FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 14, 2020

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

Bingham Farms – Today the Autism Alliance of Michigan 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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Scott Koenigsknecht, Ph.D.
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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Dr. Sally Burton-Hoyle
Professor, Special Education, Eastern Michigan University
Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC)

Dr. Susan L. Gabel
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
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