



of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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## EDUCATION BUDGET PRIORITIES

### STATEMENT

Wisconsin has a long history of quality public education for all students, but achievement of students with disabilities continues to lag behind other groups. Recent statewide investments in employment supports for people with disabilities mean our schools must do their job to ensure students graduate college and workforce ready. Students of all disability types have proven that when instruction quality is high and funding is adequate, they can get proficient marks on state tests. Wisconsin must continue to invest in and promote quality education practices in environments that preserve parents' rights to question quality and in systems that are held accountable at the highest levels.

### BACKGROUND

According to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI):

- Students with disabilities are two-and-a-half times less likely to be proficient in reading and math than their peers.
- Nearly half of all students with intellectual disabilities spend more than 40% of their school day outside the regular classroom where the majority of grade level content is taught and where research shows students have the best outcomes.
- The ACT test is a marker for college readiness, yet only 8% of students with disabilities are taking it, compared to 68% of students without disabilities.
- DPI Post-School outcome data shows that outcomes for students with cognitive disabilities are low. In 2013 93% of surveyed students reported they were never engaged in postsecondary education and training since high school (72%, in 2009) and more than half reported no paid employment since high school.

The state's share of special education funding has eroded significantly during the past 20 years from 44% to the current 26% of actual costs. Local districts bear an extraordinary financial burden to ensure students with disabilities are educated properly.

### BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase state special education categorical aid funding to keep pace with local costs. Fund [to at least 44% of costs](#) - up from 26%.
- Increase state support to 55% for the high cost special education fund.
- Invest in and make families aware of the [Wisconsin Special Education Mediation System \(WSEMS\)](#) to resolve conflict with districts.
- Eliminate discriminatory open enrollment provisions.

- Direct DPI to develop an internal special education quality improvement plan to address achievement gaps for students with disabilities. Direct DPI to set benchmarks for targeted areas (i.e. academic, disciplinary, least restrictive environment and college/workforce readiness indicators). Annually report progress to the legislature.
- Develop a fund to target resources and technical assistance to districts that are not keeping pace with Annual Measurable Outcome (AMO) targets for students with disabilities to address their significant achievement gaps in reading and math.
- Ensure a uniform definition of disability across all school settings in the school accountability system. Use federal IDEA definition of disability; disaggregate all performance measure data by disability category.
- Develop alternatives to classroom removal and out of school suspensions. Invest in training for schools about best practice methods to achieve change.
- Require that DPI develop a clear transition policy for students with disabilities over age 14 stating that the preferred outcome of publicly funded education supports is to help the child become gainfully employed in an integrated workplace at or above the minimum wage.
- Establish a school based mental health study committee.
- Develop a stakeholder committee to study the impact of the enactment of Act 125 – the seclusion and restraint law.
- Ensure inclusion of all students with disabilities and schools (including students who attend state-funded) County Children with Disabilities Education Boards (CCDEBs) in the statewide accountability system.
- Do not consider development of a separate Special Needs Voucher/Scholarship program unless all 6 key criteria (agreed to by leading disability advocacy groups) to prevent fraud and to protect children's rights are met.
  - It is only available to low income families (same level as other voucher programs).
  - It prohibits tuition charges that exceed the voucher amount.
  - It does not diminish funding for public schools provision of special education or general education.
  - It ensures that special educators and related services staff (e.g., physical, occupational and speech therapists) will be at any voucher schools which accept such students and that they will implement the child's IEP.
  - Schools which participate in any such program must be held accountable to implement children's IEPs.
  - Children who are eligible for such programs must be re-evaluated at least every 3 years to determine if they still meet Wisconsin special education eligibility criteria. If they are no longer eligible for special education, they will not continue to receive a special needs scholarship.

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**Contact Survival Coalition Co-Chairs for additional information**

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