



of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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March 6, 2014

To Senator Olsen, Chair  
Senator Farrow, Vice-Chair  
Members, Senate Committee on Education

From: Lisa Pugh, Disability Rights Wisconsin  
Survival Coalition, Education Issue Team Chairperson

Re: SB 619 creating a model academic standards board

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on SB 619, a bill that would create a Model Academic Standards Board charged with developing standards across a variety of subject areas.

The 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. Our organizations have watched and participated with great interest as the current Common Core Standards (CCS) were constructed and are now being implemented in Wisconsin. We recognize these developments as having great impact on addressing the significant achievement gap for students with disabilities and setting higher expectations for their performance and outcomes.

We strongly recommend that Wisconsin focus immediately on implementing higher standards for students with disabilities to address the concerning achievement gap. According to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI):

- Students with disabilities are two and a half times less likely to be proficient in reading and math than their peers.<sup>1</sup>
- Nearly half of all students with intellectual disabilities spend more than 40% of their school day outside the regular classroom where the majority of grade level content is taught and where research shows students have the best outcomes.
- The ACT test is a marker for college readiness, yet only 8% of students with disabilities are taking it, compared to 68% of students without disabilities.<sup>2</sup>
- DPI Post-School outcome data shows that outcomes for students with cognitive disabilities are low. In 2013 93% of surveyed students reported they were never engaged in postsecondary education and training since high school (72%, in 2009) and more than half reported no paid employment since high school.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wisconsin Information System for Education, Data Dashboard; WASA Proficiency by Disability Status; 2012-13.

<sup>2</sup> Wisconsin Information System for Education, Data Dashboard; ACT Participation by Disability Status; 2011-12.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Instruction; IDEA Indicator 14 Data - 2013 - 2009 Outcomes for Youth with Cognitive Disabilities.

Recognizing that this bill is not about the value of the Common Core Standards, but rather, the process by which education standards are set, we would like to make the following points to the committee:

- Standards that impact students with disabilities, who are complex learners who require a variety of specialized supports to be successful, must be developed by individuals with specific knowledge about how students with disabilities learn and the research base that is the foundation for successful education practices.
- It is extremely important that Wisconsin's standards allow for meaningful comparisons as to how students with disabilities in Wisconsin are doing relative to students in other states. The Common Core, which has now been adopted in a majority of states, provides this comparison.
- The Common Core Standards were developed with tests aligned to rigorous standards, including a robust alternative assessment for students with the most significant intellectual disabilities. This assessment will for the first time allow for and expect higher achievement for all students. Previously in Wisconsin, students with disabilities were not held to the same high expectations as other students; even though research tells us students without cognitive impairments (approximately 80 percent of all students with disabilities) are able to reach proficiency in grade level content to the same degree as their peers. In addition, students with significant disabilities have never had their curriculum so closely aligned to the regular education curriculum as it will be under the Common Core. The new standards and aligned assessments that are currently in place include Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles which allow students with disabilities access to rich curriculum. **We are eager to continue to build upon this momentum and see real change in test scores and outcomes for all students with disabilities. We are concerned that a new standards board will stall and impede this important progress.**
- Standards aligned with college and career readiness measures are extremely important to students with disabilities and should be based upon the evidence, with input from experts in the field of education. Prior to the adoption of the Common Core in Wisconsin, special educators could make up any "curriculum" they wanted for students with the most significant intellectual disabilities. The new standards recently put in place provide a direct tie to a strong basic curriculum designed to prepare all students for post-school success.
- The Common Core standards have already been a significant improvement over Wisconsin's previous Model Academic Standards which were extremely general. Typically students with disabilities suffer from low expectations and the Model Academic Standards did not incent high expectations. Clearly change was needed and we are now moving forward.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input on this issue. Please feel free to contact our coalition members with additional questions.

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

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