

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DPI-NR 2024-87

Friday, Sept. 27, 2024

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## ICYMI: State superintendent stresses importance of student belonging, investing in schools during State of Education Address

*Dr. Jill Underly delivered fourth State of Education Address on Thursday*

MADISON — Joined by Wisconsin students, educators, administrators and community members, State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly renewed her call for increased investment in public education and providing additional supports for Wisconsin students and teachers during the 2024 State of Education Address on Thursday.

Speaking to an audience filling the Rotunda at the Wisconsin State Capitol, Dr. Underly called for doubling the reimbursement rate for special education costs to local school districts and increasing per-pupil aid.

“As a state, we need help districts afford the cost of special education services,” Dr. Underly said. “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.”

Dr. Underly also focused on strategies for improving student belonging in schools and increasing funding for youth mental health as students reported struggling with various mental health challenges [in data recently released by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#).

“The DPI’s next biennial budget request will again ask that we fully fund mental health aid for our students,” Dr. Underly said. “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.”

As the Wisconsin State Legislature’s Joint Committee on Finance continues [to withhold nearly \\$50 million in appropriated funds to support early literacy initiatives](#), Dr. Underly spoke to the importance of improving educational outcomes in literacy and supporting school districts as they implement the requirements of Act 20.

(more)

“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,” Dr. Underly said. “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, your constituents’ schools - can do the work they need to do.”

Dr. Underly’s remarks also centered around the dedication those who work in schools have to Wisconsin students, and stressed the need to support them for the critical work they do each day. [Data released from the DPI earlier this year](#) showed the state’s education workforce is in crisis, with about four out of every 10 first-year teachers leaving the state or the profession altogether after just six years.

“Educators, staff, aides, principals - they create the web of care and support for our kids,” Dr. Underly said. “So, when we talk about belonging, we must also talk about valuing our educators so that they, too, feel like they belong. 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.”

The full State of Education ceremony featured music and poetry from Wisconsin public school students, a recognition ceremony honoring [the 2025 Wisconsin Teachers of the Year](#), and remarks from Rachel Sauvola, an agriscience teacher at New Richmond High School and a 2025 Wisconsin Teacher of the Year, on how she ensures no children in her school community go hungry.

Video of Dr. Underly’s State of Education Address [can be found on Wisconsin Eye](#). A full, text version of Dr. Underly’s remarks, as prepared for delivery, [can be found on the DPI’s website](#).

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