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Our kids need real solutions

A statement from State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly

MADISON – State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly issued the following statement regarding the bills before the Assembly Committee on Education today.

“Our schools – and our kids – need so much right now. They need real solutions to real problems. These bills are decidedly not that, and the fact that the authors of these bills seem to believe that their bills are, in fact, what our schools and students need is yet one more illustration of how out of touch they are with the reality on the ground.

“Our schools are facing major challenges, many of which existed long before COVID-19, but which have been exacerbated by the pandemic to the point of crisis. We need solutions to these challenges, not distractions that will only cause more problems. Schools without enough staff cannot meet the needs of kids. Schools without reliable, ongoing funding cannot meet the needs of kids. The legislature has done nothing to meet these needs. They could, but they choose not to. Instead, the legislature is proposing bills that will do nothing to help our public schools. They are proposing bills that are intended to divide us, to pit parents against teachers, and parents in rural communities against parents in suburban communities. They are using our kids in this sick game to win favor in an election year, plain and simple.

“Wisconsin has a state revenue surplus of \$5.6 billion. If the legislature wanted to effectively meet students’ needs, or to invest in the future of our state and our democracy, they could use even a fraction of the budget surplus to meet those needs by investing in our schools. How about giving our schools enough to meet salaries in the next school year? Instead, they will continue to hoard the budget surplus because they don’t want anything that is not their own to get any kind of win. They have the financial means to help our public schools, but they are deliberately choosing not to. So instead of helping, they want to fast-track these distracting and overtly political bills, bills that stand to cause real harm to real schools and real children.

(more)

“And while we’re on the topic of meeting students’ needs, I want to talk for a moment about family engagement. Parents, caregivers, and families already meaningfully engage with their schools, and teachers already meaningfully engage with their students’ families. I know it’s the time of year for parent-teacher conferences, and conferences are the perfect example of authentic family engagement. Engagement that has actually grown stronger during the pandemic with virtual conference options making them more accessible for some families. What a gift, for teachers to have the opportunity to learn from parents and caregivers, and for families to learn from teachers. Because what they have in common – the children – is what is most important, and that two-way communication is so valuable. These are the kinds of solutions already at work in our schools.

“Our schools and our kids need more solutions, not more problems. I urge the members of the committee to reject these bills and instead focus on delivering real solutions. I also encourage our parents, our community members, and all champions of public schools to tell these legislators to call off this strategy of divide and conquer, and quit using our kids as pawns in their election year antics. We’re tired of legislators underfunding and defunding education like it’s some sort of game. We’re talking about our children and our state’s future, not a chess board.”

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