

CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF SCHOOL PROFESSIONALS:
SOLUTIONS THAT SUPPORT STUDENTS OF VARYING MODES OF COMMUNICATION



***Division for
Communicative
Disabilities and
Deafness***

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Approved by the Board of Directors of the Michigan Division for Communicative
Disabilities and Deafness on January 22, 2019

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Division for Communicative Disabilities and Deafness (DCDD) recognizes the Michigan Department of Education report, *Academic Year 2018-2019 Critical Shortage Discipline for Employment of Retirees (updated 8/07/2018)*. The report identifies the following academic disciplines that directly impact student success during critical developmental years. The lack of highly qualified professionals will negatively impact the determination of appropriate supports and services, evaluation outcomes, assessments, school placements, service delivery models, communication modalities, language options social-emotional growth, transition services/options and self-determination outcomes.

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Academic Discipline	Type of Evidence Utilized	District Approved	Date Added
School Psychologists	Reported by Michigan Association of School Psychologists & Federal Shortage List	ALL	3/30/2017
School Social Workers	Reported by Michigan Association of School Social Workers & Federal Shortage List	ALL	3/30/2017
Special Education-All Categories and Paraprofessionals	Multiple District Reports & Association & Federal Shortage List	ALL	3/30/2017
Speech Pathologists	Federal Shortage List	ALL	3/30/2017
World Language Teachers-American Sign Language	Federal Shortage List	ALL	3/30/2017

The reduction of teacher preparation programs in Michigan is cause for concern for low incidence populations. Michigan’s higher education institutions have discontinued their teacher preparation special education programs in the areas of vision of hearing. Subsequently, Michigan has resorted to developing a “consortium” collaborating with multiple state and national universities to assist with recruitment and training of teachers in these areas resulting in disjointed learning. Enrollee numbers in these programs continue to be low.

Research supports that basic brain development begins in an early embryonic state (Stiles and Jernigan, 2010) with full development by age 25. The natural age of language acquisition is now recognized to evolve until the age of 17.4 years (Boston College, 2018) indicating the critical timeline occurring during school age years. These same findings note the impact on neuroscience, linguistics and developmental psychology (Hartshorne et al, 2018).

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As mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), highly qualified professionals are to be prepared to directly service students with an Individualized Family Service Plan (birth- three years of age) or Individualized Education Program (three- age 26 in Michigan) and to be knowledgeable of the appropriate accommodations and supports necessary to provide equal access to learning as same age general education peers. Additionally, the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, approved 11-28-2017 in the state of Michigan, has acknowledged the recurrent teacher shortage in our state by publicly made available recent legislative, program documents, and administrative data regarding the crisis (Espinosa et al, 2018) in our state.

The Michigan Division for Communicative Disabilities and Deafness adopts the proposed policy strategies (Espinosa et al, 2018; Podolsky et al, 2016) when addressing educational shortages to support maintaining and sustaining highly qualified professionals in the are special education:

A) Recruitment

- Inviting retired professionals back into the classroom without pension penalty
- Acceptance of out of state certifications and/or licensures
- Provide Teacher Preparation Programs in the state of Michigan for degrees and endorsements in special education
- Provide financial affordability/incentives for those enrollees in teacher preparation programs or other critical shortage school related professions
- Paid student teaching opportunities

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B) Service Scholarships and/or Student Loan Forgiveness

- Establish service scholarships in exchange for the number of years of service within a district experiencing sustained need
- Loan forgiveness programs in exchange for the number of years of service within a district experiencing sustained need

C) Competitive Compensation

- Provide competitive wages to professionals working in educational

(Nationally teachers earn about 20% less than individuals with college degrees in other fields. The wage gap widens to 30% by mid-career (Espinosa et al, 2018).)

D) Mentoring Novice Professionals

- Create a culture of mentoring those newly in the profession

(Research supports that well-mentored professionals are twice as likely to remain in their position as those who do not receive mentoring. Under ESSA, Michigan can leverage federal Title II, Part A funds to support incoming educational personnel.)

E) Working Conditions

- Effective school leadership and administrative support

(The top reason professionals identified as leaving/staying in a school district, outweighing salary considerations for some. ESSA, Title II, Part A provides Michigan an opportunity to reserve up to 3% of the state Title II, Part A funds for school leader development.)

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- Opportunities for professional collaboration and shared decision-making related to the work they do.
- Opportunities for collaboration and understanding of accountability systems and measures for professionals
- Availability of resources for professionals to enhance student learning
- Safe, clean facilities
- Reasonable student to teacher ratios

Staff shortages and turnover are costly, undermining student achievement and school improvement (Podolsky et al, 2016). The Michigan Division for Communicative Disabilities and Deafness is concerned with the future recruitment, training, preparedness and retention of special education professionals in the state of Michigan. We strongly encourage and support the efforts by the State of Michigan to stabilize and rebuild this workgroup using the aforementioned proposed strategies. The Michigan Division for Communicative Disabilities and Deafness requests to assist and collaborate through further discussions. Every child has a right to be taught by a competent, committed teacher (Podolsky et al, 2016). Our participation in the development of programs will impact the achievements and success of the children and families we serve.

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