

News Release

Education Information Services ■ 125 South Webster Street ■ P.O. Box 7841 ■ Madison, WI 53707-7841 ■ (608) 266-3559

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, September 20, 2012

Contact: Patrick Gasper, DPI Communications Officer, (608) 266-3559

DPI-NR 2012-101 B

Wisconsin is transforming its education system

MADISON — “It’s an exciting time to be in public education,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers in his annual state of education address. “We’re changing what children learn, how they’re taught and tested, and how schools and teachers are evaluated. The scope and pace of change is unprecedented, and we’re blessed to start from a position of strength.”

Evers highlighted accomplishments that place Wisconsin as a national leader in library usage and resource sharing. Student achievements include top-level ACT scores, “Best in the Midwest” performance on Advanced Placement exams, and graduation rates that are the highest in the nation. “We should celebrate our accomplishments,” he said. “But, we’ve got a long way to go.”

Data shows that nearly 6,000 students drop out each year and graduation gaps persist for students from racial and ethnic minority groups, students with disabilities, English learners, and students in poverty. Too many of Wisconsin’s youngest students struggle to read. Child poverty and homelessness have reached the highest levels in recent memory, and schools and libraries are dealing with the largest budget cuts in state history.

“Wisconsin faces many challenges and is transforming its education system to help our students prepare for the future,” Evers said. His 2013-15 budget will include expansion of early literacy and will recommend new investments in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), career and technical education (CTE), and industry certifications. “One of the surest pathways to the middle class in Wisconsin is career and technical education,” Evers said. “Forecasts show that job openings in manufacturing, health care, IT, and service industries will continue to grow.”

Evers noted that reinvigorating CTE hinges on students and parents believing it is a viable route to lifetime success after high school graduation. “A bachelor’s degree will always be an important path to a family-supporting career. But it’s not the only one, and it’s not the path that most kids take,” he said. “Expanding CTE does not mean devaluing academics. Today’s machinists, welders, and nursing assistants need high-level math and reading skills, as well as problem solving, creativity, and collaboration skills, as much as anybody seeking a four-year degree. Students, parents, and schools need to know all of the opportunities available.”

(more)

The Department of Public Instruction’s 2013-15 budget advances the state superintendent’s 2017 Agenda, a broad plan for transforming education. Agenda 2017 calls for implementing the Common Core State Standards into instruction and assessments. It also will enhance technology and data systems to support personalized learning for students, implement supports for schools, and continue piloting and adapting robust and fair educator evaluations.

Evers already announced his budget proposal to have the four-test ACT suite become the state’s high school assessments. Smarter Balanced Assessments, adaptive assessments based on the Common Core State Standards, for grades three through eight and resources from the Smarter Balanced Consortium for all educators, including high school, also will be part of assessment changes for Wisconsin.

“As I go around the state talking about Agenda 2017, I hear story after story about schools that are struggling to keep afloat financially. Recent cuts have meant fewer CTE teachers to prepare Wisconsin’s workforce, fewer reading teachers to intervene early, fewer counselors to connect kids to colleges or apprenticeship programs, and fewer library media specialists to facilitate digital learning. These cuts are real, and they are taking a toll,” Evers said.

“Education is a necessity, the path to our future. We must reinvest in education and fix our broken school finance system. My Fair Funding for Our Future proposal will do that and ensure stability in funding in good times and bad.” The school funding and finance reforms of the department’s 2013-15 budget will be introduced in November when school aid numbers based on certified property values will be available.

Evers urged that as Wisconsin works to reinvest in schools and prepare every child for college and career, that citizens remember that the state of public education cannot be strong without strong teachers. “The thousands of women and men who have dedicated themselves to teaching and supporting kids have been unfairly targeted in budget and policy debates of the past year and a half. Too many educators say they feel undervalued and under attack. In this time of great change, we need our educators invested and involved. We must restore dignity and respect for our teachers,” Evers said.

“I know the value of a Wisconsin public education because it’s the gift I was given. It’s part of who I am, and part of what drove me to become an educator. And I know what we have to lose if we don’t preserve and strengthen public education for generations to come,” he said. “Let’s reinvest in our schools and reform school funding so that every kid can succeed in college and careers, and let’s make sure our educators have a seat at the table. That’s how we can move forward together.

“There are many important, exciting changes coming to Wisconsin schools. We’ve got much to be proud of, and a lot yet to do,” Evers said.

###

NOTES: Highlights from the State of Education speech are attached. The full address is available on the Department of Public Instruction newsroom website <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/newsroom.html>. This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2012_101.pdf.

State of Education Address Excerpts

September 20, 2012 — State Capitol Rotunda

By State Superintendent Tony Evers

It's an exciting time to be in public education. We're changing what children learn, how they're taught and tested, and how schools and teachers are evaluated. The scope and pace of change is unprecedented, and we're blessed to start from a position of strength.

Our libraries are national leaders in usage and sharing of resources. Our students scored second in the country on the ACT, and Wisconsin leads the Midwest in achievement on Advanced Placement. We consistently lead the nation in high school graduation, and our graduation rates rose dramatically in the past year.

We've got a long way to go to provide all Wisconsin children the support they need to succeed. Child poverty and homelessness have reached the highest levels in recent memory. Schools and libraries are dealing with the largest budget cuts in state history. Cuts to public libraries have led to shorter hours and fewer resources. School districts cut nearly 2,400 staff last year, and nearly 75 percent of districts cut teachers. The largest cuts were to school librarians and career and technical education, special education, and reading teachers — critical areas where we need more investment, not less.

One of the surest pathways to the middle class in Wisconsin is career and technical education or CTE. ... That's why I'm working with business and education leaders across the state to reinvigorate CTE.... It's why I'll be calling on the Legislature to support new investments in STEM, CTE, and industry certifications. To be pro-business, you have to be pro-education.

As part of Agenda 2017, we've adopted the Common Core State Standards so teachers, parents, and students can focus on the important stuff. We'll no longer have curriculum that's a mile wide and an inch deep.

In two years, we're finally kicking the reading and math portions of the WKCE to the curb. In grades three through eight, it will be replaced with an online, adaptive test.... In high school, we're asking the Legislature to fund the ACT for all juniors, along with the preparatory tests EXPLORE and PLAN, and the job readiness assessment, WorkKeys.

We've finally kicked NCLB to the curb, as well. With the great work of a statewide design team and our federal waiver, we've developed an accountability system that's based on multiple measures of college and career readiness.

Finally, as we work together to reinvest in our schools and prepare every child for college and career, we know that the state of public education cannot be strong without strong teachers. ... In this time of great change we need our educators invested and involved. But I've heard from too many educators who feel undervalued and under attack: The teacher in Southwestern Wisconsin who drives to a grocery store two towns over so she can shop in peace. The teacher in Northeast Wisconsin who broke down in tears when I asked her what advice she'd give aspiring educators. The teacher who said, "Tony, when I meet new people, I no longer tell them I am a teacher, because I don't know where that conversation will go."

These teachers, like every teacher, didn't choose this profession for the pay or benefits, though they rightfully expect to make enough to raise a family like any professional does. They chose this profession, like I did, because they love kids, they want to inspire a love of learning, they want to change lives.

So, let's work together to restore respect for our educators by bringing civility and collaboration back to education. ... Let's reinvest in our schools and reform school funding so that every kid can succeed in college and careers, and let's make sure our educators have a seat at the table. Together, during this era of transformation, we need all hands on deck.

###

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