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Survival Coalition Disappointed in Expanded Private School Funding, Proposed Modest Investment in Public Special Education

The Survival Coalition of more than 20 statewide disability organizations is deeply disappointed with the Governor's decision today to sign into law Senate Bill 330 increasing the amount of public funding for private schools, while the Legislature's current state budget proposal for a modest special education increase would keep Wisconsin near the very bottom of all states in covering public school special education costs.

"Continuing to expand private schools that are allowed to selectively admit students and are not accountable for outcomes, while failing to adequately cover the costs of public schools which are required to educate all students is not the right direction for Wisconsin," said Beth Swedeen, Survival Coalition Co-Chair.

"Wisconsin is now funding two separate and unequal education systems," said Kit Kerschensteiner, Survival Coalition Co-Chair. "Wisconsin is choosing to increase funding for private schools that do not have to educate students with disabilities and where families have no recourse if their student is not receiving the specialized support they need."

Survival Coalition supports increasing the state's share of special education funding from the current 31.5% to 60% and eliminating public funding for private schools. As part of the ongoing state budget process, the Joint Finance Committee increased special education reimbursement to only 33.3%, dependent on funds being available.

After 2026 when there will be no limit on the number of students who may get private school vouchers, the amount of public dollars going into private schools could exponentially increase.

In 2019, a group of legislators from both political parties recommended increasing how much schools are reimbursed for the money they have already spent on special education services from 30% to 60%.

"Actual costs aren't covered unless schools are reimbursed 100 percent," said Patti Becker, Survival Coalition Co-Chair. "Reimbursing public schools 33 cents for every dollar they spend on meeting the needs of students with disabilities is not a victory."