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State superintendent proposes clean drinking water program, highlights budget proposal during Superior school visit

Dr. Jill Underly's budget request includes holding down property taxes, significant increases to special education reimbursement and general aids, universal school meals at no cost, and other provisions

SUPERIOR – State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly today proposed creating a new grant program that provides grant funding to Wisconsin schools for the purpose of upgrading water fountains to control for lead and other contaminants. Dr. Underly's announcement came during a news conference at Cooper Elementary school, in which she visited with students and staff and explained how her budget proposals will support them.

As part of Dr. Underly's 2025-27 Biennial Budget request, \$2.5 million would be provided over the biennium via a grant program that supports schools in modernizing water fountains and ensures students have access to clean drinking water.

"It is critical that Wisconsin kids have access to clean drinking water, and schools are a big part of that," Dr. Underly said. "Funding provided through my budget meets that need and allows schools to have the latest drinking water equipment available to their students. The proposals included in my budget request put Wisconsin kids first. By investing in things like expanding access to healthy meals at no cost to families, increasing school mental health services, supporting districts in retaining high-quality teachers, and improving early literacy outcomes, we are moving Wisconsin forward."

On Monday, [Dr. Underly proposed significant new investments](#) to hold down property tax increases and help meet the needs of local schools, students, and educators. Her proposal includes increasing the state reimbursement rate for special education services to 90 percent by Fiscal Year 2027, making per-pupil adjustments to revenue limits and indexing those revenue limits to inflation for the first time in 15 years, and expanding the per-pupil categorical aid program.

"The way that we, as a state, fund public education has left schools and districts in perilous financial positions for years," Dr. Underly said. "The time is past due to invest in our schools, especially in this

(more)

moment. The need is there, and we can hold down property taxes, support our kids, and provide sustainable funding to Wisconsin public schools."

The DPI's overall budget request, to be released in full later this month, will propose new, significant investments in K-12 public education. Earlier this week, [Dr. Underly held a youth mental health roundtable](#) at Wausau East High School where she listened to students on their current mental health needs and explained how her [\\$304 million budget proposal](#) invests in additional resources and services.

In October, Dr. Underly [announced a budget proposal investing nearly \\$60 million](#) to help school districts resolve staffing challenges and retain teachers and [another \\$42 million proposal](#) that supports the development of readers and schools in implementing mandated early literacy initiatives. Dr. Underly also recently [announced a \\$311 million proposal for school nutrition](#) that provides universal meals to Wisconsin students at no cost to families.

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