

## WASB • WASDA • WASBO State Education Convention Address

January 20, 2010 — Midwest Airline Center, Milwaukee

*By State Superintendent Tony Evers*

Thank you, Gregg Lundberg, WASDA President, for that introduction, your leadership in Maple, and as WASDA President. And thank you to the Eau Claire Memorial Jazz Ensemble, directed by Bruce Hering. Let's give our student musicians and their teachers another round of applause.

I would like to thank and recognize the efforts of your associations' and their executive directors:

- John Ashley, and all of WASB,
- Miles Turner, WASDA, and
- Woody Wiedenhoft, WASBO.

They do a great job representing and bringing you together. Let's give them a hand.

This is my first opportunity to address you as state superintendent, and I am grateful for the strong support of school board members, school district administrators, and school business officials.

I know you have the hardest jobs in the state. As a superintendent, CESA administrator, and at the DPI, I have worked with hundreds of you. We know nothing is easy; nothing you do is simple and clear cut.

Our 2010 version of leadership in public education is full of tough decisions. It is also full of great opportunities. For generations in Wisconsin, when faced with hard times our leaders have built for the future. Now should be no different.

With opportunity comes increased accountability for results. Increasingly, we are united by the need to work together to get these results. We are still facing an extremely difficult economic crisis that has, frankly, stretched our ability to serve the children, public schools, and communities of Wisconsin. In turn, we are responsible and trusted to improve education in our local communities and our state.

This morning, I want to lay out for you a vision and some initiatives that will advance our work for Wisconsin's children.

Six months ago in an elementary school, here, in Milwaukee, I pledged to the citizens of Wisconsin as state superintendent that I would work to ensure every child is a graduate. To do this in Wisconsin, I need the commitment of our state's leaders to:

- recruit and retain quality educators,
- invest in innovation,
- ensure safe and respectful schools,
- advance common sense and transparent accountability, and
- work toward fair and sustainable school funding.

We have worked hard with many of you in the past six months. Here are a few examples of what our work means for school districts, educators, parents and students:

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We will have new academic standards that are more rigorous, relevant, and internationally benchmarked.

We will have standards in English and mathematics that define the skills and knowledge students need to succeed in college and careers and are the same across most of the states in our nation.

We will replace the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations (WKCE) with a new assessment system that:

- combines state, district, and classroom assessments in offering public accountability;
- provides timely information to students, teachers, and parents to inform instruction and improve student achievement;
- is adaptive in assessing students performance by increasing the difficulty of questions as far as a student can successfully go;
- is computer-based, providing multiple opportunities to measure student progress during the school year at elementary and middle school levels; and
- at high school, measures college and workforce readiness.

Also, we will hold our first ever Graduation Summit in March to focus our state's attention and efforts on increasing graduation rates and reducing the numbers of students who drop out of school. As you know, one dropout is too many.

We will provide grants to you for more charter schools over the next five years with over \$86 million we won from the federal government.

We will use the nation's first curriculum planning guide for financial literacy and will have an Environmental Literacy plan for our students.

And today, I am announcing that we will create more teacher licensing flexibility and expand pathways for talented professionals to pursue their dreams to teach in Wisconsin schools. Our schools, especially rural schools, need our help so they can expand curriculum offerings, like project- and inquiry-based learning, along with special programs such as Project Lead the Way and cross-disciplinary science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Our goal in examining state licensing regulations is to maintain our high standards, and to increase the talent in our classrooms, meet the demand for innovative programs and hard-to-staff subjects, and encourage mid-career professionals to share their real-world experiences as teachers in our schools. We will, with your help and input, complete this work this year.

I want to take a moment to talk about our great host city, our state's largest city. In Milwaukee Public Schools, we are busy working to fix what's broken and build upon what works.

We have expanded the MPS efforts for this school year to increase parental involvement, consistency of curriculum, time, and quality of instruction.

I am aggressively working with community and state partners to improve education for Milwaukee's children. If I leave you with one message, it's this: We all need Milwaukee to succeed.

It is not just an MPS issue. All districts in southeast Wisconsin, and all districts in the state, must contribute to a solution.

An estimated 6,500 students dropped out of the class of 2008 in the Milwaukee metropolitan area. According to a recent study, cutting that number in half would result in a major economic boost to the economy with \$41 million in increased spending, increased home sales of \$100 million, and an additional \$7 million in tax revenue. Those millions of dollars are for each year, each year, over the lifetimes of those graduates. And those millions in lost tax revenue impact all of southeast Wisconsin, impact all of Wisconsin.

All of us must get behind our efforts to lift the achievement of Milwaukee's children.

And on a more immediate note, Wisconsin, earlier this week, submitted to the federal government a Race to the Top application that could provide resources to move forward many of our improvement efforts locally and at the state level.

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I am so proud of the near-unanimous support of the RTTT application. With such a short timeline, to have over 97 percent of our districts sign the MOU is truly amazing. The leadership of each of you and the hands-on help of Miles Turner, John Ashley, and Woody Wiedenhoft, was tremendous.

If our state is successful, I look forward to working together on this opportunity. I encourage you to begin work with your CESAs and neighboring districts to most fully use the resources we may receive.

As we work to further transform our public schools, our state must ensure that a quality education is available no matter where a student lives.

This means we need action this year on school funding.

Our legislators and candidates for governor, in this election year, can and should make commitments now to get back to two-thirds state funding. And I mean a real, serious commitment. Yes, it is important to seek revenue cap relief. But we cannot continue to make unhealthy choices. Do we cut SAGE classrooms? Or, do we cut counselors? Those are not choices.

The most direct approach is to commit to two-thirds funding now, so that as the economy improves, our ability to meet our obligations can be ensured. Sending our schools levy credits does nothing to keep our counselors; does nothing to keep our SAGE classrooms.

Make a commitment. Make it real. And, set a date.

What else should be done now?

Our leaders in Madison need to commit to:

- Increase state school aids by at least the forecasted inflation rate each and every year.
- We also need to reverse the trend of increasing the school levy tax credit instead of increasing school aids. If we keep increasing the school levy tax credit at the rate we have been the last five years, we will pay out as much in tax credits as we do in school aids in 10 – 12 years.
- Increase the state's share of special education categorical aid to 33 percent by 2012-13, and fully fund our high-cost special education aids, now prorated at 40 percent.

I grant you, these are significant commitments that will take years to accomplish. Let's set a date now, by which these can be accomplished.

Like many of you, I have been working for public education for a while. To me, fair funding means:

- making serious commitments on increasing school resources,
- providing adequate resources to ensure equal educational opportunities across our state and to meet mandates, and
- valuing the partnership between the state and local school boards for the education of all of Wisconsin children.

But we must do our part. Achieving sustainable funding also means we, the education leaders of Wisconsin, must invest in efforts that pay off, that improve learning, that increase achievement, that turn around struggling schools, and that result in every child a graduate prepared for the workplace and further education.

While I am prepared to lead the effort to gain these financial commitments, we must answer our communities' demands for real accountability and real improvement. Each district, in return for receiving significant state financial commitments, should set high, specific achievement targets and focus all energy and resources to reach them. Furthermore, we must all be willing to examine new ways of learning, new ways to use technology, and new ways to best use the resources available to us.

That is what fair and sustainable means to me.

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We can live and work together successfully in this world of highly competitive global demands, national and state mandates, increasing child poverty and local challenges. Some of you will agree with me and some not, but I am here to say we must work together and help us strengthen our schools and educate all our children.

We are working to provide a quality education with every child a graduate. We are raising academic standards, changing our assessment system.

We have begun transforming our schools for all of Wisconsin's public school students. We are Wisconsin's education leaders.

With bold, positive actions let's work together for our kids and their parents, our educators, and for Wisconsin's future.

Thank you for being here today.

God bless all of our children, their parents, and educators.

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*Tony Evers is Wisconsin's elected state superintendent of public instruction. A high-resolution photo of the state superintendent is available on the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/vm-media.html>. This speech is available on the DPI website at [http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2010\\_09.pdf](http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2010_09.pdf).*