

Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities: Statement on proposed funding for students with disabilities

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MADISON – The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) is disappointed in yesterday's vote by the Joint Finance Committee's majority members to drastically lower Governor Evers' proposed funding in the state budget, resulting in less than one-sixth of what was initially proposed.

"We hear repeatedly from all corners of the state the often heartbreaking stories about how the state's erosion in special education supports that come from more than a decade of flat funding is impacting students with disabilities of all ages," said Beth Swedeon, executive director.

"From lack of high school transition supports that could equip students with disabilities for lifelong employment, to lack of staffing that results in bullying and other safety concerns, our public schools are in desperate need of a major investment in state funds to meet the needs of students who have additional challenges, but who can significantly contribute to Wisconsin's communities with the right supports."

Swedeon points out that costs of special education supports have increased 65% over the last decade, forcing local districts to try to fill in the gaps because state funding during that time was stagnant.

“The current proposal, taking the state’s responsibility from the current 25.7% to 30% by the end of the two-year budget, doesn’t even cover 1/3 of the costs local districts incur for students with disabilities,” Swedeen said.

Swedeen said BPDD also is concerned that the Joint Finance majority voted to eliminate proposed additional funding for transition services that high school students with disabilities use to prepare for employment and increased independence in adulthood.

“Transition supports that provide community work experiences and result in paid employment can double the chances students with disabilities are employed after leaving school,” Swedeen said. “Eliminating these investments really short-changes both students and communities that need equipped workers.”

The Joint Finance Committee majority also eliminated 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.

“Students with developmental disabilities often also experience mental health challenges,” Swedeen said. “When we talk with school staff, the need for additional mental health supports is one of the top needs they identify statewide.”

BPDD will continue to work with the legislature and the governor’s office to improve the supports to students with disabilities.