



Six Shifts to Improve Special Education

Action Steps for Michigan Charter School Special Education Providers

Six Shifts to Improve Special Education and Other
Interventions – Nathan Levenson

Every Minute Counts - Johns Hopkins / OSPI (Washington
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction)



CASE Six Shifts book study

Three CASE sessions summarize Nathan Levenson's six shifts and the leadership moves needed to redesign special education and interventions.

Previously built charter deck

The existing deck contributes the Michigan charter lens: implementation playbook, leadership stance, legal essentials, 90-day plan, metrics, and reflection activities.

Every Minute Counts

The Johns Hopkins/OSPI guide contributes concrete action steps around inclusive culture, IEP service minutes, student-centered decisions, data, progress monitoring, and service delivery.

This version shifts the emphasis from “understand the shifts” to “act on each shift.”

By the end, participants can...

- Explain each of the six shifts in provider-friendly language
- Connect each shift to student-centered IEP service decisions
- Identify “Every Minute Counts” action steps that can be used immediately
- Audit one current barrier in schedules, roles, minutes, or data
- Commit to a 30-day action step for one shift

Core message

Special education is a service, not a place. Every minute should be purposeful: aligned to student need, connected to PLAAFP/goals/SDI, delivered in the least restrictive environment, and monitored for impact.

Compliance protects rights; action steps create access, instruction, and progress.

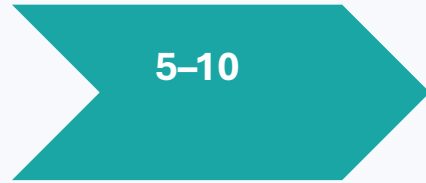
45-minute facilitation plan

A provider-facing deck with action steps embedded throughout

Flow



Frame the need



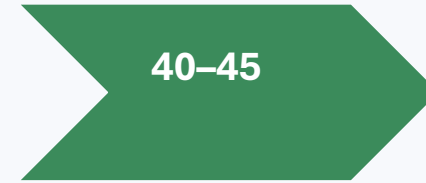
Six Shifts overview



Action steps by shift



Practice audit



30-day commitment

“Pick one current practice that is compliant on paper but not yet powerful for student progress.”

— Opening reflection

The Six Shifts

A system redesign lens for instruction, intervention, and special education

Overview

1

Special Education → General Education

4

Deterrence → Prevention

2

More Adults → More Time

5

One Good Schedule → Many Great Schedules

3

Generalists → Specialists

6

Managing Compliance → Managing Practice, Too

Each shift changes time, roles, routines, and data use so student progress becomes the center.

The guide's four checkpoints

1. Serving ALL Students
2. Student-Centered Decisions
3. Data-informed Decisions and Progress Monitoring
4. Preparing Future Educators and Collaboration

Connection to Six Shifts

The checkpoints translate the shifts into decisions about inclusion, service minutes, schedules, educator roles, progress monitoring, and family communication.

Provider lens

For each shift, ask:

What can I change in my own practice?

What needs a leader-level decision?

What needs a team routine?

Every minute should be justified by student need, not tradition, convenience, or the master schedule.

Shift #1: From Special Education → General Education

General education is the home base for grade-level learning

Shift 1

What it means

Students with disabilities receive full access to high-quality Tier 1 instruction. Special education services are portable supports designed to increase access and progress — not a parallel track.

Every Minute Counts connection

The guide emphasizes LRE and inclusion: special education and related services are transportable and should be delivered in settings responsive to student strengths, needs, interests, and preferences.

Checkpoint #1 Serving ALL Students

Access to the General Education Setting for Students with Disabilities
The continuum of special education service delivery options include, but are not limited to, those indicated below in Figure 1. Special education and related services are transportable and are to be delivered to the student in a setting that is responsive to the strengths, needs, interests, and preferences of an individual to ensure a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

According to the LRE principle of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), SWDs must be educated in the general education setting to the maximum extent possible. Particular attention must be taken when making placement decisions (i.e., general or special education settings) that begin with the LRE in mind and the IEP Team should consider how a student with a disability may increasingly access instruction in general education if they are placed in a more restrictive environment. These factors also impact the writing of IEP goals and the development of the service matrix.

Figure 1. Continuum of Placement Options Providing On-Ramp Access to General Education

Provider action question

Where can the student access grade-level instruction with supports before we consider removal from the general education setting?

Start with access to general education; design SDI and supports around that access.

Shift #1 action steps

Build a culture where special education is a service, not a place

Provider actions

- Use positive, strength-based language and reduce program/place labels
- Find academic access points beyond lunch, recess, or specials
- Design accommodations with examples of what they look like in class
- Use current progress data to justify any pull-out or restrictive setting
- Invite general educators into data and service-minute conversations

Leader actions

- Name inclusion as a schoolwide goal and communicate that it benefits all students
- Reframe all educators as service providers; services are portable
- Provide PD on UDL, accommodations, co-teaching, and presuming competence
- Create collaborative planning time rather than relying on hallway conversations
- Make removal from general education the exception, not the default

Team evidence to collect

- Core minutes protected for students with IEPs
- Accommodations observed in classrooms
- General educator input documented in IEPs
- Progress data from inclusive settings
- Family feedback on access and support

Action step: audit one student schedule for access to core instruction and meaningful inclusion.

“Special education is a service, not a place.”

— Anchor phrase for discussion

Audit prompts

- Does the student receive the same core ELA/math minutes as peers?
- Are services scheduled during core instruction? Why?
- What supports could travel into general education?
- What access point exists in the current unit or lesson?
- What data would justify the current setting decision?

30-day provider move

- Choose one student currently served outside general education for academics
- Map their weekly core access and service minutes
- Identify one push-in or access-point opportunity
- Bring the idea to the next team meeting with progress data

Do not wait for a perfect inclusion model; identify one meaningful access road.

Shift #2: From More Adults → More Time

Struggling students need more purposeful instructional time — not only more staffing

Shift 2

What it means

Additional adult support does not automatically increase learning. Students need added time for targeted, explicit instruction that does not replace core instruction.

Every Minute Counts connection

Student needs should drive the recommendation for service minutes, not the school schedule. Service decisions should be based on student data and should adjust as student's progress.

Watch for

- Default 30-minute blocks
- Service grids copied forward
- Minutes based on adult availability
- Pull-out that removes core
- No fade-out or intensification plan

More time means added, targeted instruction — not simply more adults around a student.

Provider actions

- Ground minutes in PLAAFP, goals, SDI, and progress data
- Explain the purpose of each service block
- Consider frontloading services and fading based on data
- Use multiple sources of data from IEP team members
- Review minutes more often than annually when data indicate change

Leader actions

- Build intervention/enrichment time into the schedule
- Schedule students with disabilities first when the master schedule is a barrier
- Ask teams to show where extra time is added
- Permit flexible service patterns when student data support them
- Create time for teams to revisit service-minute decisions

Team evidence to collect

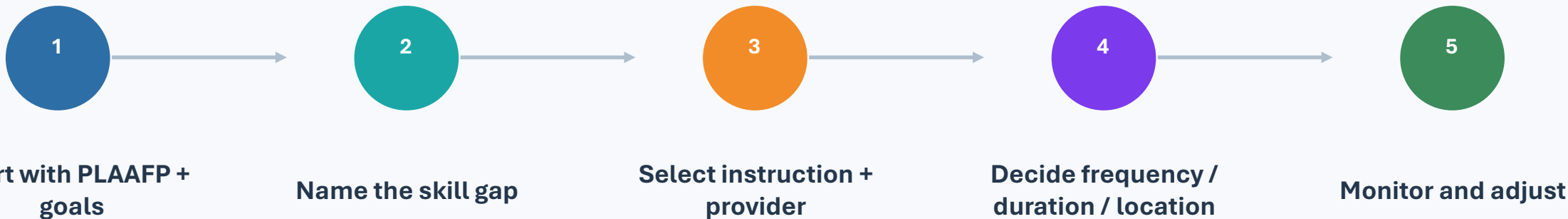
- Baseline and trend data for target skills
- Rationale for frequency/duration/location
- Progress monitoring schedule
- Plan to intensify, maintain, or fade
- Evidence service minutes are being delivered as written

Action step: add a “why these minutes?” rationale to service-minute conversations.

Service-minute decision routine

From default increments to student-centered dosage

Protocol



Facilitator prompt

When a team proposes 30 minutes, 5 times weekly, ask:

What data shows this dosage is needed?

What would trigger an increase, decrease, or change in instruction?

The service matrix should tell a student-centered story, not reproduce the bell schedule.

Shift #3: From Generalists → Specialists

Match students to the strongest instruction for the specific skill gap

Shift 3

What it means

Catch-up growth often requires deep expertise: structured literacy, math intervention, behavior support, communication, executive functioning, or case management.

Every Minute Counts connection

The guide recommends reconsidering roles: experienced content-area teachers, special educators as designers/coaches/case managers, and paraeducators trained to support and collect data.

Provider role design

Academic specialist
Behavior/SEB specialist
Case manager
Co-teaching partner
Progress-monitoring lead
Paraeducator coach

Role clarity increases instructional impact and reduces friction for special educators.

Provider actions

- Identify the specific skill each student needs to accelerate
- Clarify who designs SDI, who delivers instruction, and who monitors data
- Coach paraeducators on data collection and instructional routines
- Collaborate with general educators to implement IEPs in core classes
- Use specialist time for highest-need skills and hardest-to-teach content

Leader actions

- Place students with experienced content-area teachers and add SPED support
- Protect specialist time from low-impact tasks
- Create role descriptions for academic, behavior, case-management, and coaching functions
- Build mentorship for new teachers around IEP development
- Partner with preparation programs or ISDs/RESAs for targeted training

Team evidence to collect

- Provider-to-need match
- Paraeducator training/debrief logs
- Co-planning schedule
- Progress data by intervention group
- Reduced reliance on paraprofessional-led primary instruction

Action step: map one week of specialist time and mark minutes spent on highest-impact instruction.

Provider role clarity matrix

A quick tool to reduce “everyone does everything”

Tool

Role	Primary contribution	What to protect
Special educator	Designs SDI, analyzes progress, coaches implementation	Time for data review and direct specialist instruction
General educator	Owens Tier 1 instruction and classroom accommodations	Core minutes and co-planning time
Paraeducator	Supports access, practice, independence, and data collection	Training, supervision, and clear routines
Related service provider	Targets communication, motor, behavior, or functional access	Consult/push-in time connected to classroom routines

Role clarity is an equity strategy: students get the right expertise at the right time.

Shift #4: From Deterrence → Prevention

Preventing disruption is better than reacting after the fact

Shift 4

What it means

Systems that rely on punishment and removal are less likely to improve long-term behavior. Prevention teaches expectations, routines, replacement skills, and regulation supports.

Every Minute Counts connection

The guide highlights inclusive culture, presuming competence, and finding meaningful supports within general education rather than requiring students to “earn” access.

Provider action question

What is the student being taught to do instead — and how are adults practicing consistent prevention routines?

Prevention is an instruction and implementation problem, not just a discipline problem.

Shift #4 action steps

Move from removal to prevention routines that are taught and monitored

Provider actions

- Define the replacement skill and teach it explicitly
- Collect data on routines, antecedents, and time in instruction
- Support FBA/BIP implementation in the setting where behavior occurs
- Coach de-escalation and predictable routines
- Use peer/context comparison data for functional goals when helpful

Leader actions

- Define 3–5 schoolwide routines and look-fors
- Train, model, observe, and provide fast feedback
- Review behavior data every 2–4 weeks
- Avoid treating removal as the primary intervention
- Invest in inclusive supports that make classrooms responsive

Team evidence to collect

- Fidelity of prevention routines
- Office referrals by location/time/student group
- Attendance and tardiness
- Minutes lost from instruction
- Progress on behavior/adaptive/social-emotional goals

Action step: create one two-week coaching cycle for a high-frequency behavior routine.

Two-week prevention coaching cycle

Getting good at doing good requires repeated adult practice

Cycle

Week 1

Model + co-teach

Demonstrate the routine
in the setting where it
should happen

Week 1

Observe + feedback

Use one look-for and
provide quick, specific
feedback

Week 2

Re-teach + practice

Practice the routine with
students and adults

Week 2

Check fidelity

Use data to decide
maintain, adjust, or
intensify

Track implementation fidelity before concluding a student “did not respond.”

What it means

A schedule that merely fits adults and rooms may still block intervention, co-teaching, inclusion, and IEP services. Strategic schedules protect core and add intervention time.

Every Minute Counts connection

The guide warns that building schedules often drive service minutes. It recommends scheduling students with disabilities first when the schedule is a barrier and building inclusionary support/enrichment periods.

Provider action question

Where does the schedule make the IEP harder to implement with fidelity — and what alternate schedule pattern would reduce that friction?

A strategic schedule is one of the most powerful special education interventions a leader controls.

Shift #5 action steps

Build schedules that protect core, add support, and make IEPs implementable

Actions

Provider actions

- Bring schedule conflicts to the team with specific examples
- Identify when services replace core instruction
- Propose service delivery options inside general education first
- Name transition time and lost minutes as implementation issues
- Ask for co-planning time when SDI occurs across settings

Leader actions

- Schedule students with disabilities first when barriers exist
- Build daily intervention/enrichment time for all students
- Create multiple schedule options before locking the master schedule
- Align specialist time before paraprofessional time
- Use schedule reviews as part of IEP implementation monitoring

Team evidence to collect

- IEP services avoid core when appropriate
- Added time is visible on the schedule
- Co-teaching/collaboration time is scheduled
- Student groups are formed by skill gap
- Service minutes are delivered without chronic conflicts

Action step: identify one grade-level schedule change that would add time without reducing core access.

Schedule audit tool

Five questions to ask before accepting the current schedule

Tool

1

Where is core protected?

2

Where is extra time added?

3

Where do services occur?

4

Where is co-planning protected?

5

Where is data reviewed?

“If the schedule is the reason the IEP cannot be implemented well, the schedule is part of the intervention plan.”

— Presenter emphasis

Shift #6: From Managing Compliance → Managing Practice, Too

Monitor the quality of instruction and intervention like paperwork

Shift 6

What it means

IEP timelines, service logs, and documentation matter. But educational benefit requires monitoring whether practices are being implemented with quality and whether students are progressing.

Every Minute Counts connection

The guide recommends schoolwide approaches to data literacy, progress monitoring, service-minute tracking, and data-based action to iterate on programming.

Provider action question

What data tells us that the IEP is not just written and logged, but working?

Practice monitoring turns compliance into a continuous improvement routine.

Shift #6 action steps

Use data routines to manage practice, delivery, progress, and equity

Actions

Provider actions

- Develop progress monitoring plans for each goal
- Collect data weekly or twice monthly depending on the skill/SDI area
- Use data to decide whether to change minutes, instruction, or setting
- Track service delivery in a way families can understand
- Bring student records and prior intervention history into planning

Leader actions

- Train all IEP team members in data literacy
- Create a schoolwide progress monitoring approach
- Build routine data meetings and action steps
- Use dashboards that include compliance, practice, outcomes, and equity
- Emphasize shared responsibility in school improvement planning

Team evidence to collect

- Service minutes delivered
- Fidelity of intervention/core practices
- Goal progress graphs
- Family progress updates
- Access to core and inclusion indicators
- Discipline disproportionality

Action step: choose one simple dashboard view for compliance + practice + outcomes + equity.



Practice management questions

- Is the instruction being delivered as designed?
- Is the student receiving the documented minutes?
- Is the student making progress at the expected rate?
- Do we need to change intensity, provider, setting, or strategy?
- How are families seeing and understanding the data?

Data is not a paperwork artifact; it is the GPS for decisions.

Provider actions

- Give families accessible progress updates tied to goals
- Explain service minutes in plain language
- Ask what has worked at home or in past school years
- Share drafts early and treat the IEP as a draft
- Use student strengths, culture, and family priorities in planning

Leader actions

- Provide foundational IEP resources for families
- Create family liaison/community feedback routines
- Act transparently on family feedback
- Avoid requiring families to become legal experts to be heard
- Standardize progress snapshots and service schedule printouts

Evidence of stronger partnership

- Families understand goals and services
- Progress data is visible and understandable
- Communication occurs before problems escalate
- IEP meetings are collaborative and solution-focused
- Families can name who to contact and when

Families should not have to fight for the team to use data, communicate clearly, or include their child meaningfully.

Six Shifts action-step matrix

One practical “do next” move per shift

Quick reference

#	Shift	Immediate action step
1	Gen Ed → Special Ed	Audit core access and identify one push-in/access-point opportunity
2	More Adults → More Time	Add a rationale for frequency/duration/location based on data
3	Generalists → Specialists	Map specialist time to highest-need skills and clarify provider roles
4	Deterrence → Prevention	Run a two-week prevention coaching cycle for one routine
5	One Schedule → Many Schedules	Redesign one grade-level schedule to add intervention without reducing core
6	Compliance → Practice	Start a simple dashboard: delivery, fidelity, progress, access/equity

Do one thing well, measure it, then scale.

90-day implementation plan

Start with a small number of high-leverage system moves

Plan

Weeks 1–2 Diagnose

Audit schedules +
service times

Identify core pull-outs

Review 3 IEPs for
alignment

Pick 1–2 target grades

Weeks 3–6 Redesign

Protect core

Create/strengthen
intervention block

Clarify provider roles

Set progress
measures

Weeks 7–10 Implement

Train + model routines

Begin coaching cycles

Start data routine

Share early family
updates

Weeks 11–13 Stabilize

Adjust
groups/minutes

Fix scheduling friction

Review dashboard

Share results + next
steps

Day 90 deliverable: one implemented schedule/service/data routine that improves access and progress.

Table activity: Six Shifts audit

Use one student, one grade level, or one current service-delivery challenge

Activity

Step 1: Choose a focus

- One student with complex scheduling/service needs
- One grade level with high pull-out rates
- One recurring problem with service delivery
- One behavior routine that causes lost instructional time

Step 2: Rate the shift

- 1 = mostly compliance-driven
- 2 = emerging practice
- 3 = inconsistent but promising
- 4 = strong practice in some settings
- 5 = strong and sustainable across settings

Step 3: Commit to action

- Name the shift with highest leverage
- Pick one 30-day action step
- Define one evidence measure
- Name the person who will convene the team
- Set the next check-in date

A good action step is small enough to start now and meaningful enough to change student experience.

My shift focus is...

Shift # ____: _____

The current barrier is...

The action step I will start within 30 days is...

Evidence I will bring back

I will know this action step is working when I can show...

- More access to core
- Added instructional time
- Better provider-role match
- Prevention fidelity
- Schedule improvement
- Practice/progress data
- Clearer family communication

Write the commitment as a concrete action: who will do what, by when, using what evidence?

“Every minute counts when it increases access, strengthens instruction, and gives teams better evidence for the next decision.”

— Closing statement

Reflection prompts

- What shift is most urgent in your school?
- Where are we strongest across the Six Shifts?
- Where are we most vulnerable?
- What one action step would most improve outcomes this year?
- What evidence will we bring back in 30 days?

Final reminder

- Start student-centered
- Protect core access
- Add purposeful time
- Use specialist expertise
- Prevent before removing
- Schedule strategically
- Manage practice and progress

Core sources

- Levenson, N. (2020). *Six Shifts to Improve Special Education and Other Interventions*. Harvard Education Press.
- CASE book study page: *Six Shifts to Improve Special Education and Other Interventions*.
- Uploaded prior deck: *Building a High-Impact Special Education System*.
- Kouo, J., Harkins-Brown, A., & Phung, V. (2024). *Every Minute Counts: Calculating IEP Services to Improve Student Outcomes in Washington State Technical Assistance Guide*. Johns Hopkins School of Education / OSPI.
- IDEA / Endrew F. anchors noted in the technical assistance guide.

Adapt state-specific compliance examples to Michigan/MARSE and local authorizer expectations.

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