The Critical Shortage of Special Education Personnel in Michigan
March 18, 2014

Background
Michigan schools have struggled to hire and retain qualified special education staff for over twenty years. According to the US Department of Education (USED), this is not solely a Michigan problem. There is a long-standing nationwide shortage of personnel qualified to perform specialized instructional services in schools.

There are many factors driving this tightening of supply including the approximately 13% of special education teachers that choose to leave the field and request that their special education endorsement be removed from their certificates. The challenge of providing special education in today’s climate of increasing accountability and declining resources at the classroom level is challenging. Addressing these factors will require both long term and short-term solutions.

According to the State of Michigan there were 211,380 special education students enrolled in the state for the 2012-2013 school year constituting 13% of the total student population. Each one of these students has unique needs that require individual planning and specialized services in order to benefit from their instruction. Without adequate staffing, access to a quality education suffers.

At this time there is no legislation that addresses this issue. The current authorization that allows a critical shortage list to be developed expires at the end of the 2013-14 school year. This is a chronic problem and there is every indication that it will get worse. Michigan’s children deserve better.

The Data
The Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education (MAASE) identified critical shortages of personnel as a priority for action and collected information from membership in a survey conducted in February 2014. The survey was distributed to 648 members and had a return rate of 24.5%. Specific results of this survey are attached.

Respondents from across the state indicated current shortages exist in all of the following areas and are expected to continue through 2014-2015:

- Speech and Language providers
- School Psychologists
- Audiologist
- Occupational Therapist
- Physical Therapist
- Teachers of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Teachers of Deaf & Hard of Hearing
- Teachers of Students with Visual Impairment
- Teachers of Students with Cognitive Impairment
- Teachers of students with Physical Impairment and Students with Other Health Impairment
- Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities
- Teachers of Students with Emotional Impairment
- Early Childhood Special Education Teachers
- School Social Workers
- Special Education Directors & Supervisors
- Orientation & Mobility Specialists
- Sign Language Interpreters
Current Needs/Recommendation

MAASE strongly urges support of HB 5264 and HB 5181 as an essential first step in addressing this issue. Legislation such as this is necessary to direct the Michigan Department of Education to develop and submit to the USED a list of critical shortages for educational personnel on an annual basis.

References