca McIntyre, Assistant Director, Office of Special Education
- Jessica Brady, Performance Reporting Supervisor, Office of Special Education
- Chantel Mozden, Program Accountability Supervisor, Office of Special Education
- Charles Thomas, Special Education Consultant, Office of Special Education
- Sharon Kerr, Special Education Consultant, Office of Special Education
- Jennifer Crabtree, Least Restrictive Environment Technical Assistance Coordinator, Office of Special Education
- Ashley Reed, Departmental Analyst, Office of Special Education
- Jennifer Waters, Administrative Assistant, Office of Special Education

Cohort Two Participants and Dates for On-site Activities

Location	Address	Dates
Delta Schoolcraft ISD	2525 3rd Ave. S. Escanaba, MI 49829	October 20-23, 2025
West Shore ESD	2130 US-10 Ludington, MI 49431	November 17-20, 2025
Clinton County RESA	1013 S. US Highway 27, Suite A St. Johns, MI 48879	December 8-11, 2025
Ionia County RESA	2191 Harwood Rd. Ionia, MI 48846	January 26-29, 2026
Washtenaw ISD	1819 S. Wagner Rd. Ann Arbor, MI 48106	February 9-12, 2026
Ingham ISD	2630 W. Howell Rd. Mason, MI 48854	March 9-12, 2026
Muskegon Area ISD	630 Harvey Street Muskegon, MI 49442	April 13-16, 2026
Macomb ISD	44001 Garfield Rd. #1100 Clinton Twp., MI 48038	May 11-14, 2026
St. Clair County RESA	499 Range Road Marysville, MI 48040	May 18-21, 2026
Newaygo County RESA	4747 W. 48th St. Fremont, MI 49412	June 1-4, 2026

Timeline of the LRE Process

The activities and timeline for the FAPE in the LRE Capacity Building & Improvement Effort Process for each cohort will be ongoing throughout the six-year cycle.

Phase One: FAPE in the LRE Capacity Building & Improvement Effort pre-visit on-site activities are conducted and completed. Identified noncompliance will be managed in the Catamaran system and must be completed within one year from the date of identification.

Phase Two: The MDE OSE meets with ISD and member district personnel for conversations and meets with the Parent Advisory Committee to discuss FAPE in the LRE experiences from a parent perspective.

Phases Three-Six: With support from MDE OSE and an MDE OSE LRE TA Coordinator, each cohort participant will engage in the OSE Data Use & Action Process to develop and begin implementing a five-year improvement plan based on the areas identified in the Report of Findings issued. Improvement plan implementation, along with building capacity & improvement effort, the successful implementation, and making any data-driven revisions as needed to ensure improvement.

Phase One: The FAPE in the LRE Capacity Building & Improvement Effort will be repeated as the second six-year capacity building cycle begins.