

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

The 'Age 26 rule' for extended transition services

Most states cut special education off at 22. Michigan doesn't, if your family member has a cognitive impairment eligibility and was already receiving services at 22. Almost nobody tells families this exists before it's too late to use it.

BY JIM PALASTY · 10 MIN READ · FOUR EXTRA YEARS MOST FAMILIES NEVER CLAIM

26

AGE THROUGH WHICH MICHIGAN
CAN EXTEND SPECIAL
EDUCATION

Students with a cognitive impairment eligibility who are still receiving services at 22 can continue through the school year in which they turn 26. Most families find out after the window has already narrowed.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Most states stop at 22

Federal law requires special education through 21 or 22 in most places. That's where the story usually ends.



STEP 2

Michigan built an exception

Students with cognitive impairment eligibility already receiving services at 22 can continue through age 26.



STEP 3

The window has to be protected

Missing enrollment or eligibility paperwork at the right moment can close a door that was legally supposed to stay open.

What families need to protect the extension

Cognitive impairment eligibility	Documented clearly in the IEP well before age 22
Continuous enrollment	Services must already be in place at exactly age 22
Written confirmation	Get the district's eligibility determination in writing, not verbally
A transition-focused IEP	Ages 22-26 should target employment and adult-system handoff
Advocacy if resisted	Michigan Alliance for Families can help contest a denial

THE INTERNSHIP THAT ALMOST DIDN'T HAPPEN



Tasha's son had a cognitive impairment eligibility buried in years-old paperwork nobody had flagged. At 22, the district assumed his services would simply end. Tasha asked, directly and in writing, whether the age 26 rule applied. It did. He spent the next two years in a supported internship through the school district, and walked into a part-time paid position the district had helped arrange before his services finally ended at 24.

THE ELIGIBILITY HAD BEEN THERE THE WHOLE TIME. SOMEBODY JUST HAD TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTION OUT LOUD.

What matters, at a glance

MICHIGAN SPECIFIC

Four additional years

Skill development, employment trials, and adult service transition planning all get more runway than the standard system allows.

Cognitive impairment eligibility required

The extension applies specifically to this eligibility category. Autism alone doesn't automatically qualify without it.

Schools sometimes resist

Continuing services past 22 costs the district money. Some schools discourage families from pursuing the extension without saying so directly.

Use it strategically

Employment trials with school support, additional independent living instruction, and adult-system relationship building all fit inside these years.

Services still end at 26

The extension delays the cliff. It doesn't eliminate it. Adult system connections need to be built during these years, not after.

Coordinate with adult services

Age 22 to 26 is the ideal window to establish CMH, MRS, and waiver connections before school-based support disappears entirely.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

☐ A copy of the IEP showing cognitive impairment eligibility

☐ Written confirmation from the district of age 26 continuation

☐ A transition plan targeting employment and adult-service handoff

☐ Contact information for your regional CMH and MRS office

☐ Michigan Alliance for Families' contact information, in case of pushback

YOUR MOVE

When you're approaching 22, here is how to protect the extension

1

Confirm cognitive impairment eligibility is documented in the IEP.

2

Request written confirmation of age 26 eligibility from the district.

3

Build a transition-focused IEP for ages 22 through 26.

4

Start connecting with adult services (CMH, MRS) well before 26.

5

Escalate in writing if the district resists or delays.

6

Contact Michigan Alliance for Families if the denial continues.

Four extra years of school-based support is a real advantage almost nobody claims. It doesn't claim itself.