



30100 Telegraph Road Ste 250
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www.AAoMI.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 14, 2020

Contact: Colleen Allen

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Autism Alliance of Michigan Announces State-wide Coalition for Special Education

Bingham Farms – Today the [Autism Alliance of Michigan](http://www.AAoMI.org) announced the formation of a statewide campaign to improve special education. The Coalition, made up of education leaders and advocates, assembled to collectively address a number of critical barriers to quality programming and ultimately better outcomes for children with special needs, including autism. Current priorities include increasing school funding at the state and federal level as well as addressing learning loss for students with disabilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This coalition of the state’s top leaders are rallying together to assure that our most vulnerable kids are not left behind through the dramatic changes to education through the COVID-19 recovery process,” said Colleen Allen, President and CEO of the Autism Alliance of Michigan.

Starting with discussion to make recovery learning opportunities accessible to all families, the coalition has been working with state education leaders and legislators to prepare for school this fall. Through ongoing collaborative meetings, the coalition outlined inherent inequities in the state’s education system, the lack of consistent and dedicated funding, including historical underfunding from the federal government.

In 1975, the federal government signed the “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act,” commonly known as IDEA, which required the Federal Government to cover 40% of the cost to fund special education programs. Currently, Federal reimbursement for most states, including Michigan, equals approximately 11-15% of average costs.

“It is our moral obligation to improve special education,” said Paula Herbart, Michigan Education Association President. She continued, “If we do not make critical investments right now, the COVID-19 challenges will magnify our inherent challenges and hurt the children who need it most.”



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The Special Education Coalition of Michigan recently met with members of the State's legislature and US congressional members and submitted a [Letter to the Michigan Senate and Congressional Delegation](#) urging immediate action to address revenue shortfalls that impact school funding.

In addition to pushing for the next round of stimulus to include funding for special education, the coalition is also building a national alliance to advocate for the full funding commitment in the IDEA.

Special Education Coalition of Michigan, current members

Dr. Colleen Allen

CEO, Autism Alliance of Michigan (AAoM)

Dave Meador

Vice Chairman, DTE Energy
AAoM Board Chair

Ron Fournier

President, Truscott Rossman
AAoM Vice Chair

Brian Calley

Fmr. Lieutenant Governor
President, Small Business Administration
AAoM Board member

Representative Sheryl Kennedy, Ph.D.

Michigan House of Representatives, 48th District

Michelle Fectaeu

Secretary, State Board of Education
AAoM Board member



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Deputy Superintendent, Michigan Department of Education (MDE)

Dr. Randy Liepa

Superintendent, Wayne RESA

Lohren Nzoma

Sr. Executive Director of Exceptional Student Education, Detroit Public School Community District (DPSCD)

Justin Michalak

Assistant Superintendent, Special Education & Student Services, Macomb Intermediate School District (MISD)

Member, Governor Whitmer's Return to School Advisory Council

Kris Keranen

Director of Education Advocacy, Michigan Protection & Advocacy Service, Inc. (MPAS)

Kanika Littleton

Director, Michigan Alliance for Families (MAF)

Kristin Totten

Education Attorney, ACLU of Michigan

Paula Herbart

President, Michigan Education Association (MEA)

David Hecker

President, American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

Abby Cypher

CEO, All Individuals Matter, LLC

Melody Arabo

2015 Teacher of the Year, U.S. Dept. of Education Teacher Ambassador Fellow



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Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC)

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Professor, Inclusive Education, Wayne State University

Brian Gutman

Director External Relations, The Education Trust-Midwest

Liz Bauer

Fmr. State Board of Education

Lyn Beekman

Special Education Solutions, LLC

David Moss

Associate Professor, Disabilities Clinic, Wayne State University Law School

Debra Chopp

Director, Pediatric Advocacy Clinic, University of Michigan Law School

Michele Corey

Vice President for Programs, Michigan's Children

Peri Stone-Palmquist

Executive Director, Student Advocacy Center of Michigan

Heather Eckner

Executive Director, A2IDEAS Special Education Advocacy
AAoM education consultant

Laura Athens

Laura A. Athens, Attorney and Mediator, PLC
Education Attorney
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