

Stop Special Needs Vouchers Wisconsin

Wisconsin families committed to quality public education for all students



We are a group of families from across Wisconsin. We believe that equal opportunity for a quality and inclusive public education should be available to every student, including students with disabilities. We applaud the promise and the progress that our country has made through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and are committed to continuing to make improvements, informed by feedback from families every step of the way.

In Wisconsin, however, the promise and protections of IDEA for students with disabilities continue to face a serious threat from a proposed statewide special needs voucher program, which keeps returning year after year, pushed by big money from outside Wisconsin. Special needs vouchers offer **risk** to the students who would use the vouchers to attend private schools, and **harm** to the students who remain in public schools.

- Families who use the special needs vouchers would **give up their child's rights and protections** guaranteed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, including the right to a legally-enforceable Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Special needs vouchers **take tax dollars out of public school districts**, weakening the vitality of neighborhood schools and hurting the students with disabilities who remain in those schools. Small districts are particularly vulnerable to further loss of funding.
- **Public schools must accept students of all abilities, but voucher schools have not done so.** The US Department of Justice recently warned Wisconsin that voucher school discrimination against students with disabilities must end. Far from fixing the problem, special needs vouchers would create new avenues for cherry-picking students with mild disabilities, while students with more significant challenges would remain in neighborhood schools as the funding drains away.
- Voucher schools are **not required to employ special education teachers or therapists**, and have no obligation to meet a student's specific needs.
- The special needs voucher proposals have not required a private school to accept the voucher as the entire tuition, and there has been **no income cap for families**; the gap between lower-income and wealthy students would increase.

For these reasons and more, the special needs voucher program is an empty promise for students with disabilities in our state.

Special needs vouchers are wrong for Wisconsin and must be stopped.

We see a better way for Wisconsin, an opportunity to offer fair choice between public school districts, where IDEA rights are preserved. We want to improve the public school open enrollment system so that students with disabilities have equal opportunity to access open enrollment as do students without disabilities. Students with disabilities are denied open enrollment between public schools at a higher rate (42% denials of open-enrollment applications) than students without disabilities (31% denials). The time to address that inequity is now!

Please join us to work together for all students in Wisconsin!

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