



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

2013-2015 Biennial Budget Recommendations for Education

Background

The Survival Coalition of more than 40 Wisconsin disability organizations is concerned about the poor outcomes for students with disabilities exiting Wisconsin's schools. Students with disabilities experience a significant achievement gap as evidenced by recent test scores. Statewide WCKE scores show that less than half of Wisconsin's students with disabilities (46.7%) are reading at the proficient level and less than half (45.4%) are proficient in math: much lower percentages than any other subgroup measured. On national exams (the NAEP), fourth-grade students with disabilities rank 31st out of 52 jurisdictions. Even with testing accommodations, 75% score in the below basic category. In addition, the Wisconsin four-year graduation rate for students with disabilities is just 65%, compared to 89% in the overall student population. According to parent and school administrator surveys, reduced funding for public education in the current biennium has resulted in more segregated programming, reductions in course and extracurricular options, and larger class sizes.

Added challenges contribute to Wisconsin's poor outcomes for students with disabilities, the funding formula for special education services, unresolved questions about the public school open enrollment system, inadequate preparation for special education teachers charged with equipping students with disabilities to be college and career ready, and outdated, inadequate technology to meet the needs of diverse learners.

In addition to these challenges, families often do not have the information they require, systems do not coordinate efforts across agencies, and many times public resources are not used efficiently and are not tied to outcomes. In part because schools are not adequately preparing youth with disabilities for employment, fewer than 9% of individuals with long-term care support needs statewide are working in integrated, competitive-wage employment. This missed opportunity and misuse of public funds is resulting in higher use of public programs, higher poverty rates for this population, and reduced local buying power in Wisconsin communities.

Recommendations

Based on the challenges currently facing Wisconsin's schools, Survival Coalition has the following 2013-2015 budget recommendations.

- Restore overall education funding in the 2013-2015 biennium to 2009-2011 levels, including a fair increase in special education categorical aids reimbursement rate to 30%.
- Fully fund implementation of Read to Lead screening of all kindergarten students in the state. Ensure screening money is adequate to continue 5K screening through 2015 and to expand to other grades.
- Fund a statewide anti-bullying initiative that provides training to all staff in every school building in the state using an evidence-based training (such as the Olweus Anti-bullying Program).
- Fix the open enrollment formula for funding high-cost students with disabilities so families of students with significant disabilities can keep federal special education (IDEA) protections within the public school system and are not shut out of the open enrollment process.
- Implement a statewide transition certification/endorsement to provide necessary pre-service transition expertise in the state to achieve better employment outcomes for youth with disabilities.
- Consider implementation of recommendations from the Governor's new College and Workforce Readiness Council that are specific to better workforce readiness for students with disabilities.
- Fund expansion of evidence-based positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS) in all grades statewide, with a specific focus on underperforming schools. PBIS has been shown to not only improve school climate, but is correlated with significant academic improvements in underperforming schools, including at the secondary level.

(over)

Revenue Ideas

- Eliminate \$4 million GPR/year spent on County Children with Disabilities Education Boards and redirect funds to special education categorical aids. These separate, segregated school districts duplicate what is provided in the existing public school in a community. These outdated county school models are no longer necessary for the education of students with significant disabilities – who are almost universally educated in their home districts across Wisconsin.
- Raise the levels on the revenue caps per the formula previously in statute prior to the 2011-13 biennial budget. With additional measures in place for local school districts to realize savings, districts should be allowed the flexibility to incrementally increase revenue caps.

Conclusion

Wisconsin lags behind other states in preparing its students with disabilities for workforce and career readiness. Adequate and targeted funding for programs with proven outcomes, coupled with high-quality teacher preparation can vastly improve outcomes for students with disabilities exiting Wisconsin's schools.