

## State of Education Address

September 24, 2009 — State Capitol Rotunda, Madison

*By State Superintendent Tony Evers*

Thank you, Adam (Lang) for that kind introduction. Congratulations to both you and Julia (Sprangers), our Boys and Girls Badger State Superintendents, and thank you for your participation today.

Thank you, Joan (Wade) for serving as our master of ceremonies. CESA 6 is fortunate you are its leader.

Thank you Forward Brass, Jonathan Overby, and the Wisconsin Army National Guard for your presentations.

We have in attendance today a number of distinguished individuals. I would like to introduce them and ask them to stand:

- First Lady Jessica Doyle,
- Supreme Court Justices,
- Cabinet Secretaries Michael Morgan, Lorie Keating-Heinemann, and
- all our State Legislators who are with us today.

Please stand. We thank you and ask for your continued support for public education.

A special thanks to all tribal leaders, school board members, and other elected officials who have joined us. Please join me in showing our appreciation for their public service.

Also thanks to the heads of our institutions of higher education:

- Kevin Reilly, President of the University of Wisconsin System,
- Dan Clancy, President of the Wisconsin Technical College System, and
- Rolf Wegenke, President of the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

Furthermore, we recognize all staff in our schools, public libraries, institutions of higher education,

- my colleagues at the Department of Public Instruction,
- the CESAs,
- the Wisconsin Education Association Council led by President Mary Bell,
- AFT-Wisconsin led by President Bryan Kennedy,
- AWSA led by Executive Director Jim Lynch,
- WASBO led by Executive Director Woody Wiedenhoef, and
- WCASS led by Executive Director Phil Knobel,
- WASB led by Executive Director John Ashley,
- the Wisconsin Library Association led by President Walter Burkhalter, and
- WEMTA led by President Jo Anne Carr.

Of course, I salute the many individuals and organizations in this state that support education. And a special welcome to Miles Turner of WASDA and all of our school district superintendents from throughout our great state.

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As your state superintendent, I have made an unwavering commitment to the public schools and libraries in our state.

Our schools in every part of Wisconsin help our children to become active citizens, productive and skilled workers, and leaders who have risen to the challenges they face, generation after generation.

Our long-standing commitment to public education continues to earn nation-leading graduation rates, college entrance exam scores, and strong increases in students taking rigorous college-level courses.

We are proud of the accomplishments of our public schools and libraries. And, we know our schools and democracy are made stronger by our constant effort to change and renew, to strive for the common good, and transform for the better.

We must ensure that strong public schools and libraries deliver the opportunity for our children to be the best they can be and to reach their goals.

This is even more important in our current economic times, facing the challenges of a struggling global economy. Let me be clear, we must educate children *now* for jobs that will be the foundation of Wisconsin's prosperity.

This past year's hard times leave many working families struggling with lost earnings, lost jobs, lost homes.

Too many families increasingly find it hard to afford health care, a roof over their heads, or even their next meal.

This fall children return to schools that face budget cuts that have resulted in higher class sizes and lost educational opportunities and support.

While we appreciate the state's commitment to schools in these tough times, public schools are cutting budgets at a time when achievement gaps are too large and too many of our students drop out.

We must commit now to increase resources to schools and libraries as the economy improves. I repeat. We must commit *now* to increase resources to schools and libraries as the economy improves.

To put it into a farming context, we must stop eating our seed corn. A quality education with every child a graduate prepared for the workplace and further education lasts a lifetime. It provides a bountiful harvest for years to come.

Three months ago in an elementary school 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, we must:

- 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.

And, I can tell you, we have hit the ground running. For example, we will hold our first ever Graduation Summit in December 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 drop out is too many.

We are increasing the rigor and relevancy of our academic standards through the work of the American Diploma Project and joined a national effort to create Common Core Standards and Assessments.

We won over \$ 30 million from the federal government to provide more charter schools and educational opportunities across our state.

We announced the phasing out the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations (WKCE) and are working toward a new assessment system based on recommendations from the Next Generation Assessment Task Force.

We published the nation's first curriculum planning guide for financial literacy.

We launched job placement centers in public libraries across our state.

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We have almost universal free wireless internet access in our public libraries and just expanded Wisconsin's on-line library service, Badgerlink, with free access to more resources for the increasing numbers of library patrons.

And we have been busy in our state's largest city. In Milwaukee Public Schools, we must 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 reinvigorating and expanding DPI's Urban Education Office in Milwaukee, and I am holding regular office hours there. I am aggressively working with community and state partners to improve education for Milwaukee's children.

Let me be clear. All school districts in the state need Milwaukee to succeed. All of us must get behind our efforts to lift the achievement of Milwaukee's children.

We need to leave behind blame and excuses, and build on the good being done there by hard-working educators, parents, and students. Thousands of our educators daily teach Milwaukee's children regardless of assorted controversies revolving around the school system.

As the state continues to improve MPS through our corrective action requirements, the next two years provide a great opportunity for more systemic changes to transform MPS.

The people of Milwaukee dare to care, and so do I, that kids learn in all of Milwaukee's public schools.

Throughout Wisconsin, I am working with community, state, and national partners to further transform our public schools and ensure that a quality education is available no matter where a student lives.

We are living in exciting times, and I believe it is possible for plans that seemed unattainable in the past to actually happen.

Can you imagine 51 states and territories coming together to create internationally benchmarked common core standards in English and mathematics that define the skills and knowledge students need to succeed in college and careers? It is happening.

This effort recognizes what we have long known. Our students and families are highly mobile and our economy is global in scope. This collaborative effort, if successful, frees us to completely redesign our assessment and accountability system. Thus, can you also imagine 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 based on academic standards that are internationally benchmarked,
- 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.

This will happen.

Also, can you imagine piloting an innovative teacher compensation system that

- sustains high quality professional growth over a teaching career,
- supports our newest teachers through a guided and directed teaching experience that provides time to model and reflect on work with master educators and mentors,
- provides further incentives to get more of the best educators to our chronically low-achieving schools,
- enables teachers to earn additional salary by demonstrating evidence of accomplished teaching, and
- the success of this pilot will be based on increased student learning.

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Can you imagine all schools and libraries across the state with the Internet bandwidth capacity to access “virtual” global learning opportunities:

- taking a class of rural Wisconsin students to an on-line interactive exhibit in Costa Rican rainforests,
- allowing students to track the movement and research work of the international space station,
- giving library users access to on-line employment retraining courses, or
- connecting Wisconsin families through a video visit to a relative serving in the armed forces in Iraq or Afghanistan.

What an opportunity, especially for our rural schools and libraries. With the proper prioritization, this can happen.

In the next couple of weeks and months, I will work with many of you to move these dreams to reality.

Expect more to come. This is no time to have an aversion to risk. Life is too short. My parents taught me to leave this world a better place than you found it. We all need to help and provide our ideas. And, we all need to join together for our kids’ education.

This past year has hit many hard. We know that the struggles of families too often hit hardest on those we aim to protect and help flourish: our children. In many cases, our schools and public libraries are the only place of certainty and security for our children.

But in the end, it’s all about the people who serve children. Every day our educators and public librarians are there for our kids. We must value their work; raise the level of public discourse; and provide all we can to support their missions: to educate Wisconsin’s children. These hard-working public servants modestly reach for those small successes that add up over years of schooling to an educated, productive member of our society.

Educators are building Wisconsin’s economic future every day. Educators are tomorrow’s job creators. They don’t expect shout outs, high fives, or tweets.

They do expect and deserve our support and commitment to educating all our students. Let’s work 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 state superintendent of public instruction. Elected in April, his term for the nonpartisan, constitutional office is four years. 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>.*