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Survival Coalition Disappointed with Lack of Funding for Students with Disabilities

The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations is disappointed that the Republican members of the Joint Finance Committee are ignoring the needs of students with disabilities and the clear message from families and schools that a 30% reimbursement rate is not adequate to meet the needs of students and keep pace with more than a decade of flat funding to special education supports.

Based upon hundreds of family stories from across the state, Survival sees that the need is clear and overdue. The current proposal is 1/6 of what the Governor requested, and does not even provide 1/3 of the costs of the special education, pushing the majority of expenses back on local districts.

Lisa Pugh, co-chair of the Survival Coalition said, “The State has not increased special funding for a decade, forcing local districts to make up the difference. Survival Coalition has heard from families around the state about significant erosion in quality of education for their children with disabilities with a direct impact on student achievement, emotional well-being, and safety. Today, families were provided crumbs for children who desperately need more.”

The Joint Finance Committee Republican majority also took away over \$22.7 million annually that the Governor requested for mental health services, which included additional funding for pupil services and community collaborations with mental health providers. Kit Kerschensteiner, Survival co-chair said, “One in five students in our school districts have undiagnosed mental health conditions. School staff are on the front lines trying to meet the needs of these students. Without additional staff children will continue to fall through the cracks.”

The committee also stripped the additional funding for students with disabilities for transition services to prepare youth for community employment and post-secondary education. The Governor proposed increases for school districts requests for assistance to meet the requirement under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. “School districts are required to provide transition services and the increase in funding would have met the grant requests from school Districts who are working to prepare youth for future employment and independent living,” said Beth Swedeen, co-chair Survival Coalition. “Eliminating school resources that directly prepare students with disabilities for employment and increased independence just as they approach adulthood is particularly short-sighted.”

Survival Coalition will be continuing to advocate for student with disabilities as the budget moves through the process.

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.