



of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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To: Senator Paul Farrow

Members, Senate Committee on Education Reform and Government Operations

From: Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

Re: SB-001 **School and School District Accountability Report: Survival Coalition Does Not Support Bill as Drafted**

Thank you to Chairman Farrow and Members of the Senate Committee on Education Reform and Government Operations for hosting a hearing on this important school accountability bill. This testimony represents the perspectives of members of the Survival Coalition – a statewide coalition of more than 30 disability groups - several of which directly support students with disabilities and their families to advocate for quality special education supports.

First of all, we thank you for your focus on developing an accountability system that incorporates all schools receiving public funding in our state. Parents of children with disabilities require robust information about their child's school in order to make good educational choices and to be part of the system of improvement for their district. No matter where a student with a disability attends, a parent has a lot on the line and often must be significantly more involved in their child's education than the parent of a typically developing child. The outcome of an education for a student with a disability can often mean the difference between a young adult who leaves school with real-world job skills prepared for employment or postsecondary education or someone who will be solely reliant on public benefits, live in poverty or end up in our criminal justice system. **Meaningful accountability for schools and transparent information is a way to empower parents.**

Therefore, we appreciate the attention this bill pays to developing a comprehensive school accountability system that will disaggregate data by disability status through multiple measures. For parents, seeing how a school specifically is educating students with disabilities is critical. Our only question relative to this is whether the detailed student subgroup performance information will be available to families, in addition to a school's performance category. We also strongly support measures that address both growth and gap closure in student achievement, as these types of measures allow parents and others to see how subgroups are performing in otherwise high quality schools.

We support the provision that students will continue to be measured under one common assessment including students with disabilities so that parents are comparing "apples to apples" across all school options; public, charter, or choice schools. While not specifically addressed in the bill, we would encourage

the requirement for both the availability of an alternative assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities and testing accommodations for any student with a disability that requires that as part of their IEP or ISP.

We would also like to share concerns and ideas for improvement in this bill.

Definitions:

Specifically, our member organizations tell us parents need consistent information about student performance across schools. An accountability system should be built upon an “apples to apples” comparison and definition of children with disabilities. We recommend that “disability status” be defined in the bill to cross-reference the definition of disability as it currently appears in state statute at 115.76 (5) (a-f) to clearly include a student who has developed either an individualized education program (IEP) or individual service plan (ISP). The bill currently has no definition of “child with a disability” or “disability status” and it will be important for parents to know that all schools include the same type of students in this category. For instance, a student who has a food allergy or other special need that with appropriate accommodation does not impact their daily learning would likely not require or be eligible for an IEP or ISP and should not be included in this category for means of academic achievement comparison.

In addition, if the intent of this bill is to include all schools receiving public funding, it is appropriate to include within the definition of a “school” – a county children with disabilities education board under s. 121.135, in order to capture the performance and outcomes of students in these settings.

Accountability Boards:

We strongly advocate that any review board making critical accountability decisions must include individuals with specific education expertise and expertise related directly to students with disabilities. Only with this expertise can such a board make sufficient decisions on improvement plans and how they relate to the needs of students with disabilities for low performing schools and school districts.

The bill also allows for an appeal of the identification as a chronically failing school to the accountability boards by the public, charter, and choice school governing boards. The Accountability Boards are allowed to choose to not identify the school as chronically failing if there are exceptional circumstances to justify the performance. The bill does not identify these exceptional circumstances and we would request these possibilities be defined. Our main concern would be that schools who predominately serve students with disabilities may be considered an exceptional circumstance and thus not held to the same standard as all other schools. **All students with disabilities deserve absolute assurance of being held to equal if not higher transparent accountability standards in this system given the results of low expectations previously and the dire consequences to the student, parents and taxpayers if a school fails such a student.**

Review System:

This bill should include a clear performance measure for career and college readiness, an essential element of any accountability system for all students, but particularly for those with disabilities. We should be paying more attention to the performance of these students and whether their education in whatever school setting is leading to college and workforce readiness. We suggest that the review system must recognize and include workforce readiness measures. Public schools already must report on something called Indicator 14 – which tells them where students with disabilities are one year after graduation. It is a stark wake-up call to look at this data and see how many students are sitting at home doing nothing. Previous drafts of school accountability in the 2013 Legislature (SB 286) did include workforce readiness measures. We welcome the opportunity to work with this committee to determine appropriate workforce readiness measures for our students with disabilities.

Another measure we would like to see included within the review rating for schools is one related to the number of pupil suspensions and expulsions, disaggregated by disability status. Parents of children with disabilities will tell you this information is critical to their own review as to whether a school is adequately meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Interventions:

We are concerned about what happens to parents and students when a choice school is identified as failing. As the bill is currently written, participating choice schools would not be required to put any intervention plan in place after being identified as a chronically failing school and although a failing choice school would no longer be able to enroll new students it appears current students in a failing choice school would be allowed to remain, without notice or other communication. We strongly advocate that the bill include various parent notification requirements throughout this section. As you might suspect, changing schools for any student, but particularly a student with a disability and their family, can be an extremely disruptive process. Parents require timely information about when their school is under performing so they can make informed decisions about their child's education.

We support the required improvement plan that public and charter schools would be required to submit to the Board. The four main components of the plan that focus on aligned curriculum, differentiation of instruction to meet individual needs, system of academic and behavioral supports and early intervention, and additional learning time can only better meet the needs of students with disabilities in these chronically failing schools. We believe these same plans should be expected of choice schools that will continue to receive state funding even if only for the students still enrolled in these chronically failing schools.

Thank you in advance for addressing the concerns outlined in this testimony. Our Coalition members are ready to provide support and feedback as you continue this process.

This document prepared by the Survival Coalition Education Issue Team.

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