



Statewide Coalition Launches RISE to Advance Michigan Special Education Reform

Education, parent, disability, and policy organizations back full implementation of the MI Blueprint

LANSING, MI, April 7, 2026 — A new statewide coalition, RISE (Reimagine Improved Special Education), today announced its launch to support full implementation of the [Michigan Special Education Finance Reform Blueprint, known as the MI Blueprint](#). RISE brings together education, disability, parent, and policy organizations from across the state with a shared goal of ensuring Michigan modernizes how it funds special education, so resources can be distributed in a way that reflects student need, thereby strengthening public education statewide.

RISE was formed to help move the MI Blueprint from framework to action. The coalition is focused on ensuring implementation is comprehensive and coordinated, so the system functions as designed and delivers consistent, reliable support for students, families, and educators across Michigan.

“The MI Blueprint reflects years of listening, analysis, and collaboration,” said **Heather Eckner, Director of Statewide Education at Autism Alliance of Michigan**. “RISE exists to make sure Michigan honors that work by implementing the Blueprint fully and responsibly. This is not about quick fixes. It’s about building a system that schools can rely on and students across Michigan can count on.”

RISE launched with the support of a broad coalition of organizations from across Michigan, including:

- 482 Forward
- Autism Alliance of Michigan
- EdTrust Midwest
- KConnect
- Launch Michigan
- Learning Disabilities Association of Michigan
- Michigan Advocates to End Seclusion & Restraint
- Michigan Center for Youth Justice
- Michigan Education Justice Coalition
- Michigan League for Public Policy
- Michigan Parent, Advocate & Attorney Coalition
- Michigan PTA
- Michigan Transformation Collective
- Michigan’s Children
- Teach Plus Michigan



- The Student Advocacy Center of Michigan
- Washtenaw Association for Community Advocacy (Arc chapter)

RISE expects to continue growing as additional organizations, community partners, and stakeholders join the effort.

The MI Blueprint is a data-driven, statewide framework developed at the request of the Michigan Legislature to modernize how Michigan funds special education. It was built through extensive statewide engagement, technical analysis, and public input from families, educators, administrators, researchers, and advocates across the state.

The Blueprint aligns funding with actual student need and provides a clearer, more predictable system for schools and districts. By moving away from an outdated reimbursement model and toward a needs-based structure, the MI Blueprint strengthens special education while reinforcing the broader public education system.

RISE members emphasize that the MI Blueprint was designed as a single, integrated system. Its components are intentionally interconnected and must be implemented together to function as intended.

“This is about following through on a plan Michigan communities helped build,” said **Venessa Keesler, President & CEO, Launch Michigan**. “Full implementation provides the clarity, stability, and alignment schools need to plan responsibly and deliver consistent support to students across the state.”

When special education funding does not reflect real student needs, it creates instability across the education system, making it harder for districts to plan, staff, and sustain services over time. Uncertainty in funding affects long-term decision-making and limits schools’ ability to operate with clarity and confidence. By aligning funding with student needs and creating greater predictability, the MI Blueprint strengthens the foundation schools rely on to function effectively.

The MI Blueprint was completed and formally submitted to the Michigan Legislature in October 2025. With the analysis and design phase complete, the next step is legislative action to implement the framework.

“Michigan has a clear path forward,” **Eckner said**. “What matters now is following through.”

“For students to truly have their needs met, they need the funding and resources to support them,” said **Brian Love, State Director of EdTrust-Midwest**. “State policymakers have laudably recognized that they need to invest more for students with the greatest needs, particularly students from low-income backgrounds and English learners. Now it’s time to recognize the true cost to support the needs of students with disabilities. We’re proud to partner with others in the RISE coalition to implement the MI Blueprint and ensure fair funding for all Michigan students.”



About RISE

RISE (Reimagine Improved Special Education) is a statewide coalition powered by the Autism Alliance of Michigan that is working to advance full implementation of the Michigan Special Education Finance Reform Blueprint (MI Blueprint). RISE supports a modern, predictable, and student-centered special education funding system that strengthens public education and ensures every Michigan student has access to the support they need to thrive.

For more information about RISE and the MI Blueprint, visit <https://autismallianceofmichigan.org/education-initiatives/rise/>

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