



State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

NEWS RELEASE

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State superintendent announces rural advisory council

DPI, UW-Extension collaborative partnership addresses rural needs

MADISON—State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster announced membership of a groundbreaking advisory council that will advise policymakers on a wide range of issues facing rural communities.

The Advisory Council on Rural Schools, Libraries, and Communities, co-chaired by Burmaster and University of Wisconsin-Extension Chancellor Kevin Reilly, is made up of rural educators and community leaders. Formation of the council was one component of a comprehensive rural initiative Burmaster announced in early June.

The Advisory Council on Rural Schools, Libraries, and Communities will focus on a range of community concerns that affect rural areas, including education and overall quality-of-life issues. The council will examine the increasing challenges facing rural school districts, including revenue caps, declining enrollments, high-cost programs, reductions in categorical aids, and increasing transportation expenses. The council, with input from rural school and community leaders, will identify the array of services and financial resources needed to support rural schools and communities.

“The well-being of rural schools and communities is essential for our state’s future,” said Burmaster. “This collaborative partnership between the DPI, with its highly developed resources serving the education community, and UW-Extension, with its wealth of connections in rural communities, is a major step toward identifying and addressing key rural community issues on a statewide level.”

In addition to the formation of the Advisory Council on Rural Schools, Libraries, and Communities, other components of Burmaster’s “Advancing Rural Wisconsin” initiative

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- propose school finance changes that
 - provide aid to small rural districts based on sparsity through the “Rural School Promise” program;
 - double statutory transportation aid reimbursement rates for all districts and provide increased aid for rural districts that transport students more than 12 miles each way; and
 - make the current 75 percent declining enrollment hold harmless exemption a recurring exemption for revenue limit purposes.
- forge a partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Extension to encourage and promote regional discussion forums to highlight and emphasize the value and importance of rural communities and their schools,
- charge the new partnership between the DPI and the UW-Extension to strengthen and promote the quality of leadership in Wisconsin’s rural areas,
- use approximately \$1 million of federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funding to build a statewide support infrastructure to help teachers in rural schools meet the challenges they face educating children with autism or severe behavioral disabilities, and
- create a cross-divisional team within the DPI that will focus on rural issues and examine how various state-level initiatives will impact small rural districts.

“The hope for the future of our rural schools and communities rests within our ‘Advancing Rural Wisconsin’ initiative,” Burmaster said. “We need the talent and vision of members of the Advisory Council on Rural Schools, Libraries, and Communities to help us improve the opportunities and future of all Wisconsin children by making rural Wisconsin strong.”

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Advisory Council on Rural Schools, Libraries, and Communities

Council Co-chairs

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Chancellor Kevin Reilly
University of Wisconsin-Extension

Council Members

Kris Adams Wendt, Director, Rhinelander Public Library

Scott Beard, Former President, Wisconsin Indian Education Association, Portage

Sue Beitlich, President, Wisconsin Farmers Union, La Crosse

Storm Carroll, District Administrator, Laona School District

Paul Dix, Principal, Oakfield High School

Barry Donohoo, Special Education Teacher, Solon Springs School District

John Fox, Teacher, Independence School District

Sen. Sheila Harsdorf, R-River Falls

Frank Koehn of Herbster, Science Teacher, Port Wing Junior High School, South Shore School District

Bryce Luchterhand, Staff Member for Governor's Northern Office, Unity

Kathleen Martinson, District Administrator, Rosholt School District

Christian Meier, Teacher, Phelps School District

Mary Moran-Orona, Title I Migrant Secretary, Palmyra Elementary School

Paul Ohlrogge, CRD Agent, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Dodgeville

Deb Pickett, Owner, Southwest Graphics, Darlington

Belinda Peterman, Grades 9-12 Spanish Teacher, Direct Migrant Program, Wautoma Area School District

Dave Polashek, District Administrator, Oconto Falls School District

Carole Rajkovich, Grades 6-12 Music Teacher, Brillion School District

Ricky Rolfsmeyer, Board Member, Wisconsin Rural Challenge, Hollandale

Elaine Salinas, Board Member, Wisconsin Rural Challenge, New Richmond

Judd Schemmel, Executive Director, Wisconsin Council of Religious and Independent Schools, Madison

Lynn Schreck, Farmer and School Board Member, Seneca School District

Scott Schultz, Editor, *The Country Today*, Eau Claire

Rep. Gary Sherman, D-Port Wing

Rick Stadelman, Executive Director, Wisconsin Towns Association, Shawano

Greg Stanton, Student, Webster School District

Sharon Stewart of Bayfield, President, Chequamagon Bay Arts Council

Barbara Thompson, District Administrator, New Glarus School District

Faye Thunder-Begay, Presidential Aide, HoChunk Nation

Alyssa Umberger, Student and 4-H Member, Genoa

Scott Wall, President, Bank of Cashton

Walter Wetzel, School Board President, Neillsville School District