State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

**** WAFLT ADDRESS ****

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

Wisconsin in the World – The World in Wisconsin: Internationalizing Education

Speech to the Wisconsin Association for Language Teachers
Summer Language Leadership Institute

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Pyle Center — August 8, 2007

I am honored to serve as your State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Thank you Jackie for your leadership of WAFLT.

Throughout my career as a teacher and as an administrator, whether in elementary grades, middle school, or senior high, I have experienced firsthand the power of language and the potential in embracing cultures other than my own.

Let me illustrate with two stories:

When I traveled to France to discuss with the recteurs of Bordeaux and Aix-Marseille how we might implement our recently signed Memoranda of Understanding, I was a little worried, because my French is limited. I was very grateful to be connected again with Hunter Martin, who had been a student of mine at Madison West when I was principal. He was studying in Paris and agreed to be my guide and translator to travel down to Bordeaux and back.

Now I think I could have maneuvered the signs to figure out how to get to the right train platform at the right time, but without the language connection, I would have missed out on the conversations and ideas shared with others during that ride on the fast TGV. Language made it possible for me to learn and connect.

When I traveled to Vietnam and Thailand to join our DPI sponsored Fulbright-Hays Project Abroad two years ago, I got to know Sheboygan teacher Yer Yang, who left Southeast Asia at the age of 5. She had not been back to her birthplace in 30 years.

It was both easy and hard for her to return. Easy in that she understood the culture and the language. But, hard for her because of her inner struggle to identify as a Hmong.

In both of these cases, language and culture make a difference. Being able to function in different languages and in different cultures is not a luxury; it is essential in our 21st century interconnected world. I thank all of you for working so passionately to advance world languages and the understanding of world cultures.

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I thank WAFLT for your leadership in our state and nationally. A year and a half ago I was honored to accept the Senator Paul Simon Award, given by the Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

I want to again thank WAFLT for nominating me for this award and all those who wrote such wonderful letters in support of this nomination. I accepted the award only as a representative of all the individuals in Wisconsin who are making a difference by teaching world languages and bringing international perspectives to education. It is an honor to represent world language teachers and to speak of your hard work and success in bringing world languages to more students in more grades.

Senator Paul Simon—for whom the award was named—truly earned his place in Illinois and in our nation as one of the greatest visionary leaders of the late 20th century. He had a strong voice in support of teaching languages and international education. He spoke of the critical role of international education in ensuring the future strength and security of the United States.

Paul Simon knew what was needed to live in peace. He knew that we need citizens with the skills and understanding to communicate across their borders. He knew that we need citizens who can see through the eyes of another culture. Now, more than ever, as a nation at war, we know the urgency of this vision.

We are all inspired by his vision. And working together, we need to bring even more attention to international education efforts in Wisconsin.

Our message must be that increasing world language instruction and infusing an international perspective throughout the curriculum will raise the achievement of all students and close the gap in achievement between economically disadvantaged students, students of color, and their peers.

As state superintendent, I called together a progressive group of people from government, education, community organizations, and business for our statewide International Education Council to address these issues. We are developing policy and budget initiatives to internationalize education from pre-kindergarten through graduate school.

However, the foundation of this statewide work and the greatest impact is made by you who are in our classrooms every day. When you give a student the gift of a new language, you are investing in a legacy of cultural understanding for all of our children.

We know that we cannot let federal education law narrow our instruction. We know that learning other languages has tremendous impact on scores in reading and math. One example comes directly from the College Board itself. When they looked at different factors that impact SAT scores, four years of studying a world language made more of an impact on SAT verbal and math scores than four years of studying any other subject area.

One or two years of world language study has some impact, but the longer one studies another language, the greater the impact on literacy skills.

Research also shows the impact of learning a second (or third) language on reading in students' native English. From studies with students in elementary grades in Louisiana, the interesting thing is that students who started behind in reading skills in their native English, actually made more of a gain than students who were already strong in native English reading skills.

Students who are frequently disadvantaged in our schools were given help to catch up to their advantaged peers by learning another language. Rather than hurting their first language literacy,

studying a second language strengthened their first language reading skills. I am also impressed by the story of how Menasha has not only implemented K-12 language instruction in Spanish, German, and Japanese, but how the district has sustained the program and developed community interest in and support of the program.

We have so much to be proud of in Wisconsin.

We were the first state to develop a comprehensive curriculum guide to support global studies. As I mentioned earlier, Wisconsin has established a statewide International Education Council, which I chair and our governor strongly supports. This council has adopted recommendations, which are already impacting our schools.

We currently partner with Germany, Japan, France, and Thailand on teacher and student exchanges. I have personally visited Germany, France, Vietnam, and Thailand to build our connections, signing Memoranda of Understanding.

And, in addition to your annual world language conference, we have held an international education summit. In just a few weeks, our International Education Council will be holding a strategic planning workshop to identify the most effective approaches to internationalize education in Wisconsin by improving our advocacy, use of technology, curriculum integration, and study abroad opportunities. Good work is happening!

In Wisconsin, we are striving to open our students to new worlds, experiences, and opportunities. Wisconsin ranks third nationally in the percentage of students studying world languages, ten of which are offered in the state's public schools. Over 50 percent of our students in grades 6 through 12 are studying a world language this year. I am proud, as state superintendent, to tell the story of the good work and good will of our educators.

As we all recognize, every student who learns another language increases his or her future opportunities and expands our society's capacity for understanding and interacting with all nations. We cannot solely focus on a selected few languages to teach; we must have the vision to ensure that all languages are part of the program options and opportunities offered to our students in all of our states.

DPI was awarded funds from the U.S. Department of Education under the Foreign Language Assistance Program. The FLAP grant has three components: preparing teachers, planning with districts, and supporting students.

We are preparing 18 teachers of Chinese beginning this summer, and they are here with us today. They began their training at Concordia Language Villages; they are now continuing at UW-Madison for two weeks, including teaching in a Chinese Language Academy each morning.

Throughout the coming school year, they will be teaching Mandarin Chinese in schools throughout Wisconsin. Then next summer, they will do it all again in a second round of teaching seminars and practica. In this way, Wisconsin will grow its capacity to offer another critical language to our students. Will they please stand and let's thank them for taking on this challenging commitment.

The FLAP grant also funds work around curriculum integration and heritage language speakers.

I like to think of the goals for international education and world languages as summarized in five C's. Five C's are: communication, citizenship, careers, culture, and community. This is why global literacy is

so essential for all our students. They are already living in a world that doesn't stop at borders. Let's give all students the literacy of skills, knowledge, and attitudes to function in the world.

A quality education is one that expands beyond the reaches of one's own experience, beyond the familiar. Every student needs to embark on an educational journey that is infused with global understanding. Every student needs to think, act, and ask the important questions that globalization requires; all students need to develop the integrated, critical thinking that will be required for peace and prosperity in the world.

Languages are critical to spread democracy. We must also ensure that students learn how to embrace diversity, beginning in our own communities, and then to work as partners from a global perspective. It is not enough to just learn about others; we must communicate and share with them. Then, and only then, will we live in peace.

Senator Paul Simon said, "If we want to improve our nation and the world, we must be willing to sacrifice a little." Learning new languages is hard and rewarding work. Through our commitment to world language education in our states and at the national level, we can make this a better world.

Thank you for the gift of communication and understanding you give to Wisconsin's students. Through your efforts, you are helping them learn languages and become comfortable to walk in another culture. You are doing your part to ensure that Wisconsin is in the world, and the world is in Wisconsin.

Thank you.

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Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.

NOTE: A high-resolution photo of the state superintendent is available for download on the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/vm-media.html.