

ADVOCACY FOR CHANGE *Issue Brief*

Issue: Special Education

Kids with disabilities, like all kids, spend the largest share of their waking hours at school. School districts struggle on a daily basis to comply with their obligations to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with disabilities with insufficient state and federal aid.

Background: Currently, funding for special education comes from 3 sources: 1) federal flow-through money, 2) special education State Categorical Aids funding, and 3) school district funding, which comes from property taxes and other local sources.

In 2009, the state of Wisconsin will receive substantial federal funds for education from the federal economic stimulus package. We do not yet know exactly how much money each school district will get, but we do know that Wisconsin districts will receive a total of over \$200 million in stimulus funding.

Governor's 2009-2011 Budget:

- The Governor recommended no increase in funds for special education. It was not the \$80 million over 2 years that the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) estimates is needed to continue the state funding level of 28% of the cost of special education costs. However, given the stimulus funding, parents should focus on the proper use of the federal stimulus funding, as described further below.
- The Governor recommended grants for 4 year old kindergarten.
- Funding for training programs for school seclusion restraint guidelines was not included.
- Specific funding for training in behavior management was not included in the Governor's budget.

Action Needed:

- We support making sure there are no cuts in special education categorical aids in this budget.
- We support state budget language that ensures that school districts will make the best use of federal IDEA stimulus funds, including: 1) no reduction in local support for special education; 2) target federal stimulus funding for one-time costs, such as training, assistive technology, positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), and data collection for seclusion and restraint use; in order to avoid running deficits when the stimulus funding disappears.
- We support fully funding the Special Education High-Cost Students program. Appropriate funding was not included in the Governor's budget.

- We applaud the Governor's funding of 4-year old kindergarten. It will allow new districts to provide this important program which benefits young children with disabilities who can be part of inclusive classrooms.
- We support using federal stimulus funding of \$500,000 for training programs on the school seclusion and restraint guidelines and \$500,000 for data collection on the use of seclusion and restraint in Wisconsin schools.
- We support using federal stimulus funding for training programs for teachers in behavior management, inclusion, dyslexia and other reading disorders and other areas pertinent to the educational needs of children with disabilities.