

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DPI-NR 2024-85

Thursday, Sept. 26, 2024

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

State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly to deliver 2024 State of Education Address, renew call for investment in public education

Speech to include call for supporting all students; excerpts included below

MADISON – State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly today will deliver the 2024 State of Education Address at the Wisconsin State Capitol.

In her remarks, Dr. Underly will renew her call for increased investment in public education, including a doubling of state reimbursement of special education costs to local districts, as well as an increase in per-pupil aid. She also will emphasize that all students are served by public education and speak to the importance of ensuring all youth feel they belong at their school.

Dr. Underly’s fourth State of Education Address will provide an update to the people of Wisconsin on K-12 education in the state, specifically tackling opportunities and challenges currently facing students, educators, families, public schools, and public libraries. The 2024 State of the Education Address will begin at noon [and can be livestreamed on Wisconsin Eye](#). Below are several excerpts from Dr. Underly’s speech, as prepared for delivery:

On increasing the special education reimbursement rate...

“Right now, our districts receive reimbursement from the state for only about one-third of the cost of special education services. This is not nearly enough. And it means many districts continue to struggle to afford to provide services and retain staff. As a state, we need help districts afford the cost of special education services. These services are legally mandated. It’s the right thing to do, and all our students benefit when special education needs are met. **The time is now to build a bipartisan majority. The state must fund special education at least to 60 percent.**”

(more)

On increasing investment in youth mental health services and resources...

“The DPI’s next biennial budget request will again ask that we fully fund mental health aid for our students. We know what works, so let’s fund it. Help us build momentum by letting your legislators know this is a top priority for you. **When we talk about supporting our students, we can all agree that every kid deserves to have adults who care for them, believe in them, who see them, and who listen.** Now, that may be a parent or a caregiver. But for many kids, it may only be a trusted adult at school.”

On the need for improving student belonging in schools...

“The value of belonging is a powerful litmus test. If policies and initiatives create and foster belonging, they’re more likely to be successful. If they create isolation, if they silence participation, they are more likely to alienate and be ineffective. So, it’s not lip service when I say that we must make sure that every Wisconsin child feels like they belong and has the support they need to thrive in our public schools.

“Belonging is the bedrock of our schools, our communities, our workplaces, and our democracy. We are at our best when everyone feels like they belong, and that our collective future belongs to us.”

On investing in public education...

“The state has a massive budget surplus. And school districts are telling us they need more resources. Most public-school districts have gone... are going... or will be forced to go to referendum just to make ends meet. Rebuilding Wisconsin’s strong, high-quality public education system requires that we adequately and equitably fund our public schools. So today, I am calling on the state legislature to increase revenue limits and sustainably fund our public schools. They can do this while still keeping property taxes flat.”

On the legislature releasing funding intended to help implement early literacy initiatives (NOTE: [The legislature is withholding \\$49.7 in appropriated funds to support early literacy under Act 20](#))...

“Our educators are doing their part in the classrooms, yet the Joint Committee on Finance once again left this critical funding off its agenda. Our kids deserve better.

“I want to state firmly, and with no malice, on behalf of the state’s children and educators: State legislators: Release the funding. **Release the funding so our schools -- your schools and your constituents’ schools -- can do the work they need to do. You say you care about literacy when the**

spotlight is on you, but you continue to obstruct the release of this critical funding. People across the state see that inconsistency. Let's get that funding released so that we can fulfill the promises we all made to help our kids read."

On fixing Wisconsin's educator workforce challenges, in the wake of data showing teachers continue to leave the field at unsustainable rates...

"If we want to keep our teachers – the ones who make such a huge impact on the lives of our kids – we need to pay them for the important work they do. Pay them. This is a no-brainer. You know that old saying, 'You can't pour from an empty glass'? Well, that's what we've been asking our teachers and our schools to do.

"Teachers are one of Wisconsin's most important resources. We shouldn't take their work, their service, and professionalism for granted. We cannot continue on this path and still expect quality educational outcomes for our kids."

On supporting student nutrition and growing opportunities....

"It's about priorities. Our kids. Our schools. Our libraries. They are our priority. So, let's talk about how we can invest in our future. Let's talk about how we can make sure our kids are their best selves when they are at school and have what they need to learn.

"We need to invest in nutrition programs by providing free breakfast and lunch for all students, as Rachel reminded us all here this afternoon. We can and should expand our farm-to-school programs, allowing our local farmers to help feed their local kids. We can and should expand Career and Technical Education options so our kids can gain valuable skills in a variety of careers prior to graduating."

###