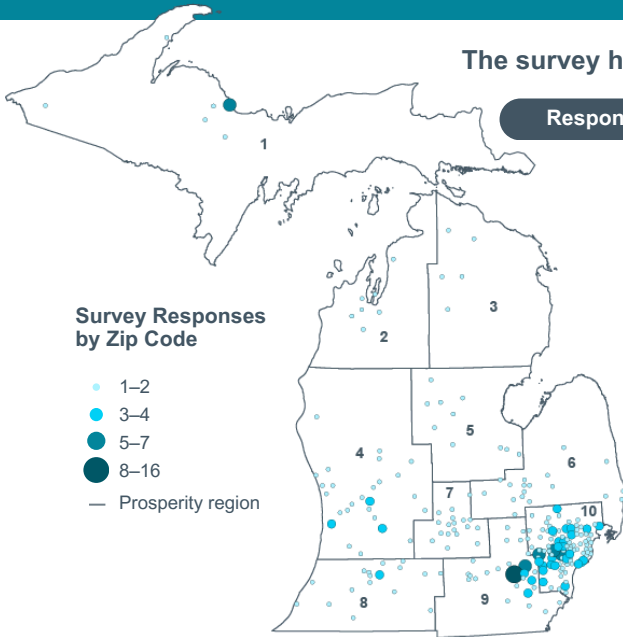


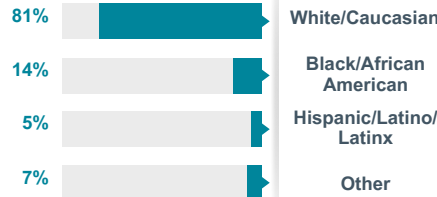
The Autism Alliance of Michigan (AAoM) was founded on the vision that people with autism will lead lives that meet their greatest potential. In 2023, AAoM fielded an unprecedented online survey to inform collective advocacy efforts to improve access and grow opportunities for students with disabilities across the state.

The survey had **890 responses** from across Michigan.

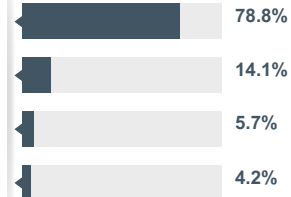
Respondents mirror Michigan's racial demographics:



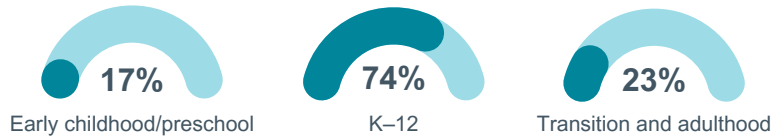
Survey respondent demographics¹



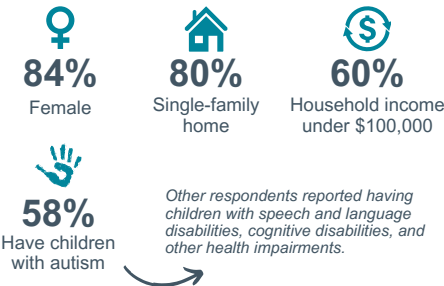
State demographics (2020 Census)



Respondents included individuals with disabilities and parents of students with disabilities from various educational levels:



Respondent characteristics:



What Is Special Education?

The system we refer to as "special education" is governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), enacted in 1975 and last reauthorized by Congress in 2004. Under IDEA, schools are obligated to provide a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment to eligible students through an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or individualized education program (IEP). IEPs and IFSPs are legal documents outlining the services and supports a student needs. With tools like these, IDEA helps prepare eligible children with disabilities for further education, employment, and independent living.

State Assessments

Schools use assessments to measure student proficiency and achievement. Under IDEA, all students with disabilities are expected to participate in state assessments. In Michigan, the vast majority of students with disabilities participate in the general state assessment, called the M-STEP, with or without accommodations. For a very limited number of students, those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, an alternate assessment is available in Michigan called the MI-ACCESS.

Participation in alternate assessments can have implications for high school completion and postsecondary opportunities. Communication between schools and parents about the potential impact of these assessments on students' future opportunities is critical when determining whether an alternate assessment is appropriate.

Federal regulations include an expectation for the state to ensure that the decision to assess a student under an alternate assessment does not preclude the student from attempting to complete a regular high school diploma.²

In Michigan, **96.8%** of students took the M-STEP in the 2022–2023 school year.³

According to the most recent data, **11.8%** of high schoolers with disabilities took an alternate math assessment and **12.6%** took an alternate reading assessment.⁴



¹ Survey demographic questions were optional.

² United States Department of Education. n.d. "Inclusion of All Students." *Code of Federal Regulations* 34, 200.6.

³ Michigan Department of Education (MDE). August 31, 2023. "2023 State Test Scores Improve in Many Grades in Math, Science, Social Studies, and English Language Arts." MDE. Accessed December 22, 2023.

⁴ Center for Educational Performance and Information. n.d. "Special Education: Indicator Report Summary." *MI School Data*. Accessed November 28, 2023.

Understanding the Impact of State Assessment Participation

How a student with a disability participates in state assessments is a decision made annually by the IEP team. The use of alternate assessments should be considered for those students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and who are unable to participate in the general state assessment with accommodation.⁵

As part of the IEP process, **parents must be clearly informed if their child's achievement is being measured against alternate achievement standards and how participation in such assessments may delay or otherwise affect the student from completing the requirements for a regular high school diploma.**



One-quarter (27%) of respondents had either not discussed, or were unsure whether they had discussed, the impact of taking an alternate assessment with the IEP team.



Nearly one-quarter (22%) of respondents are unsure or do not understand the difference between a diploma and a certificate of completion.

A certificate of completion is not equivalent to a diploma and is not an accredited or legally recognized credential.

Is Your Student Taking an Alternate Assessment?

34% of respondents were unsure if their student with a disability takes an alternate assessment.

AAoM is committed to ensuring that schools are properly following the decision-making process and communication guidelines with families according to federal IDEA requirements.

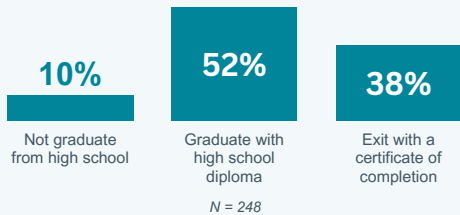
High School Completion and Dropout

Parent and Personal Expectations

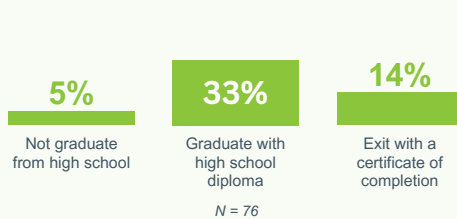
Parents of students with disabilities have an intimate understanding of their student's abilities and potential as well as valuable insight into what their child needs to succeed, all of which inform their expectations of their child's education outcomes.

Respondent Expectations About High School Completion

Surveyed Parents of Students with Disabilities



Surveyed Students with Disabilities



Respondents were asked to select all options that applied. Select options are shown here. Results do not equal 100%

Dropout

Dropping out of high school may have serious implications for any student but, for students with disabilities, dropping out of high school may act as an even higher barrier to success. **Michigan high school dropout rates for students with disabilities are more than twice what they are for students without disabilities.**⁶

9% of respondents said their child has dropped out or been removed from their school setting
N = 276

22%
Dropout rate for students with disabilities

8%
Dropout rate for nondisabled students

Of respondents whose students dropped out of school (N = 25), the top reasons were:

- Poor relationships with fellow students
- Lack of appropriate curriculum
- Dislike of school experience
- Poor relationships with teachers and/or school staff

“He is very behind and likely will not graduate on time. I am an educator with a master's degree and had the means to find outside services, and my kid is still in danger of not graduating from high school.”
—Michigan parent

“[The school] seemed shocked I had college expectations of my child. He is nearly a savant when it comes to math, yet they wanted to put him in lower-level courses. He had difficulty getting all the steps on paper because his brain was processing quicker than he could write. The attitude of the teachers and administration ... has stalled his progress post-graduation because he bought into their vision of him rather than mine.”
—Michigan parent

To learn more about Autism Alliance of Michigan or to get involved, go to:
autismallianceofmichigan.org/education-initiatives/ or

SCAN THIS CODE FOR MORE INFO

