

MARCH 2015

EDUCATING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

More than 120,000 students have disabilities in Wisconsin – about 12% of students in our state. Research shows that, with supports, students with disabilities can learn and reach academic proficiency just like students without disabilities.

ISSUE:

Achievement of students with disabilities lags behind other groups. All schools must ensure that students with disabilities graduate ready for college and work, but 20 years of eroded funding has taken a toll. High expectations and quality education focus for students with disabilities will have a positive impact in other public benefit programs, as students with disabilities become competitively-employed adults.

BACKGROUND:

Investments in education should result in college and workforce readiness for students with disabilities; however, Department of Public Instruction data shows:

- Students with disabilities are 2.5 times less likely to be proficient in reading and math than their peers.
- More than 1/3 of students with cognitive or emotional and behavioral disabilities and nearly 1/4 of students with autism reported never being employed or enrolled in school/training one year after graduation.
- 92% of youth ages 18-21 who receive Medicaid-funded long-term care are not employed.

The state's share of special education funding has eroded from 44% to 26% over the last 20 years with no increase in 8 years.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Increase special education funding. Fund districts at the original state promise of 44%. Fully fund high cost students (those above \$30,000/year).
- Oppose voucher expansion including Special Needs Voucher proposals that do not ensure parent rights or quality education practices and drain funds from public schools.
- Address policies that keep students with disabilities out of certain schools (i.e. charter, voucher) and that significantly increase the special education population in public schools.
- Support Pay for Performance policies (the Rep. Rob Brooks Better Bottom Line bill) that give schools an incentive payment when they prove students are getting jobs or enrolled in school after graduation.

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Investing in People with Disabilities**