

Help Children with Disabilities - Keep \$600 Million Investment for Special Education in Budget



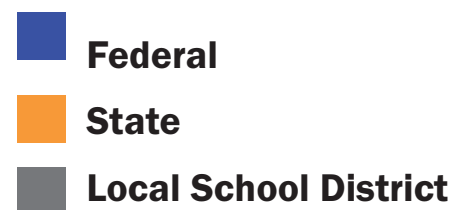
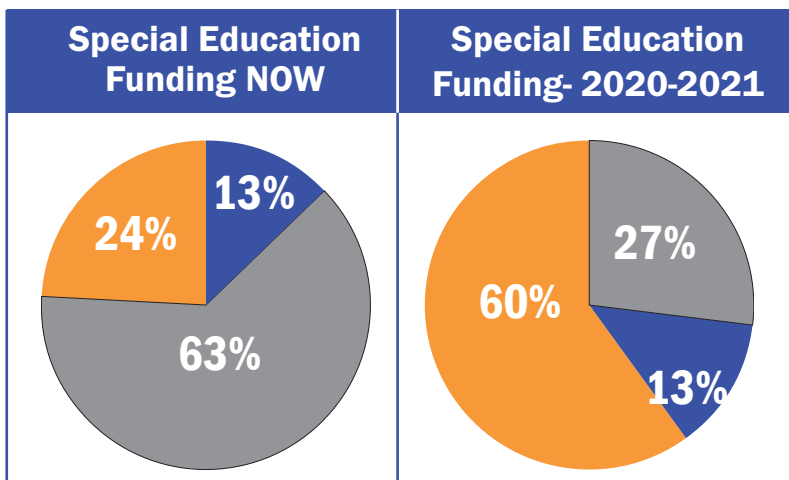
Over the last 10 years, Wisconsin school districts have been forced to use over \$1 billion in local taxpayer funds to make up for special education costs the state has not been covering. The State currently reimburses less than a quarter of a school district's actual special education costs. The state's share of funding has not increased in a decade while costs have increased by 60%. Wisconsin rates are one of the lowest in the nation for state reimbursement. In 2018 the state's Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding heard from stakeholders across the state that lack of special education funding was the biggest driver of local funding problems—impacting quality for students with AND without disabilities. The commission recommended several proposals including the Governor's proposal of an increase to 30% reimbursement in 2019-2020 and an increase to 60% reimbursement in 2020-2021.

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In 2000, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that students with disabilities have a fundamental right to “an equal opportunity for a sound basic education...” and that “So long as the legislature is providing sufficient resources so that school districts offer students the equal opportunity for a sound basic education as required by the constitution, the state school finance system will pass constitutional muster.”¹ Insufficient funding puts the equal opportunity for a sound basic education in jeopardy for over 100,000 students receiving special education services in Wisconsin.

Reimbursement rates have fallen from a high of 70% in 1980 to the new low of 24.5% in 2018-2019.

Reimbursement Rates 1980 - 2017



¹ Vincent v. Voight, 236 Wis. 2d 588, paragraph 3

Statewide Family Survey



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.

Stories from Wisconsin Families

“ My daughter always loved school but now she comes home in a terrible mood and sits in her room. She worries the whole weekend about going to school, says she hates school constantly and makes the morning routine very stressful for me and my son. The whole family is exhausted and frustrated. ”

“ My son has seen an increase in bullying. He feels that he doesn't have friends and most kids just want to hurt him. He is only 8 years old. ”

“ Our child is being segregated and isolated at his high school. He has been kept in windowless rooms with no access to any programming. We have picked him up early every single day he's attended, once while he was having a seizure that was completely unnoticed by staff. ”

“ My child often has the brakes on his wheelchair set because there are not enough aides in the classroom. It saddens me when I enter the classroom and he is sitting alone and he's unable to interact with anyone. ”

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**)

Will an increase in Special Education Reimbursement impact Maintenance of Effort?

The federal government requires state and local school districts to sustain a level of spending on special education each year - this is called Maintenance of Effort. Local school districts cannot reduce their spending for special education except under particular circumstances. MOE is met when at least the same total combination of local and state funds are budgeted as the last year the LEA expended the most local and state funds on special education activities. Spending will stay the same but additional local funds for all students will be freed up. Students with disabilities will also benefit from more funds for all kids. This should be considered an important shift in funding that will not be tracked as an increase in Maintenance of Effort under federal law.



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Share your story how under funding in special education has affected your child.
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SpecialEducationSurvey>