

WASB • WASDA • WASBO State Education Convention Address

January 23, 2013 — Delta Center, Milwaukee

By State Superintendent Tony Evers

Thank you Wayne Anderson for that introduction, your leadership in Mount Horeb, and as WASDA president.

And thank you to the Badger High School Jazz Band of the Lake Geneva-Genoa City Union High School District, directed by Greg Bungee. Let's give our student musicians and their teacher another round of applause.

I would like to thank and recognize the efforts of your associations' and their executive directors:

- John Ashley, and all of WASB,
- Miles Turner, WASDA, and
- Woody Wiedenhoeft, WASBO.

They do a great job representing you, and I appreciate their partnership in leading Wisconsin's education system. Let's give them a hand.

As your state superintendent, I am humbled by the work that goes on in public schools across Wisconsin to educate and serve our children and our citizens. I am tremendously proud of the accomplishments of our public schools, as national leaders in graduation rates, college entrance exams, and leading the Midwest in Advanced Placement course results.

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 educators are evaluated. The scope and pace of change is unprecedented, and we're blessed to start from a position of strength.

Despite nation-leading graduation rates, nearly 6,000 Wisconsin students drop out every year. Graduation gaps are unacceptable when Hispanic and American Indian students drop out at a rate of one in four, and African American students at a rate of one in three. Wide gaps persist for students with disabilities, English learners, and students in poverty. High school dropouts earn far less and are far more likely to be unemployed. For their futures and ours, Wisconsin must fight to make Every Child a Graduate.

We've got more to do to provide every Wisconsin child a pathway to a family-supporting career. Too many high school and college graduates struggle to find good jobs, while too many Wisconsin employers struggle to find skilled workers.

One of the surest pathways to the middle class in Wisconsin is career and technical education or CTE. Forecasts show that job openings in manufacturing, health care, IT, and service industries will continue to grow. But statewide, our relative share of investment in CTE has decreased 40 percent in 20 years. Since 2004, districts have cut 20 percent of their CTE workforce, with 50 percent of those cuts in the past two years alone. Revenue caps and state budget cuts have consequences.

Each February, since I have been state superintendent, I have visited robust CTE programs, and have always been energized by what I saw.

Thanks to programs like these, Wisconsin's CTE students graduate at a rate of over 95 percent.

That's why I'm working with business, union and education leaders across the state to reinvigorate CTE and create personalized academic and career plans for every student. 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.

Working together, we are engaged in efforts that will improve student learning through our Agenda 2017.

- We are implementing the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics in every school in our state.
- We are expanding opportunities for students to earn college credit and employment skills while in high school through partnerships with UW Colleges and our technical colleges.
- We are on the road to improving elementary reading performance with a new statewide kindergarten screener and improved educator preparation.
- We are developing and piloting a new, fair and robust educator evaluation system in partnership with WASB and WASDA as well as educators.
- We have kicked the broken No Child Left Behind law to the curb with a new federal waiver creating a school accountability system that includes student growth and multiple measures of college and career readiness. I believe we will soon extend this accountability system to the private schools receiving publically funded vouchers.
- We have also kicked the math and reading portions of the WKCE to the curb. In grades three through eight, we will have an online, adaptive test providing meaningful, timely data to students, parents, and teachers.
- And in high school, in the state budget we are asking to fund the ACT for all Juniors, along with the preparatory tests EXPLORE and PLAN, and the job readiness assessment, WorkKeys.

As I go around the state talking about Agenda 2017, I hear story after story about schools that are struggling to keep afloat financially.

We've all heard the claims that the past cuts did no harm or somehow even helped. I am here to tell you that is not the case. Your official staffing reports showed that school districts around the state cut nearly 2,400 staff last year, and nearly 75 percent of districts cut teachers. Fewer CTE teachers to prepare Wisconsin's workforce, fewer reading teachers to intervene early, fewer counselors to connect kids with colleges or apprenticeship programs, fewer library-media specialists to facilitate digital learning – these cuts are real, and they are taking a toll.

We can't keep expecting districts to balance their budgets on the backs of kids and working families. We can't keep viewing education as an expense that must face the chopping block each year when the going gets rough. We must reinvest in public education in the next state budget. No one in Wisconsin knows this better than you.

Let's look at the last ten years – for all of us inflation has increased by almost 25 percent in total or around 2.5 percent a year on average. State school aids are up a total of 4.6 percent over that same ten year span – that works out to an average of half a percent increase each year.

The last four years are even worse; state schools aids are down 9 percent. The cost for everything has risen, as state funding is down \$500 million since its peak in the 2008-09 school year.

This is unsustainable. Unsustainable.

My biennial budget request calls for

- reinvesting in our public schools,
- fixing our school finance system, and
- protecting property taxpayers.

The Fair Funding for Our Future plan, endorsed by WASB, WASDA, and a number of local school boards across our state, is a realistic and ready first step that provides solutions that are good for education and our economic future. Our state leaders can make Wisconsin's school funding formula more fair, sustainable, and transparent by passing the Fair Funding plan in this year's budget. Please go to our website where we have listed every district's share of the Fair Funding plan.

Let's talk some of the specifics. My biennial budget request:

- Calls for an increase in the per pupil revenue limit of \$225 in the first year and \$230 in 2014-15. This restores revenue limit authority to all school districts.
- Calls for an increase in general and categorical school aids by 2.4 percent in the first year and 5.5 percent in 2014-15. Almost all school districts, over 400, will see increased state aid, and the remaining few will have the same amount as now. The overall net state impact on property taxes is zero.

For categorical aids, my biennial budget calls for an increase of almost \$50 million. It targets resources so every child has an opportunity to graduate college and career ready. Specifically, I am calling for some new categorical aid programs that:

- Will increase graduation rates through competitive grants to school districts with the highest dropout rates and lowest graduation rates.
- Will help rural schools by paying more transportation costs and fully funding sparsity aid.
- Will fund all schools educating students learning English.
- Will make a serious commitment of state resources to get our new evaluation system right. We need everyone to understand that creating a fair and valid teacher and principal evaluation system will take time and resources.
- Will provide resources to struggling schools identified by school report cards.

My budget proposal also:

- Invests in technology to support personalized and blended learning, and make every Wisconsin teacher, parent, administrator, and policymaker able to monitor progress at the click of a button.
- And, increases funding for special education aid and small class sizes through the SAGE program.

I know the value of a Wisconsin public education because it's the gift I was given. It helped launch my children's lives and now my grandchildren. 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.

As an educator, I've been answering the bell for 36 years now, and I'm well aware of the challenges we face. Yet, I continue to be a glass half-full person. I think this is a common trait in those of us who devote our lives to working with children.

So, I am jazzed about the future. I hope you are too. This school year, and the next few to come, will bring many important, exciting and positive changes to Wisconsin schools. We've got much to be proud of, and a lot yet to do.

As your state superintendent, I will drive our agenda forward and advocate for all those who dedicate their lives to public education and most of all, for our kids — for all Wisconsin's children.

Join me in standing up for our kids, our public schools, and all the parents, educators, staff, board members, and leaders who work daily to build a more prosperous future for Wisconsin.

Thank you. God bless Wisconsin and God bless our children.

Thank you again, everyone. Before I go, I have to say again how impressed I am with the way our school districts are managing the many changes that are happening in the world of education. I know it can be difficult to keep up to speed — I was in your shoes before. I also want you to know that all of our efforts in Wisconsin are not going unnoticed at the federal level. In fact, we are now going to take a few moments to watch a video message from U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan. He has provided this specifically for this conference. Let's listen to his message now.

###

Tony Evers is Wisconsin's elected 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://news.dpi.wi.gov/eis_vm-media. This speech is available on the DPI website at http://news.dpi.wi.gov/files/eis/pdf/dpinr2013_14.pdf.