



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

P.O. Box 7222, Madison, Wisconsin 53707

For Immediate Release: September 13, 2016

Contact Survival Coalition Co-Chairs:

Beth Swedeen, beth.swedeen@wisconsin.gov; (608) 266-1166;

Kristin M. Kerschensteiner, kitk@drwi.org; (608) 267-0214

Maureen Ryan, moryan@charter.net; (608) 444-3842;

Federal Investigators Look into How Private School Vouchers Are Impacting Education; Students with Disabilities

Survival Coalition members will continue to monitor how private school voucher programs serve students with disabilities, in light of a new report issued today. Wisconsin was one of three states the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) visited last year while developing a report on the performance of rapidly expanding private school voucher programs. The GAO also surveyed all states operating voucher programs, including programs exclusively for students with disabilities, across the country. Read the full report here: <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-16-712>

Wisconsin students with disabilities are enrolling this fall in a new special needs voucher program, one of four voucher programs currently available in Wisconsin. Survival Coalition had opposed the creation of special needs vouchers that allow private schools to receive public dollars to support students with disabilities, but do not require the schools to adhere to federal protections and requirements to educate students with disabilities.

The GAO's report, "[SCHOOL CHOICE: Private School Choice Programs are Growing and Complicate Providing Certain Federally Funded Services to Eligible Students](#)," highlighted some of the concerns Survival Coalition members have raised previously.

"The responses from both private voucher and public schools confirmed some of the issues we have been monitoring," says Beth Swedeen, Survival Co-Chair. "The ability for private voucher schools to put policies into place with little oversight or consequences while drawing away resources from public schools that must ensure specific rights and protections is a great concern."

The GAO says student participation in private school voucher programs has more than doubled in the last five years.

“Parents’ main concerns about voucher school expansion proposals in Wisconsin have been the significant lack of protections of student and parent rights in voucher schools,” says Kit Kerschensteiner, Survival Co-Chair.

The report also highlighted what other states have found when they opened new voucher schools specifically for students with disabilities: public schools see even greater demand on resources to evaluate children for special education eligibility so parents can draw down the higher voucher amount.

“Survival has been consistent in sharing our concerns about whether a special needs voucher program in Wisconsin will have any meaningful accountability for students, parents or taxpayers, and whether voucher programs really improve student outcomes,” says Maureen Ryan, Survival Co-Chair. “We will continue to monitor how this program rolls out in Wisconsin this year.”

More than 400 students with disabilities and 28 schools statewide are expected to participate in Wisconsin’s new Special Needs Scholarship Program this year. Participating private schools receive \$12,000 per full-time equivalent student.

Survival Coalition is comprised of more than 30 statewide disability organizations that advocate and support policies and practices that lead to the full inclusion, participation, and contribution of people living with disability.

Survival Coalition Issue Teams: education, employment, housing, long term care for adults, long term care for children, mental health, transportation, workforce, voting, Medicaid and health care.

Real Lives, Real Work, Real Smart, Wisconsin
Investing in People with Disabilities