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

State superintendent welcomes Secretary Cardona to Wisconsin, joins state, local leaders in kicking off new school year

Dr. Underly visits public schools across state

MADISON – State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly over the last two weeks kicked off the 2024-25 school year by visiting with students and staff at public schools around the state. She also joined U.S. Department of Education Secretary Miguel Cardona and other leaders this week in learning about the needs of Wisconsin's students, educators, and schools.

“The start of a new school year always brings so much excitement, joy and optimism, and serves as a reminder for the critical role our public schools have within our communities,” Dr. Underly said. “Our public schools are for everyone – they accept all students and provide endless opportunities for growth, learning and achievement – and our educators are a key in ensuring the individual needs of students are being met.

“It was my honor to join Secretary Cardona and so many others on welcoming communities back to school this week. I am so appreciative of the incredible work of our teachers and support staff and wish them the best on a new school year.”

On Tuesday, Dr. Underly joined other leaders from around the state in welcoming students and staff at Milwaukee Public Schools' South Division High School back for the new school year. Following a red-carpet welcome, [Dr. Underly](#), [Sen. Tammy Baldwin](#) and others attended a student-led tour of the school, learning about innovative programming, spaces and opportunities available for students at the state's largest bilingual high school. Additional photos from the visit can be found [on Dr. Underly's official Facebook page](#). Later in the day, Dr. Underly joined Secretary Cardona and staff at Wisconsin Heights Middle/High School in Mazomanie, where the GROW Cooperative was highlighted. The unique partnership includes four South Central Wisconsin school districts (School District of Cambridge, School District of Lodi, Sauk Prairie School District and Wisconsin Heights School District) and has a goal of attracting teacher candidates to the teaching profession. Photos from the roundtable visit can be found [here on Dr. Underly's Facebook page](#).

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“These visits provided another opportunity to see and hear firsthand how public schools are dealing with a lack of funding from the state,” Dr. Underly said. “The needs of our public schools continue to grow, and more and more school districts are making the difficult decision to go to referendum. It is essential the state upholds its responsibility in appropriately funding our public schools so they can continue making a positive difference in the lives of our students. The Department of Public Instruction can advocate and propose funding in a budget, but it is only our legislature that can deliver on that promise to our kids.”

On Wednesday, Dr. Underly joined Secretary Cardona, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Mandy Cohen, White House Domestic Policy Advisor Neera Tanden, U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore and many other community leaders in discussing academic recovery during a roundtable event at United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County in Milwaukee. Photos from the roundtable event [can be found here on Dr. Underly’s page](#).

On Thursday, Dr. Underly visited Verona Area High School and joined staff in a student-led tour of the school. During the tour, [2022 Wisconsin Teacher of the Year Kabby Hong](#), an English teacher at the school, met with Dr. Underly and encouraged his class to express their needs and ideas for making the public education system better for students. Students expressed wanting a more flexible school schedule and improved mental health resources and services. Photos from the visit can be found [here on Dr. Underly’s Facebook page](#). During the afternoon, Dr. Underly visited Vel Phillips Memorial High School and Robert M. La Follette High School in the Madison Metropolitan School District. During the two visits, school leadership showcased completed school renovations that enhance offerings and opportunities available to students. Photos from this visit [can be found here on MMSD’s Facebook page](#).

Last week, Dr. Underly visited Doty Elementary School in the Green Bay Area School District and Banta Elementary School in the Menasha Joint School District. During the Doty Elementary visit, she learned from students and staff about the ongoing early literacy programming and toured the school to view proposed facility improvements. Photos from this visit [can be found here on Dr. Underly’s Facebook page](#). At Banta Elementary, Dr. Underly engaged with students and staff as they highlighted the bilingual education programming the school offers to students. Dr. Underly ended the week with a visit to Fennimore Community Schools, where she learned about the career and technical education programming that helps set students up for success after high school. Photos from this visit [can be found here on Dr. Underly’s Facebook page](#).

To kick off the new school year, [Dr. Underly also recently published a guest editorial](#) on improving student belonging and improving youth mental health.

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NOTE: This news release [is available online on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction’s website](#).