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Evers optimistic as he begins second term as state superintendent

MADISON — State Superintendent Tony Evers shared his optimism for the future of public education as he took the oath of office Monday to begin his second four-year term as state superintendent of public instruction.

“Despite the great battles that are being waged in this state over the future direction of education, I still believe that we, as Wisconsinites, can come together in the pursuit of innovation and excellence,” he said.

Evers noted that local schools and libraries are sources of pride in villages, towns, and cities across Wisconsin, that the state is among leaders in the nation on graduation rates and ACT scores and is the “Best in the Midwest” in Advanced Placement course results. And, though Wisconsin faces challenges, especially disparities in graduation rates for African American, American Indian, and Hispanic students as well as for students with disabilities, English learners, and students in poverty, Evers said he still believes “that citizens across this state want to work together ... That Wisconsinites remain committed to ensuring that every child, no matter where they live or how much money their parents make, can graduate from high school prepared for that next step — whether it’s directly into a career, college, or the military.”

He shared stories of his school visits to Riverside Elementary School in Menomonee Falls, Washington Elementary School in Merrill, Eleva-Strum High School, Vincent High School in Milwaukee, and Gilmore Middle School in Racine where he saw innovation and excellence in action. In each school, students were fully engaged in their learning and elements of his 2017 Every Child a Graduate Agenda were evident.

Agenda 2017 sets aggressive but achievable goals and lays out a plan to meet them. Through improved standards and instruction, assessments and data systems, school and educator accountability, and school finance reform, Wisconsin will increase graduation rates, close gaps, and increase college and career readiness. Evers noted that already Wisconsin has rigorous standards for English language arts and mathematics, benchmarked to the highest performing states and countries. The state is developing next generation assessments tied to new standards that will provide students, parents, and teachers the timely feedback they need to improve learning. Additionally,

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Wisconsin implemented a new statewide kindergarten reading screener to improve elementary reading performance and adopted the ACT suite to measure student progress throughout high school.

“We’ve not only raised expectations for our kids, but for our educators and schools, as well,” Evers said. “We’ve created a new, fair and robust educator evaluation system in partnership with teachers, administrators, and school boards that we are piloting this year. For schools, we have kicked the broken No Child Left Behind law to the curb, creating a school accountability system that was homegrown by a multitude of partners here in Wisconsin.”

Evers warned that “Public education in Wisconsin cannot be strong without strong teachers. In this time of great change, we need our educators invested and involved. He commended Leah Luke, a former Teacher of the Year and an English and Spanish teacher from Mauston High School, for standing up during this tumultuous time and reminding us of our values and the importance of teaching to our future. Luke served as master of ceremonies for the inaugural event at La Follette High School in Madison.

“We must once again find a way to value and honor public service, especially teaching,” Evers said “Teachers chose this profession, like Leah did, like I did, because they love kids, they want to inspire a love of learning, they want to change lives. Let’s turn the corner on this, and get back to a time when teachers are valued and respected for the contributions they make to our children, and our state,” he said.

Evers predicted that this school year, and the next few to come, will bring many important, exciting, and positive changes to Wisconsin schools. “It’s both an exciting time and a challenging time for public education. We’re changing what children learn, how they’re taught and tested, and how schools and educators are evaluated. Our schools are investing in innovation and pursuing excellence at an unprecedented pace. And, while the scope and pace of change can sometimes seem overwhelming, we absolutely need to stay the course. For our kids and for their futures, it’s the right thing to do.”

Evers pledged to stand up for kids, schools, and all the parents, educators, staff, board members, and leaders who work daily to build a more prosperous future for Wisconsin. “As your state superintendent, I will drive our agenda forward and advocate for our kids — for all of Wisconsin’s children.”

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NOTE: This news release is available electronically at http://news.dpi.wi.gov/files/eis/pdf/dpinr2013_87.pdf. The complete text of the state superintendent’s inaugural address is available at <http://news.dpi.wi.gov/newsroom>.