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Contact: DPI Media Line, (608) 266-3559, [media.inquiries@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:media.inquiries@dpi.wi.gov)

## Our future and the function of education

*An editorial for publication by State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly on making a difference in 2022*

In 1947, an article titled “The Purpose of Education” appeared in the Morehouse College campus newspaper. In it, the author argued that “education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from fiction.” He boiled it down to a direct truth: “The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically.” The article was written by a student. He was barely 18 years old, and his name was Martin Luther King, Jr.

It’s been 75 years since that article was published in The Maroon Tiger student newspaper, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s words ring just as true today. Intensive critical thinking is the foundation of public education because it is the cornerstone of democracy. That is why investment in our schools and our children is also investment in the civic life of our state and our nation. It may be trite to say that the children are our future, but it’s only repeated so often because it’s true, and our future deserves to be a bright one.

I think that might be where we get lost sometimes when we talk about investment and the future. We talk about our children’s future as if it is far off in the distance, and as if it is not ours as well. But our collective future starts tomorrow, and the question is: what will you do today? What will you do to make our schools and students stronger? When you look back at 2022, how will you have made a difference for public education? We all have a role to play. What will your role be?

Me, I will follow the teachings of a young student from Morehouse College. I will look at the evidence to see what works, like high quality early childhood education, and then I will advocate for those investments. I will discern the true from the false, like lifting up the true expertise of Wisconsin’s educators in a time of great uncertainty and doubt. I will separate the real from the unreal, like prioritizing the all-too-real mental health needs of our students and staff over the manufactured outrage against COVID-19 mitigation measures. And I will provide the facts to counter the fiction, like speaking out for equitable and consistent school funding despite the fictional narrative that districts can meet their needs with one-time federal money. And by doing all of this, I will continue to put kids first. What’s best for our children is what’s

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best for Wisconsin, and what's best for our children includes access to early childhood education, respected teachers, mental health support, and robust and reliable funding.

This is how I will serve the function of education, as described by Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1947 – by thinking intensively and critically about the challenges we have before us and the opportunities we can create in 2022. Please join me in this endeavor.

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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/2022/our-future-and-function-education>.