


# IMPACT

A report on the impact of the  
2018-2019 biennial budget  
on Wisconsin students  
with disabilities



 **Survival  
Coalition**  
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**“ I am concerned for my  
child’s future due to flat  
funding for a decade.**

*57% of Wisconsin Families Surveyed*

# Survey Summary

The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations inquired about the educational impact of nearly a decade of flat state special education categorical aid funding on students with disabilities and their families. The Coalition distributed a survey to parents over a three month period, asking about the impact, if any, their children were experiencing as a result of funding changes. The survey generated 574 responses from families statewide. Survival Coalition analyzed the survey and presents the following results.

## Key Findings- 574 Responses

**58% of respondents** indicated they were concerned for their child's future due to lack of funding.

### The top areas of concern:

- a reduction in supports and resources (**38% of respondents**)
- loss of special education aides (**31% of respondents**)
- lack of child's progress (**35% of respondents**)
- child more socially isolated (**47% of respondents**)
- experiencing more bullying (**25% of respondents**)

**13% of respondents** indicated they were seeing more clustering of students with disabilities in certain classrooms and **15% of respondents** said their child was being placed in a more restrictive setting.

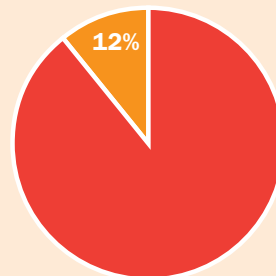
**443 families responded** about their experience in the last two years. Families identified some positive aspects of their child's programming in the following areas:

- **51%** report their child's IEP is being implemented to allow their child to make meaningful progress
- **53%** report their child spends meaningful time with peers who don't have disabilities and are making social progress.

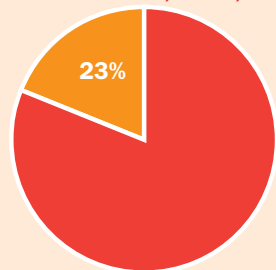
My school district has made cuts to the special education program constantly throughout the years. The keep saying everything is great and fine. The math and reading scores are the lowest ever and the readiness for college is 0%. It is so emotional. I want my child to have what every other child has and this is NOT happening. I am worried to death for his future.

## WISCONSIN SPECIAL ED FUNDING

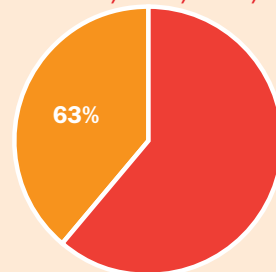
**Federal special education aids**  
**12% - 201,949,500**



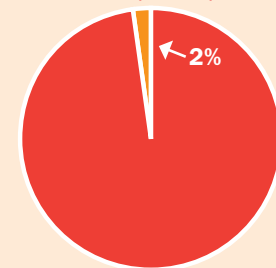
**State Special education aids**  
**23% - 359,354,000**



**Local school district funding**  
**63% - 1,030,065,400**



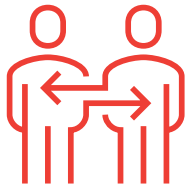
**Other funding**  
**2% - 38,812,600**



**2015-2016 Total Special education costs - 1,630,181,500**



**172 families** reported their child experienced a reduction of supports and resources.



**120 families** reported their child experienced a loss of special education aide support.



**126 families** reported their child is more socially isolated.



**114 families** reported their child is having more behavioral challenges.



**154 families** reported they are concerned for their child's future.

## Change of Placement

**183 families** responded that their child with a disability has experienced a change of placement over the last two years. Of these families,

- **49 families** reported more clustering of students with disabilities in certain classrooms.
- **55 families** reported a change in classroom type from general education to a more restrictive setting

### Stories from Wisconsin also add information about placement and the effects on students:

A general disregard for truly integrating the special education students with neurotypical students.

Moved to a more specialized school away from home and not appropriate for his needs.

My child learns for 2 hours a week at the library.

Although our child has at least half of the setting listed as a general education environment, they are completely segregating students with significant disabilities in the high school he began this year and they are not following the IEP.





## School Experience

**270 Wisconsin families** responded on how the school experience had changed over the last two years due to flat funding.

- **35%** say their child is not making the same progress in the last 1-2 years.
- **42 %** say their child has more behavioral challenges in school.
- **47%** say their child is more socially isolated
- **35%** say their child dreads going to school.



### Stories from Wisconsin families about how their child's school experience had changed over the last two years:

Not enough OT and PT and SLP therapists at school. They are spread to thin and my child does not receive adequate services.

My child does not currently have a qualified, licensed special education teacher. An aide with an art degree has been placed in this position.

Less opportunity to attend classes with non-disabled peers because my child is in a special education classroom and needs support to attend electives.

## Transition Services

160 families responded about the different transition supports (for youth 14-21) that their school district is providing. **(Paid work experiences and access to general education activities are generally the strongest predictors of post-school success)**

- **7.5%** of the families reported their child has a job experience
- **11.88%** of the families reported their school has a transition coordinator
- **15.63%** of families reported their child receives a community based transition program
- **40.63%** of families reported transition planning is based on their child's strengths and needs.

### Stories from Wisconsin families 70 families shared their personal stories about transition

Unpaid work experience –not in a field that is desired for my child.

School does not provide transportation to employment secured by family-school does not have transition program.

I wrote the transition plan when he was 14. His teacher said thank you and put it in his file. I asked for help. He is 15 and we were told to wait until he is 16. This makes me upset every day.

## Search For Other Options

**258 Wisconsin families** reported enough concerns about the quality of their child's special education services that they have considered other options

- **100 families** considered open enrollment
- **94 families** considered home schooling
- **52 families** considered private school
- **30 families** considered the special needs scholarship program
- **133 families** feel like they have no options



### Stories from Wisconsin Families:

Both of my kids are in an out of district placement due to school not being able to handle them.

Selling home. Closing business. Moving to a different community/new school district.

Now that the student is being home-schooled, he has made significant gains both academically and socially

## Discipline

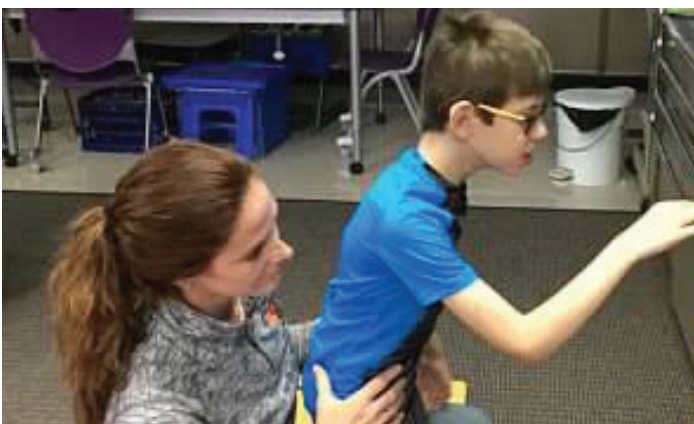
**189 families** reported that their child with a disability has experienced an increase in discipline. **60 families** were called to pick up their children from school without a proper suspension.

### Stories from Wisconsin families who report increases in discipline also report other types of discipline that affected their child:

My child was threatened to be arrested.

Not allowed to eat lunch with other kids for an entire school year due to late assignments.

The decrease in available staff has created an environment that is rampant with discipline issues. Students at large are demonstrating bullying behaviors with staff not having time to be proactive to create a positive learning environment.





# Improvements

**Families shared successes of their children, schools and staff that support them.**

**EE** We have been very happy with the education and behavioral support. They have been open to suggestions and offer advice.

We moved and at the new school there are more people to work with him and help direct him the in the right direction.

We love the “super senior” option of the Independence for Learning program.

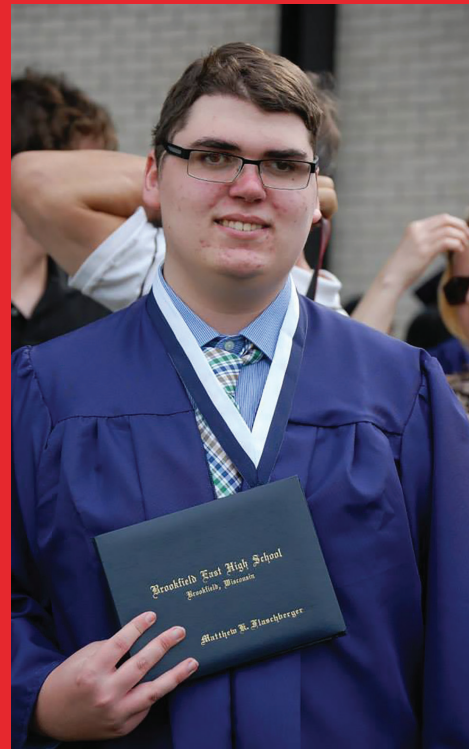
We have an amazing teacher and PT and OT.

We absolutely LOVE our support staff and primary teacher. His needs are always being taken into account. We are very blessed to be where we are.

Our teacher is very educated and truly goes beyond to ensure student success.

We cant say enough good things about her support staff and her school.

My daughter had made tremendous programs over the past two years and I am very pleased with the support she gets at school.



# Conclusion

The majority of the **574 families** who responded to the survey expressed concerns related to the quality of their child's special education. **192 families** provided their personal stories to describe the most significant impacts on their child during the school year, how they felt about that and how it has affected their family. The Survival Coalition concludes that public school funding for special education is not adequate to address the social emotional well-being, functional progress, and academic progress for students with disabilities across Wisconsin. The Survival Coalition offers the following recommendations to policymakers:

- 1** Increase state special education categorical aid funding to keep pace with local costs. Fund to at least 50% of costs up from 26%, addressing a decade-long funding freeze.
- 2** Even out the reimbursement rate for the special needs scholarship program to more closely match the reimbursement rate for students with disabilities in public schools.
- 3** Initiate a meaningful audit of special education quality and outcomes, including the preparation of students with disabilities for college and the workforce.
- 4** 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 and report annually to the legislature.)



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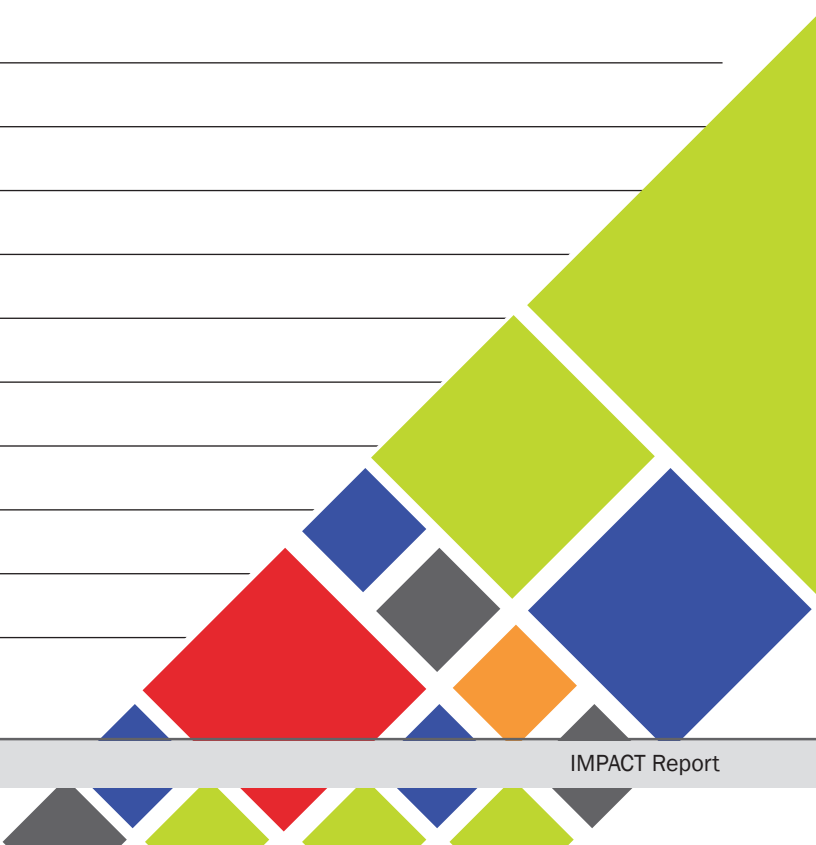
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# Notes



A young boy with glasses, wearing a brown firefighter's jacket and a black helmet, is smiling while sitting in the driver's seat of a fire truck. The image is framed by a thick green border. The background of the page is white with horizontal lines, and there is a decorative geometric pattern in the bottom right corner consisting of green, blue, and red squares.





*Thank you to the Quality Education Coalition,  
Wisconsin's only statewide coalition focusing  
on special education issues, for assisting in  
the printing of this report.*







# Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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