

## Guest Editorial

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### Strong libraries needed to improve the state's economy

*A National Library Week guest editorial by State Superintendent Tony Evers*

Wisconsin's public, school, academic, and special libraries improve the state's economy and the quality of life for residents of our state. Libraries have always been a source of community pride, and they are especially valuable in today's knowledge and information-based world. Strong Wisconsin libraries support a stronger Wisconsin economy.

Our state is struggling with high unemployment and shrinking paychecks. This difficult economy requires smart investments and careful spending. Wisconsin libraries are models of frugality, using technology and working cooperatively to reduce costs and share resources. In fact, Wisconsin is first in the nation in per capita interlibrary loan, which saves taxpayers an estimated \$100 million annually by sharing resources rather than purchasing more copies of library materials. The cuts proposed in the 2011-13 budget strike at the heart of library efficiencies. Elimination of the requirement that communities continue to support their local libraries will threaten Wisconsin's resource-sharing services, creating a system of haves and have-nots.

Libraries are one of the best investments a community can make. Libraries help families cope with tight budgets by providing Internet-connected computers, books and other materials, and professional assistance at no cost to the user. Libraries support a competitive workforce through literacy programs, partnerships with job training programs, and other resources that help children and adults learn to find, evaluate, and use information they need for their education, health, and careers. Studies show that good school libraries effectively improve student performance. And, research has shown that libraries return more than \$4 to the economy for each tax dollar invested.

In recognition of the importance of libraries to our economy and the services they provide to their communities, the American Library Association and libraries across the nation are sponsoring National Library Week, April 10 to 16. No matter your interest or need, libraries and library staff members are there to help. In honor of National Library Week, I encourage everyone to visit their local library to take advantage of the wonderful resources that are available, and to thank their librarians and library staff for making information and education accessible to all.

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*Tony Evers is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.*

**NOTES:** 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 news release and a copy of the state superintendent's National Library Week proclamation are available at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/newsroom.html>.