



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

P.O. Box 7222, Madison, Wisconsin 53707

Date: July 7, 2015

TO: Members, Wisconsin State Legislature
FROM: The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

RE: **Survival Coalition Asks for Budget Bill Changes to Education Policies**

Members of the Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations have been monitoring the progress of the state budget. We write to make you aware of significant changes in education policy that will impact students with disabilities. Changes to education policy can have stark, unintended consequences for students with disabilities who require specialized supports in order to benefit from their education and become productive adults.

We request the removal of two policy items that were added to the budget bill without adequate public input or discussion about impact on students with disabilities.

The Survival Coalition asks that you make the following modifications to the budget bill Substitute Amendment 1 to Senate Bill 21:

- **Remove Special Needs Scholarship Program**
Page 957, line 11: delete the material beginning with that line and ending with Page 966, line 23.

This policy proposal was inserted into the budget in an omnibus motion late in education budget deliberations and without discussion at public hearings. Families of students with disabilities, who have consistently opposed similar proposals since 2011, were not provided with the opportunity to express concerns on the proposal as added to the budget. The proposal lacks protections for students, lacks meaningful accountability to parents or taxpayers and is not built upon a model that will guarantee results for students. **No Wisconsin disability organization supports a special needs voucher.**

- **Remove the Opportunity Schools Partnership Program.**
Page 973, line 11: delete the material beginning with that line and ending with Page 975, line 12.
Page 1054, line 6: delete the material beginning with that line and ending with Page 1110, line 5.

This proposal would turn selected Milwaukee public schools over to types of schools that currently do not serve students with disabilities in the same proportion, or are not required by law to educate students with disabilities. The Survival Coalition believes that unintended consequences for students with disabilities were not adequately discussed or considered in the development of this proposal. Students with disabilities attend affected schools in disproportionate numbers, as high as 35% in some cases. The proposal would potentially impact 7,564 students with disabilities. This significant policy change lacks protections and accountability for these vulnerable students.

Thank you for considering these requests.

Contact Survival Co-Chairs:

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