

IMPACT

A REPORT ON THE IMPACT OF THE 2011-2013 BIENNIAL BUDGET ON
WISCONSIN STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES



**Survival
Coalition**

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

A light gray outline map of the state of Wisconsin is centered on the page. The text is overlaid on the map.

*I am concerned for
my **child's future** due
to these changes.*

- **177** Wisconsin Families

REPORT SUMMARY

As three leading statewide agencies representing the interests of students with disabilities, **Disability Rights Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities, and Wisconsin FACETS** sought to discover the educational impact of the 2011-2013 budget on students with disabilities and their families. Over a two-month period a survey was distributed to parents statewide, asking for their perspective on what, if any, impact their children were experiencing as a result of funding changes. 442 responses were received from families throughout the state. **The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations** analyzed the survey and presents the following results to the public.

KEY FINDINGS - 442 RESPONSES:

46% of respondents indicated their child's educational programming was worse when compared to the last 1-2 years. 33% reported no change and 21% indicated the programming was better than previous years.

40% of all families surveyed indicated they were concerned for their child's future due to the changes in educational programming this year.

The top four reasons that families said education programming was worse this year was:

- loss of staff support (40% of all survey respondents)
- larger class sizes (33% of all)
- a change in services the child was receiving (33% of all)
- access to teachers with less experience (29% of all)

18% of all respondents indicated they were seeing more clustering of students with disabilities in certain classrooms this year, which they said resulted in decreased academic progress, increased behavioral challenges, and more segregation and social isolation.

Families who indicated there was no change in educational programming, or that programming was better, provided reasons for this positive result that generally fell into three categories:

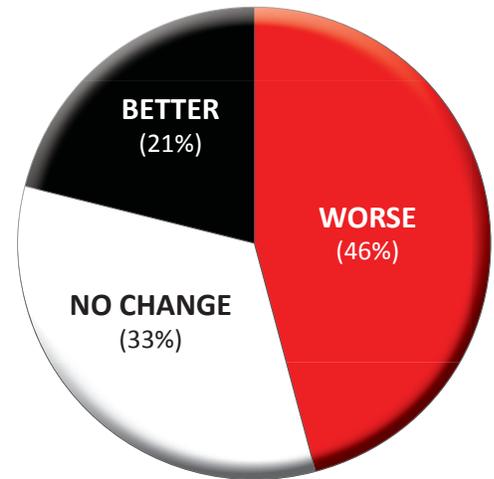
- Existing school staff/school program have been and continue to be strong
- Their child switched schools and is having an improved experience in a different place
- Their child has new staff this year who are providing improved programming and/or are working more closely with the family

A STORY FROM WISCONSIN

"My 9-year-old child with Down syndrome was **found wandering** on a busy road an hour after school. Her aide was busy in another class and has been letting her go to her bus unassisted even though she is supposed to be walked there as stated in her IEP. She was confused about where to go one day, missed the bus and decided to try to walk home. She was luckily spotted by a teacher from another school who saw that she was **alone and confused** on a busy street and that teacher stopped to help her."

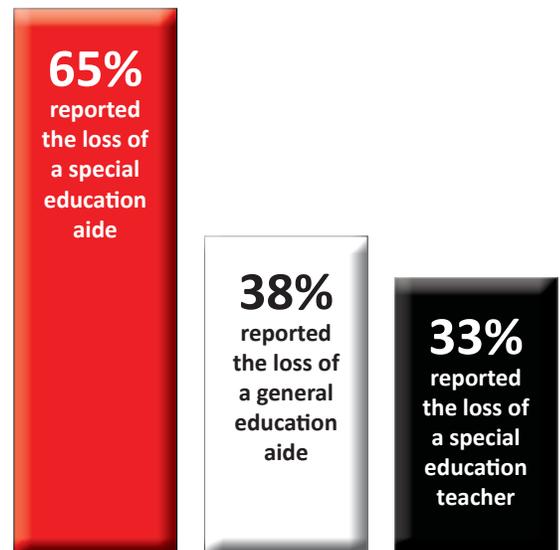
- Waukesha County Parent

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING COMPARED TO LAST 1-2 YEARS



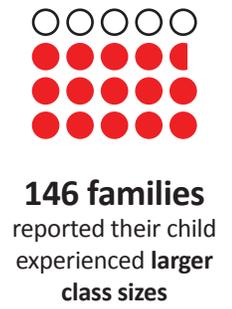
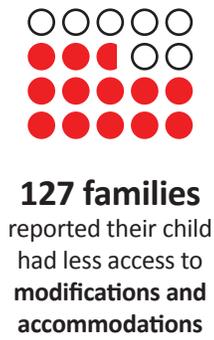
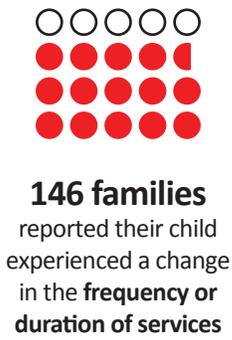
LOSS OF STAFF SUPPORT

178 Wisconsin families reported that their child with a disability has experienced a loss of staff support. Of these families:



HOW HAS THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE CHANGED FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES?

● = 10 Wisconsin families



IN THE CLASSROOM

146 Wisconsin families reported that their child with a disability has experienced larger class sizes. Many Wisconsin families also reported that their child has experienced a change in placement. Of these families,

- **79** reported more **clustering** of students with disabilities in certain classrooms
- **50** reported a **change in classroom type** (e.g. regular education to special education resource room or self-contained)
- **32** reported **higher numbers** of students with disabilities in certain schools

Stories from Wisconsin families about how changes in school or classroom placement are resulting in additional stress and isolation for students with disabilities:

- *My child has been removed from the general curriculum due to lack of support for classroom teachers. (Lafayette County Parent)*
- *Because my children were moved from their neighborhood school for budget reasons, they do not have the same opportunities to interact with our neighborhood children. (Rock County Parent)*
- *My child spends most of his day in a room with other children with disabilities. He needs to be with other typical children so he can learn from them (and they can learn from him)...not a good thing for trying to build social skills and to have kids be his friend. (Anonymous Parent)*

CHANGE IN PROGRAMMING

66 Wisconsin families reported that their child with a disability has experienced a change in programming. Of these families,

- **80%** reported a change in the **range of options** in school-based programming
- **42%** reported a change in the district's **community-based transition programming**

Stories from Wisconsin families who report slower academic progress and reduced access to courses:

- *She is staying after school regularly to seek extra help because she can't get it during the day. (Waukesha County Parent)*
- *My daughter's elective courses have been cut drastically. Vocational experiences in the community have been slashed. (Pierce County Parent)*
- *Now all the children with severe disabilities are being bunched in classrooms with the same teacher for years. This doesn't help their learning because it's the same curriculum over and over. (Anonymous Parent)*



HOW HAVE THE CHANGES IMPACTED YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL EXPERIENCE?

	% of respondents	# of families
I am concerned for my child's future due to these changes.	40	177
My child is more socially isolated .	24	107
My child is not making the same progress made in the last 1-2 years.	24	104
My child has more behavioral challenges in school.	19	85
My child is increasingly segregated .	18	79
My child is experiencing more bullying .	11	49

SCHOOL STAFF

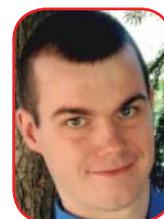
178 Wisconsin families reported that their child with a disability has experienced a loss of staff support. Of these families,

- **65%** reported the loss of a **special education aide**
- **38%** reported the loss of a **general education aide**
- **33%** reported the loss of a **special education teacher**

Also, **130 families** reported that **teachers with less experience** are working with their child, and **118** reported a **decrease in the availability** of staff to communicate with the families.

Stories from Wisconsin families about how reductions in staff support – most frequently the loss of special and general educational assistants and teachers – have had some devastating impacts on students with disabilities:

- *My 9-year-old child with Down syndrome was found wandering on a busy road an hour after school. Her aide was busy in another class and has been letting her go to her bus unassisted even though she is supposed to be walked there as stated in her IEP. She was confused about where to go one day, missed the bus and decided to try to walk home. She was luckily spotted by a teacher from another school who saw that she was alone and confused on a busy street and that teacher stopped to help her. (Waukesha County Parent)*
- *My child has had more frequent accidents due to not having help or time to use the toilet. (Jefferson County Parent)*
- *I have a son with autism in high school who has been relentlessly bullied and there has been little supervision to stop it even though he has asked for help. (Waukesha County Parent)*



INCREASE IN DISCIPLINE

40 Wisconsin families reported that their child with a disability has experienced an increase in discipline. Of these families, **53%** reported that their child with a disability has either been **suspended or expelled** from school.

Stories from Wisconsin families who report that their children are experiencing more behavior challenges and increases in discipline as a result of fewer staff:

- *More restraints are being used because staff have more students in the classroom. (Sheboygan County Parent)*
- *My child has been eliminated from extra-curricular events. She has been restrained because no one knows her so they can't read that she just wants to go where other kids go. (Winnebago County Parent)*
- *The consistency of care isn't the same. She shuts down, has more inappropriate behaviors, is incontinent and basically where we were two years ago. The changes sadden me. (Eau Claire County Parent)*
- *More calls about my son becoming angry and pushing/attacking other youth. (Jefferson County Parent)*



IMPROVEMENTS

Nearly 21% of Wisconsin families responding to the survey said their child's school year had improved over the year before. Most common comments from these families reflected a change in school or district, a change in staff that resulted in better programming and relationships, and attendance in a district that has always had a strong educational program for students with disabilities.

Stories from Wisconsin families who report that their children's school year had improved:

- *Staff is everything. My child has a new case manager who is full of energy, and the additional time and effort she spends on her students makes up for the losses elsewhere. It is not because the "program" has not been affected that I have not seen a decline in services. It is only because she is compensating with her time!* (Dane County Parent)
- *His change in placement has improved, allowing for more independence and self-direction.* (Anonymous Parent)
- *My child is a lot happier at his new school. I feel teachers last year were worn out, and used to operating in a cookie cutter mode. My child hated to be at school last year. This year, he loves it...The staff is way better!* (Anonymous Parent)

CONCLUSION

Based on the stark changes in educational experiences for 46% of students with disabilities found in these survey results, the Survival Coalition concludes that public school funding in the state is not adequate to address the health, safety, and academic progress of students with disabilities. Specifically, the Survival Coalition offers these recommendations to policymakers:

- **Restore overall public education funding** in the 2013-2015 biennium to previous levels, including an increase in special education categorical aid funding to raise the state reimbursement rate to 30%.
- **Convene a Legislative Council Study Committee** to examine the changes that must be made to improve the education climate for all students, including those with disabilities and make recommendations for legislative changes to address these concerns.
- **Take direct steps to address reductions** in school safety, slower academic progress, and increased bullying.

The survey results showing that nearly 40% of families surveyed are concerned for their child's future due to this year's educational programming changes are unacceptable. **Wisconsin must take a step forward to improve public education for all students.**



The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations is a cross-disability coalition of more than 40 state and local organizations and groups. For more than 20 years, Survival has been focused on changing and improving policies and practices that support people with disabilities of all ages to be full participants in community life. Go to www.survivalcoalitionwi.org for more.

Disability Rights Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities, and Wisconsin FACETS all have a statutory charge to protect and promote the educational rights of students with disabilities in the state.

