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Hurley hosts State Superintendent

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HURLEY — The Hurley K-12 School played host to Wisconsin State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers and the Rural School Advisory Council on Thursday in Hurley.

This was the first time Hurley hosted such an event, and many district administrators and superintendents from rural schools across the state came to the annual event to discuss issues that affect them. School officials came from Bayfield, Naples, Butternut, Phillips, Mercer, Drummond, Hayward, South Shore, Wausaukee and others.

Evers addressed the council and audience about the importance of the committee in helping schools across the state.

"First, I want to thank everyone for coming here to Hurley today," Evers said. "The council is truly committed to rural schools and rural communities, and from what I have seen so far here today, Hurley has a lot to be proud of as a rural school."

Hurley Superintendent Chris Patritto addressed the committee on the importance of having a great relationship with the school board when it comes to facing challenges in a rural area.

"Just like any other school district in the state, we have faced a lot of challenges," Patritto said. "However, we have also had a lot of victories. Our school board president, Joe Simonich, has been the rock that has helped us through all of that for the past 18 years."

Simonich briefly touched on some of the challenges that Hurley has faced as a district, including a partial roof collapse in the late 1990s, as well as a fire in 2006 that caused \$6 million in damages.

"Hurley is a very welcoming community, despite these challenges," Simonich



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Hurley middle school science teacher Dan Rye, left, discusses teaching and his classroom with Wisconsin State Superintendent Tony Evers, center, and state Rep. Janet Bewley, D-Ashland, Wis., on Thursday during a tour of the Hurley K-12 School. Hurley hosted the annual Rural School Advisory Council meeting, featuring districts from all across the state.

said. "However, we don't have a lot of high-paying jobs. Over the past couple of years, we have had to cut over \$2 million from our budget. Through all of that, our

staff has been wonderful in making sure that our students received the best education. I truly believe that we have one of the best staffs in the state."

Throughout the event, attendees watched a presentation from Wausaukee

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superintendent Jan Dooley about the financial troubles the district faced, including possible dissolution. Dooley explained the steps taken to keep the district moving forward, including partnerships with Northeast Wisconsin Technical College for vocational studies.

"We needed to change," Dooley said. "Consolidation was not an option for the district, and through changes, we were able to take a negative \$129,400 fund balance, and turn it into a \$3.814 million fund balance. We had to show the community that we were stewards of their dollar and make necessary changes, and thinking outside of the box."

After Dooley's presentation, the council made a conference call with Mike Bormett, director of policy and budget for the Division of Finance and Management, to discuss changes in the state's education budget for the upcoming year.

One issue raised by the council and attendees was sparsity funding for schools. Sparsity funding allows for districts to receive additional funds if there are less than 10 students per square mile in the district.

An attendee raised a point that while he was working in a district in central Wisconsin, his district received sparsity funding, despite there being 12 other districts within a 30-mile radius.

According to Bormett, the numbers were equally spread between the 130 districts that received funding last year.

"We had Drummond, with less than one student per square mile, to Algoma, which had 9.65 students per square mile," Bormett said. "The numbers are

fairly spread."

The discussion turned to the geographic size of districts. Some administrators said they had students traveling as many as 90 minutes on the bus one way, to and from school, then raising issues with overall transportation aid.

Bormett's interview was cut short to keep on schedule, and was followed by the council taking a tour of the school led by high school student council members.

"What a beautiful facility," Connie Erickson, council member from Webster, said.

The meeting concluded with recognition of AmeriCorps worker Liz Stenroos, of Kimball, who received a round of applause for the work she does at the Hurley K-12 School, including tutoring, setting up tutoring services and volunteering her time.

"The only thing is that I wish I could continue doing this," said Stenroos, who is on her third and final 10-month term with AmeriCorps. "I really love what I do here."

Evers complimented the district for the work it put in hosting the event, including the breakfast and lunch by the food service staff.

"I know that this was not all put together in one day," Evers said. "I just want to thank Chris, the district, the staff, students and the community of Hurley for hosting this event. It was a great day, with great discussion and great food, so thank you all very much."

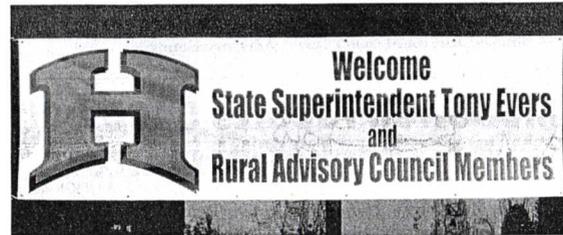
For more information on Evers and the DPI, visit dpi.state.wi.us or call 608-266-3390. For information on the council, visit dpi.wi.gov/rural/ruraladvisorycouncil-meetings.



Hurley School Board President Joe Simonich, left, and Wisconsin State Superintendent Tony Evers, center, listen to Hurley School District Administrator Chris Patriitto during the annual Rural School Advisory Council meeting at the Hurley K-12 School on Thursday.



Members of the Hurley High School student council pose with Wisconsin State Superintendent Tony Evers during the annual Rural School Advisory Council meeting at the Hurley K-12 School on Thursday. Pictured include, first row, from left, Nicole Marczak, Anna Olson, Ross Adamavich, Evers, Savana Swanson, Sam Lardinois, Adrienne Fedora and Donald Sherrer; second row, from left, Mark Saari, Kourtney Zacharias, Cameron Rowe, Hurley District Administrator Chris Patriitto, Hurley K-12 Principal Jeff Gulan, Kelsey Rye, Sarah Carroll (hidden), Beka Harrington and Jaclyn Hissa.



A large banner welcomes Wisconsin State Superintendent Tony Evers to the Hurley K-12 School on Thursday for the annual Rural School Advisory Council meeting in Hurley.

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