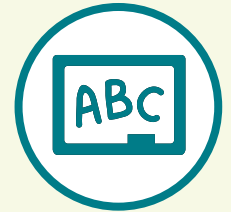


# Improving Education for

# Wisconsin Students with Disabilities

Wisconsin public schools educate 867,800 students; approximately 14% of those children have disabilities and qualify for special education services through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). These services may include education related therapies, classroom accommodations, modified curriculum, or one-on-one support. [Research shows us even students with the most significant disabilities can make progress in grade level content when provided with appropriate supports.](#)

**Poor Academic Performance** Unfortunately, academic performance for Wisconsin students with disabilities is poor. The 2017 4th grade reading scores recently released by the National Assessment of Educational Progress show Wisconsin students with disabilities scoring nearly 10 points below the national average (177 to 184). Approximately 76% of Wisconsin 4th graders with disabilities scored “below basic” in reading.



**Lack of Funding** Congress originally committed to covering 40 percent of the average cost to educate a student with a disability; however federal funding never met that mark and has not increased with inflation. Federal funding for students with disabilities currently hovers at 16 percent of special education service costs.

**Parent Dissatisfaction** Wisconsin parents of children with disabilities are reporting significant dissatisfaction with special education supports, sometimes reporting critical concerns.

574 parents of students with disabilities responded to a recent survey distributed by the Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations. Key findings:



- Nearly half of respondents indicate the school is not implementing the IEP in a way that allows their child to make meaningful progress.
- 21% report that their child is being bullied.
- 9% report that their child has been inappropriately suspended or expelled while 8 % report inappropriate or overuse of seclusion or restraint practices. Overall more than 25% saw an increase in disciplinary measures of their child at school, including 16% of parents who say they are now called to pick up their child during the school day.
- More than half report their child has experienced a loss of support staff over the last two years with nearly a third (31%) indicating their child has lost a special education aide in the classroom.
- While about one-fifth of survey respondents indicated they had considered other school options (e.g. virtual or home schooling, special needs voucher, open enrollment) to improve their child’s educational future, 133 parents said they felt like they had no options to improve the situation.
- 154 parents (27%) of survey respondents said the reduced quality of their child’s education makes them concerned for their child’s future.



# Stories from Wisconsin Families

“ My daughter always loved school but now she comes home in a terrible mood and sits in her room. She worries the whole weekend about going to school, says she hates school constantly and makes the morning routine very stressful for me and my son. The whole family is exhausted and frustrated. ”

“ The most significant impact for my son is the increase in his anxiety. He has now become a target of bullying and fear by other students, due to the outbursts, which has also resulted in social ostracization. Although I actively advocate and fight for proper supports, I feel as if I am watching a train wreck in slow motion that I have no chance of stopping. It is the worst feeling in the world as a parent to be unable to make it all better for your child. ”

“ **My son has seen an increase in bullying. He feels that he doesn't have friends and most kids just want to hurt him. He is only 8 years old.** ”

“ My child often has the brakes on his wheelchair set because there are not enough aides in the classroom. It saddens me when I enter the classroom and he is sitting alone and he's unable to interact with anyone. ”

“ Our child is being segregated and isolated at his high school. He has been kept in windowless rooms with no access to any programming. We have picked him up early every single day he's attended, once while he was having a seizure that was completely unnoticed by staff. ”

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Significantly increase federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (special education) funding.
- Invest in Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) as an evidence-based strategy that gives teachers critical tools to increase academic performance of all students while managing a positive environment and contributing to school safety. School safety proposals must include funding for increased PBIS in Wisconsin schools.
- Support legislation to limit the use of restraint and seclusion in schools.
- Initiate a meaningful audit of special education quality and outcomes, including the preparation of students with disabilities for college and the workforce