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

State superintendent proposes \$42 million to support early literacy initiatives

Dr. Jill Underly highlights budget proposal during elementary school visit in Appleton

APPLETON— State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly today announced a budget proposal that will provide sustainable funding to school districts as they work to support developing readers and implement mandated early literacy initiatives in the biennium, even as the legislature continues to hold back \$50 million promised to school districts in the current year.

Under Dr. Underly's proposal, the state would increase help implement early literacy coaching programs, fund intensive summer reading programs, and invest in community-based early literacy supports including high-dosage tutoring programs. Video of Wednesday's news conference, where Dr. Underly announced the proposal, [can be found on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's Facebook page](#).

[2023 Wisconsin Act 20](#), implemented in public schools across the state this school year, aims to increase literacy rates among students by using science-based early literacy instruction. To date, [the Joint Committee on Finance has refused](#) to release the nearly \$50 million the legislature passed, which was intended to support districts in implementing this requirement starting this year.

"As so many of our educators work day in and day out to implement this science-based, data-driven approach to teaching literacy, the Joint Committee on Finance is sitting on funding intended to help improve outcomes," Dr. Underly said. "The early literacy priorities included in my budget proposal are needed to build on this year's funding for Act 20 – which we still need. We go even further to support our districts in helping our kids learn to read, so they can read to learn. By providing our school districts resources like coaches and student tutoring programs, we make sure our next generation of leaders have access to the things they need to succeed. We need the legislature to step up now, and again during the development of next year's budget."

(more)

The proposal, part of Dr. Underly's 2025-27 Biennial Budget Request, was highlighted during a visit to Highlands Elementary School in the Appleton Area School District. During the visit, Dr. Underly and DPI Office of Literacy Director Dr. Barb Novak joined school and district staff in observing early literacy instruction in kindergarten classrooms.

Dr. Underly's early literacy budget proposal will:

- Increase the number of literacy coaches from the required 64 under Act 20 to 100. These coaches help schools build capacity to teach reading in kindergarten through third grade using science-based early reading instruction (\$22 million over the biennium).
- Provide grant funding to community-based organizations (including tutoring programs) to help strengthen early literacy outcomes, boost confidence, and help build critical learning skills (\$10 million over the biennium).
- Develop strong readers by funding additional staffing and resources for local school districts necessary for intensive reading programs, which are required under Act 20, for students who exit third grade and have not completed a personal reading plan and met expectations on the reading portion of the Wisconsin Forward Exam (\$5 million over the biennium).

The DPI's budget request, to be released in full in November, will propose additional significant investments in K-12 public education. On Tuesday, Dr. Underly announced [a budget proposal investing nearly \\$60 million](#) to help school districts resolve staffing challenges and retain teachers. Last week, Dr. Underly announced [a \\$311 million proposal for school nutrition](#) and [a \\$304 million proposal to support Wisconsin youth mental health](#).

For more information on the DPI's early literacy work, [visit its website](#).

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