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Excerpts from State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly's 2022 State of Education Address

MADISON – State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly today will deliver the 2022 State of Education Address at the Wisconsin State Capitol.

In her remarks, Dr. Underly will provide an update to the people of Wisconsin on K-12 education in the state and will speak to the opportunities and challenges currently facing students, educators, and families. The 2022 State of the Education Address will begin at noon and can be livestreamed on Wisconsin Eye at WisEye.org/live. Below are several excerpts from Dr. Underly's speech, as prepared for delivery:

On the need for increased investment in public education...

"We need robust, ongoing, reliable funding for our public schools and libraries across Wisconsin. Without increased funding, schools and libraries cannot meet the needs of kids – or of all of us.

"Investing like this in our schools isn't new. The reason our schools are as strong and, yes, resilient as they are today is thanks to meaningful investment decades ago – investment that continues to have an impact today. And today, we need to make meaningful investment again so that, decades down the line, some future state superintendent can say the same – that the state of public education in Wisconsin is strong then because we had the foresight and willpower to make impactful investments today.

"The austerity this (and previous) legislatures have insisted on for our schools is starving our public education system. Our schools and children deserve investment. We deserve investment. Because investing in public schools is an investment in us, too."

On addressing the achievement gap...

"For every single student to succeed, it is our constitutional and community responsibility to eliminate the achievement gap. But we cannot call it that – we cannot call it an achievement gap, because a gap in

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outcomes is caused by a gap in inputs. And we can do something about the inputs, it's just that historically we have chosen not to, or at least, chosen not to do enough.

“Understanding the achievement gap instead as a representation gap, or an engagement gap, means that there are clear action steps we can take to address it. It's a powerful reframing, because it puts the ball back in our court; instead of blaming the student because of their learning challenges, or their family because their parents are working multiple jobs to get by, or their school district or teachers who are under-resourced – instead of placing blame about their achievement, we can make important choices about curriculum that can make a difference.”

On creating safe learning environments...

“When we talk about the inputs, the conditions that create disparities, we must also address the belonging gap – and that means creating a safe learning environment. At its most basic, a classroom must be safe; students must be safe. And that means creating an affirming and welcoming community, because building such a community in classrooms and schools results in emotional safety; the bare minimum requirement for the education of every single student in this state. When we have welcoming and affirming schools and classrooms, it creates belonging. Belonging creates community. Community creates young people who are engaged in the civic life of our state. And civic engagement creates a strong, healthy democracy.”

On ensuring a strong democracy...

“Schools can be – and must be – the foundation of our democracy. I want my students – all Wisconsin students – to grow up to be active participants in the civic life of our state. To be future active participants in democracy, they need that strong foundation. They need to know how to examine our past. They need to know how to think critically about our present. They need to make informed decisions about their future – our future.

“And we, as current active participants in democracy, must do the same: look at our history, think critically, and make well-informed and productive decisions. The history of public schools in Wisconsin is one of innovation and meaningful and sustained investment. We do not see that investment today. We must think critically about how that is impacting our children and our state, and we must make a different decision. And all of that means that the state of education in Wisconsin, and the future of our democracy, stands on the shoulders of students who must be safe and nurtured, and who engage in challenging curriculum. Because nurturing, challenging classrooms make it possible to learn and act on critical thinking.”

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