



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

P.O. Box 7222, Madison, Wisconsin 53707

For Immediate Release: November 17, 2016

Contact Survival Coalition Co-Chairs:

Beth Swedeen, beth.swedeen@wisconsin.gov; (608) 266-1166;

Kristin M. Kerschensteiner, kitk@drwi.org; (608) 267-0214

Maureen Ryan, moryan@charter.net; (608) 444-3842;

Survival Coalition Applauds Key Proposed Investments for Students with Disabilities in the State Education Budget

The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations is pleased to see funding priorities for students with disabilities highlighted in the Department of Public Instruction biennial budget request sent Tuesday to Governor Walker.

Specifically, the budget request includes significant increases in special education funding, targeted supports for school mental health and adds incentives and reimbursement for districts that focus on college and workforce readiness for youth with disabilities.

“This budget request is what families of children with disabilities have been asking for because it is focusing on results,” says Beth Swedeen, Survival Coalition Co-Chair. “Funding targeted at improving the outcomes of our youth is groundbreaking and essential.”

DPI’s Transition Incentive Fund, an initiative successfully championed in the 2015-17 budget by Representative Rob Brooks, R-Saukville, rewards school districts only after they prove they are getting kids jobs or enrolling them in postsecondary training. DPI also proposes a new Transition Readiness Investment Grant.

The budget request also addresses a decades-long erosion in overall special education funding that many point to as part of the problem in addressing the state’s achievement gap for students with disabilities. Data shows the academic performance of students with disabilities lags significantly behind their peers. In the 2015-16 school year, 8th graders with disabilities were only one-third as likely to be proficient in language arts as their peers; only 1 in 10 8th graders with disabilities were proficient in math.

“Over the last two decades the state’s share of special education costs has dropped from 44% to 26%,” says Maureen Ryan, Survival Co-Chair. “We hear from families that this is impacting the quality of their child’s education. An increase in state funding investment that can support robust programming for students with disabilities is long overdue – combined with a renewed commitment to high expectations for all children.”

The DPI budget calls for an \$88 million increase over the biennium to get the state to a 30% reimbursement rate. In addition, the plan includes a request to fully fund costs above \$30,000 a year/student to support high cost students.

“The focus on supports for students experiencing mental health issues is also extremely promising,” says Kit Kerschensteiner, Survival Co-Chair. “There simply are not enough trained professionals currently in our schools to adequately support these children.”

The DPI mental health proposals would, among other things, increase funding for school social workers, and provide funding to support collaboration between schools and community mental health professionals. The DPI budget cites national estimates that one in five students has a mental health need.

To read about the Survival Coalition's education budget priorities, go here:

<http://www.survivalcoalitionwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Survival-Budget-Recommendations-2016-Final.pdf>

Survival Coalition is comprised of more than 30 statewide disability organizations that advocate and support policies and practices that lead to the full inclusion, participation, and contribution of people living with disability.