

State of Education Address

September 16, 2010 — State Capitol Rotunda, Madison

By State Superintendent Tony Evers

Thank you, Billy Greisch for that introduction. Congratulations to you and Jessica Tanck, the 2010 Boys and Girls Badger State superintendents, and thank you for your participation today.

Thank you, Frank Helquist for serving as our master of ceremonies. Birchwood is fortunate you are its leader.

Thank you also to Forward Brass, Jonathan Overby, and the 1st of the 147th Aviation Battalion 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 Ann Walsh Bradley and N. Patrick Crooks,
- State Treasurer Dawn Marie Sass,
- Cabinet Secretaries Reggie Bicha, Matt Frank, and Roberta Gassman, and
- all our state legislators who are with us today.

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 Wiedenhoeft,
- WCASS led by Executive Director Phil Knobel,
- WASB led by Executive Director John Ashley,
- the Wisconsin Library Association led by President Alberto Herrera, and
- WEMTA led by President Sandy Heiden.

And a special welcome to Miles Turner of WASDA and all of our school district superintendents from throughout our great state.

As your state superintendent, I am humbled by the work that goes on in public schools across Wisconsin to help children become active citizens, productive and skilled workers, and leaders in our communities. I am tremendously proud of the accomplishments of our public schools and libraries.

In July 2009, in a Milwaukee public school, I took the oath of office as state superintendent of public instruction of our great state of Wisconsin. On that day, I affirmed my unwavering commitment to public education, our public libraries, and to the goal of every child a graduate prepared for the workforce and higher education.

Wisconsin's long-standing commitment to public education continues to earn nation-leading graduation rates, college entrance exam scores, and a growing number of students taking rigorous college-level courses. We have a tradition of excellence, and there is much to celebrate.

At the same time, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. Graduation and achievement gaps are too large. Too many students drop out of school – one in ten students. And, we have a broken school finance system that erodes our ability to ensure all children graduate prepared for future success.

Educators in Wisconsin know we cannot stand still. For 14 months, I have worked with many of you and thousands of others across Wisconsin to make the changes we need to improve outcomes for our students and ensure that every child is a graduate prepared for future success.

- We adopted new, rigorous academic state standards in mathematics and English language arts. These standards are aligned to college and workplace expectations, are benchmarked against those of the highest performing countries, and now are shared across 35 states.
- We are reforming and modernizing student testing in Wisconsin by phasing out the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) and leading national efforts to build a new multi-state student assessment system.
- Through the hard work and dedication of many of the partners here today, we secured passage of the most significant education reform legislation in over a decade, giving the state superintendent authority to intervene in chronically struggling schools and districts.
- Our efforts are already paying off through new and needed reforms in the state's largest school district – the Milwaukee Public Schools. Through my state and federal authority, with a new state technical assistance team and the collaboration of the new MPS leadership team, we are driving MPS to improve student outcomes through a consistent reading and math curriculum, improved quality of instruction, a system of Response to Intervention and behavioral supports, and increased family engagement.
- To advance school improvement efforts in school districts around the state, we've established a new Response to Intervention technical assistance center in partnership with the CESAs. To date, the RTI Center has trained nearly 500 school teams to create supportive and safer learning environments that help all children excel.
- We are making new investments in data and research by expanding our statewide K-12 longitudinal data system into higher education, providing accountability for achievement throughout a student's educational career.
- We're investing in innovation that makes sense, including charter schools, technology, Next Generation Learning Innovation Labs, a model bullying prevention program and policy, and teacher licensing flexibility.
- We held our first ever Graduation Summit to provide direct and targeted technical assistance to those districts that had the highest dropout rates or greatest graduation gaps.
- We've supported the establishment of job centers in public libraries across our state and placed VISTA volunteers to support them.
- Last, but certainly not least, I've authored a sweeping new school finance reform framework, "Fair Funding for Our Future," to repair our broken school funding system and secure fair, sustainable, and transparent funding for Wisconsin schools.

In these and other areas, we have worked with parents, students, educators, and leaders across the state to transform our education system so that every child is a graduate. Our first year has laid the groundwork, and we've made investments that will have lasting impacts. But now we need to do much more.

We can make our high school graduation requirements more meaningful. Right now, Wisconsin law only requires students to complete 13 credits, the lowest in the nation. Most of our graduates already take at least 21.5 credits. We need to change state law to hold all students to this higher uniform standard, which would put our requirements above the national average.

We can also do more to ensure that all Wisconsin children have the opportunity to graduate from high school with some postsecondary credits or credentials. We have strong advanced placement courses, youth options, youth apprenticeship and career academies – at least in certain parts of the state. Today, I am calling on my partners in higher education to work with me to make new dual enrollment opportunities available to students throughout Wisconsin.

Let's work together on early and middle college programs to give high school students that chance to take college level courses while still in high school. We need early colleges that compress into five years rigorous coursework so students can graduate from high school and earn an associate degree or the first two years of college credit. And, we need middle colleges that offer high school students, especially students at risk of dropping out, the opportunity to earn some postsecondary credit while in high school and flexibility in their studies.

While some examples of these kinds of innovative high school exist in Wisconsin, we need more of them across our state.

We also need to develop a "test out" option for 11th- and 12th-graders who demonstrate readiness for success in postsecondary education, something that is being piloted around the country. These students would earn their high school diploma early and be admitted directly into college to begin working on an associate or bachelor's degree.

To make these dual enrollment opportunities a reality takes a new way of thinking about mission of education. It means sharing ownership over college readiness. It means leadership and commitment to breaking down the barriers between PK-12 and higher education and our linear and divided approach to schooling. We have long talked about seamless education from pre-kindergarten through the postsecondary level. Let's finally make it so.

The result will be young people succeeding in college-level courses during high school, graduating college and career ready, increasing the pipeline of students who will go on to college, and reducing their total time and cost to degree. It's the right thing to do for our students, and it's a wise use of public resources.

As we expand dual enrollment options, we also need to redouble our efforts to improve outcomes in Wisconsin's most struggling schools.

Part of the budget proposal I am preparing for the next governor and Legislature will focus on a new categorical aid program aimed directly at increasing graduation rates and reducing the number of dropouts. We need to invest early in students who demonstrate warning signs of dropping out, and offer them programs to keep them in school and on a pathway to success. The proposal I am developing will focus efforts and resources on the school districts with the most significant graduation gaps, and hold them accountable for improving results.

Replacing the WKCE and transforming our assessment systems is a major part of preparing students to become college and career ready. The pieces are coming together on what our replacement for the WKCE will look like. This month, our SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium, a collaborative effort of 30 states, was awarded \$160 million dollars to develop an online, adaptive assessment system, aligned to the Common Core State Standards.

The consortium will be developing this system over the next few years, with full implementation expected by the 2014-15 school year.

In the meantime, we will continue to administer the WKCE assessment to meet federal and state accountability requirements. However, we can and should do more now. We need to encourage use of benchmark assessment data.

Our students, parents, and educators need data to inform course planning in high school and to assure that all students are on track for college or careers after high school. Therefore, I am announcing that my budget proposal will include incentives for school districts to:

Provide students in grades three through eight an online, adaptive benchmark assessment tool, the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP),

And adopt a set of college and career readiness tests of students — the EXPLORE/PLAN/ and ACT.

Our commitment to “Every Child a Graduate” relies upon highly effective teachers. Research shows that the single most critical element in student learning is teacher quality and effectiveness.

We know that improving educator effectiveness is one of the most direct and promising strategies for improving student achievement. To improve the effectiveness of educators, valid and reliable processes are needed to measure how well an educator promotes learning for students.

First of all, we must redouble our effort to increase the numbers of National Board Certified educators in Wisconsin, a fine example of measuring individual effectiveness.

It is also critical that we move forward as a state to create an educator performance system that improves student learning and informs professional development. I commend school boards, administrators, and educators for the efforts they are already undertaking to improve effective teaching and student achievement.

However, because this issue is too important not to be guided by a state vision, I challenge the leadership of our associations for school boards, administrators, and unions of educators to take the lead on this. If we don’t get this done through collaboration, there is a strong possibility we will get something shallow, superficial, and politically motivated imposed on us. Together, working collaboratively, we need to develop a Wisconsin vision of how we can support teacher effectiveness to provide all the children of Wisconsin with their best opportunity to learn.

Finally, none of this is possible without adequate resources for our public schools. Across Wisconsin, school boards have cut budgets, closed schools, and cut classes and educational programs at a time when an educated workforce is vital to our economic recovery and long-term prosperity. Yet, taxpayers feel burdened and citizens increasingly question whether they are getting adequate results for their substantial school tax dollars, and parents pay more and more fees.

This summer, I began a public discussion about the way we fund our schools by introducing my “Fair Funding for Our Future” framework. This school finance plan outlines reforms that – taken together – will create a fair, sustainable, and transparent school funding system without raising statewide taxes.

The plan focuses on:

- providing a minimum level of state aid for every student in the state, regardless of where they live;
- accounting for a community’s ability to pay by incorporating taxpayers’ income, not just property wealth, as a factor in our state general aid formula;
- supporting our many rural school districts; and
- providing predictable growth in state general school aid to districts.

My school finance plan will also increase transparency and accountability for results in state funding to schools by:

- ensuring that state education dollars are actually spent educating children, and not on tax credits that are called “state support” for our schools;
- building a stronger safety net for school districts by reducing the swings in aid any district could experience in a given year; and
- investing in innovation and programs that have proven results by consolidating and targeting our categorical aid programs.

I have engaged many Wisconsin citizens and leaders in the past couple months on school funding issues, and we all must continue to take up the cause with every candidate for the Legislature, governor, and every elected official who can help us make the reforms we need now.

I know we walk through a graveyard of school finance proposals derailed by the political reality of winners and losers. My reforms are based on principles, not printouts, but I recognize that any viable proposal must show

communities what the changes would mean to them. With that in mind, I am going to present the school finance reform portion of my budget to the next Governor and Legislature later this fall when I am able to accurately model the impacts using this school year's data.

I look forward to working with all of you to pass school finance reform during the next legislative session. Our moment is now.

Last year in this address I said, "Expect more to come." More has come. More will come. I will continue to work for our students and their parents and educators and librarians. We have made real strides this year to ensure Wisconsin's schools stay strong and every child is a graduate. And while the past two years have hit many hard, our schools and public libraries have responded to be centers for recovery and centers for compassion and caring. Every day our educators and public librarians are there for our kids and our communities.

Teaching, learning, and improving – each of these – making our strong schools and libraries better – is about hard steady work. It cannot fall victim to fads and political turmoil. We know that real, serious change takes time and must be done right. We will get it right and support our parents and educators as they raise and teach our next generation of leaders and innovators. We have set ambitious goals, and we will need your support to achieve them. 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, educators, and librarians.

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Tony Evers is Wisconsin's state superintendent of public instruction. 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>.