



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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Survival Coalition Informs Parents of Children with Disabilities about their Right to Open Enrollment

Parents of children with disabilities, along with all parents in Wisconsin, can begin applying for open enrollment in Wisconsin school districts February 1. This will be the first full school year in which families of children with disabilities will benefit from a positive change to the program that takes away significant barriers to choosing a different school district that may better meet the needs of their child.

In the 2015-2017 state budget legislators passed an improvement to the open enrollment law that reflected changes agreed to by stakeholders, including school districts, school boards, parent groups, disability advocates and the Department of Public Instruction.

Prior to the budget changes, children with disabilities could be denied open enrollment if their school district declared that the transfer to another district would cause an “undue financial burden”.

The budget change established a uniform transfer amount of \$12,000 to reflect the average cost for a student receiving special education services. This change eliminates “undue financial burden” as a reason for open enrollment denial and ensures fair open enrollment funding for school districts for the variety of students with disabilities who are accepted into or exiting their district in a given school year.

The 2015-2017 budget also made a new investment in the high-cost special education fund, which will assist districts accepting students with significant disabilities. Both of these improvements have created greater flexibility for families while continuing to protect the rights of their child under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

“Prior to this change, parents of children with disabilities often felt discriminated against in Wisconsin’s open enrollment system,” says Kit Kerschensteiner, co-chair of Survival Coalition.

“Now the process will be more transparent for families and allows them to choose the school district that is a better fit for their child. Often moving to another area school district helps both parents and educators to find the right solution for a child without continued conflict.”

Disability advocates also hope that districts that experience a significant number of students leaving their district will self-assess the quality of their special education supports, inquire of parents how to improve and work collaboratively with families to provide high quality special education supports.

The open enrollment period runs from February 1 through April 29. Parents interested in accessing open enrollment can find more information here: <http://dpi.wi.gov/open-enrollment>

Survival Coalition is comprised of more than 30 statewide disability organizations that advocate and support policies and practices that lead to the full inclusion, participation, and contribution of people living with disability.

Survival Coalition Issue Teams: education, employment, housing, long term care for adults, long term care for children, mental health, transportation, workforce, voting, Medicaid and health care.

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