

RESPONSE OF DISABILITY ADVOCATES TO GOVERNOR WALKER'S PROPOSED EDUCATION BUDGET

Introduction: Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW), Wisconsin's Protection and Advocacy agency for people with disabilities, and the Quality Education Coalition (QEC), Wisconsin's only statewide coalition of parents, educators and advocates who work together to improve Wisconsin's system of special education are gravely concerned with Governor Walker's proposed education budget due to the dire impact it will have on Wisconsin children, including those with disabilities, if passed as is. Following are DRW & QEC's proposals to improve upon Governor Walker's budget for the sake of these children.

- DRW & QEC oppose the Governor's proposed cuts in revenue limits as these cuts exacerbate the inability of school districts to educate students with disabilities in a regular education environment as well as increase the tension between special education and regular education parents and educators by pitting them against each other. **The legislature should leave the current law on revenue limits unchanged as it costs that state nothing to allow this limited local control over local school budgets.**
- DRW & QEC oppose the Governor's proposal to lift the income caps off the voucher program. In addition to their being no need to subsidize upper and middle income families who can afford to send their children to private school without taxpayer subsidies, the voucher program serves very few children with disabilities and creates an ever higher percentage of students with disabilities (with no numerical increase) in MPS. **The legislature should leave the current law's income limits on the Milwaukee School Choice Program. In times of fiscal crisis the very suggestion that the state has sufficient funds to subsidize private school for middle and upper income families is nothing short of shocking.**
- DRW & QEC oppose the Governor's proposed historic cut in general school aids and urge the legislature to restore this funding to base for same reasons listed above in the first point. No Wisconsin legislature has ever cut funding to public schools and this legislature should not become the first. The budget bill is a values statement about Wisconsin priorities. Wisconsin must demonstrate its continued commitment to investment in education by redirecting funding back to where it belongs - to our children. **We recommend eliminating the subsidy for middle and upper income parents in the Milwaukee School Choice Program; transferring to education the \$350 million increase in the transportation budget which Wisconsin cannot afford on the backs of children; and closing sales tax and other corporate loopholes which do not serve the public good.**
- DRW & QEC urge the legislature to increase funding for special education categorical aids, including the high cost program as DPI originally proposed in order to keep the reimbursement rate the same as it is now. Failure to do so will force a further draw on the decreased state and local funds in order to provide FAPE to children with disabilities. **The \$51 million required for this budget item can easily be found as outlined in the point above.**

- DRW & QEC oppose the Governor's proposed cuts to 4K start up funding and Head Start as these programs support inclusion of young children with disabilities and in some cases, reduce the need for special education.
- DRW & QEC offer qualified support for the Reading Study under the Dept. of Administration budget, but referenced in the DPI budget. Our support is contingent on the study being focused on all students including students with disabilities and the members of the study committee having the expertise to make research based scientific recommendations for all students, including students with disabilities.
- DRW & QEC offer informed neutrality on the charter school provisions. The testimony we submitted on SB 22 makes it clear that while we support charters as an alternative for students with disabilities who need those alternatives because they are not being served well by their local school districts, we are concerned about the fact that many charters exclude children with significant disabilities. In addition, charters can lead to segregation, and the current proposal to water down teacher qualifications will make it more difficult for charters to serve children with the highest needs, including those with disabilities.
- To the extent that the Open Enrollment provisions in the Governor's budget duplicate the bill which the Senate has already passed in the amended version of SB 2, DRW & QEC oppose those provisions, although we believe they can be amended to improve the Open Enrollment program without harming students with disabilities. For further information, see the previously supplied memo to Assembly Education Committee Chair Steve Kestell, dated February 9, 2011, which DRW submitted in an effort to improve upon SB 2.

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