

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Celebrating Wisconsin's educators

*Not all heroes wear capes, but all educators are heroes*

Growing up, heroes were superhumans who could fly or bust through the walls of buildings with their special powers. They lived in comic books and on the big screen, and they rescued children from burning buildings or other life-threatening peril. These actions are heroic, but most of them live in the fiction section of the library or the movies. There is another group of heroes who too often go underappreciated. Teachers, school secretaries, special education assistants – all our school staff – improve, change, enrich, and save lives. Even without the soaring soundtrack and special effects.

I still remember the first teacher I ever had who really saw me for who I was, and for the learner I could become. It was Mr. Holmberg, my high school choir teacher. I enrolled in 10th grade girls choir because my best friend pressured me to do it. I was shy. I didn't want to sing in front of others. Mr. Holmberg recognized something special in me, gave me small solos at first, then had me accompany the choir while he directed. He nurtured my love of music and singing, built up my confidence, and made me feel like I could do anything. He was one of the reasons I wanted to become a teacher; I wanted to build up the confidence in others and help our children discover their passions.

When I talk to my fellow educators here at DPI, I hear stories of their transformative teachers and the transformative teachers they see in their children's schools and schools across our state. One staff member is thankful for the teacher at her son's school who walked him into the building every day to help him transition into the in-person school year; she wasn't his classroom teacher, but this teacher knew that all kids are our kids and reached out to help a student she saw struggling. Another member of our team is thankful for his daughter's elementary school teacher who took the time to recognize her for her patience with her classmates; it meant so much to him as a parent to know this teacher wanted to honor his child's kindness. One of our managers remembers her high school social studies teacher who believed in her worth

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long before she did; she will never forget when this teacher took her aside, expressed his concern for her health, and encouraged this student to get help for her eating disorder.

This is the tip of the iceberg – the heroes we overlook helping learners in our schools runs even deeper. The custodian who works with the school social worker to make sure students without stable housing have a place to store their belongings. The school secretary whose smile and greeting make all families feel welcome. The school nutrition worker who checks in with the students sitting alone in the cafeteria and helps them find new friends to sit with. These are the stories of Wisconsin’s educators, and I invite you to join me in thanking them for their heroic work. Throughout this week, we will be posting stories, shoutouts, and thank you messages to Wisconsin educators using the hashtag #WIAEWSHoutOut on our social media, and I encourage you to do the same. Recognize a teacher from your childhood. Honor a school staff member working at your child’s school. If you’re an educator, thank a colleague. There are so many inspiring stories to share.

So let me start this American Education Week with a thank you. Thank you to my incredible team at the Department of Public Instruction. Your work makes a difference every single day in Wisconsin’s schools and libraries, and I am so thankful for your commitment to our students and educators. You, and all our school staff, may not wear capes nor appear in movie blockbusters, but you are all definitely heroes.

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**NOTE:** A headshot for publication of State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly is available at [https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/news/Jill\\_Underly.jpg](https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/news/Jill_Underly.jpg). This guest editorial is available electronically at <https://dpi.wi.gov/news/releases/2021/celebrating-wisconsins-educators>.