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

With great hope: In celebration of public schools

*An editorial celebrating Public Schools Week by Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Executive Director of Equity and Inclusion Demetri Beekman*

Public schools and the teachers, administrators and school staff who dedicate their lives to education leave a lasting impact on our children. As a former teacher and administrator and current state leader, my experience in public schools helped guide me and the work that I continue to do to this day.

One of my favorite memories came one early Monday morning towards the end of the school year, and I was standing at the front door welcoming kids as they rushed by. I called out to one particular kid.

“Hey there! How was your birthday? Do anything to celebrate?”

“Huh? What do you mean, Mr. B?”

“Wasn’t it your birthday this Saturday?”

He looked surprised and said, “I forgot, Mr. B! My birthday was Saturday, and nobody remembered except you!” Then he kept walking down the hall...with a huge smile.

Those are the moments I live for as an educator. The moments of connection. The moments of celebration. The moments that say, “I see you, I hear you, I believe in you.” Because I know those moments build a culture of inclusion, inclusion creates a community of opportunity, and opportunity makes it possible for our students to find their purpose and realize their hopes and dreams.

Public schools are for everyone because they are where hopes and dreams come alive, where educators connect with every learner, where everyone feels safe and where students and educators alike can learn about and with people who are different from themselves. All of that sounds rather serious and very important, and it is, but public schools are also places of laughter and joy; if you can’t laugh with kids, then you are missing out on some great learning opportunities. Let me tell you, the day there was toilet paper stuck to my shoe was a day of a lot of learning! And no, I’m not joking. Laughter is an act of vulnerability, of

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sharing joy and believing others will want to share in it, too, and doing it in community with our kids helps empower their voices, their hopes and dreams, and their learning.

As an education leader, I've always believed that I must lead in service to our children and our families. When we hosted open house before the start of the school year, my colleagues and I served the food and always ate last. We wanted families to receive our food and also to receive our message that we were here to serve them and their children, to provide them all they needed to succeed and find their purpose – to live their hopes and dreams. Because that is what public schools can do.

Years before becoming president, Barack Obama spoke these words: “Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. The audacity of hope! In the end, that is God’s greatest gift to us, the bedrock of this nation. A belief in things not seen. A belief that there are better days ahead.” Hope is also the bedrock of public education. It is a great teacher’s greatest gift to their students – a belief in their future and the tools to discover it. Public education is hopeful, it is audacious, it is for everyone, and it deserves to be celebrated every day, just like our students.

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NOTE: The week of Feb. 27 to March 3, 2023, is Public Schools Week. An official proclamation by State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly [can be found on the Wisconsin DPI’s website](#), and a proclamation by Gov. Tony Evers can be found [on the governor’s website](#). A headshot for publication of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Director of Equity and Inclusion Demetri Beekman is available upon request. This guest editorial is available online [on the Wisconsin DPI’s website](#).