

State of Education Address Excerpts

September 21, 2017 — State Capitol Rotunda

By State Superintendent Tony Evers

MADISON — State Superintendent Tony Evers delivered his State of Education address Thursday before an audience of school superintendents and invited guests at the State Capitol in Madison. He used “The Man in the Arena” passage from President Teddy Roosevelt’s 1910 “Citizenship in a Republic” speech delivered at the Sorbonne in Paris, France, as a backdrop to the call for leadership in these challenging times. Selected excerpts from the state superintendent’s speech follow.

Teddy is calling us to stand tall in the face of adversity. To demonstrate leadership and confront problems, seek solutions, rather than simply critique. ... Teddy’s words remind all of us to: face our problems head on, seeking solutions; live as the adults in the room; and find ways to dare greatly, together. I believe we are always stronger when we work together.

A decade ago, Wisconsin spent nearly 40 percent of its general tax dollars on public schools. Today, it has fallen to 32 percent. This is a question of priorities.

Today, over a third of our students in rural Wisconsin rely on Medicaid for physical and mental health care. ... Proposals out of Washington to cut those dollars will hurt kids and directly impact schools.

[S]ome of our youngsters spend two hours or more on the school bus each day. Every minute on a bus means less time for learning, play, or family.

There are more than enough solutions. ... We have to push past the politics and dare greatly.

But even in these difficult times, we continue to strengthen new partnerships ...

[T]he examples of leadership in our classrooms, public libraries, schools, and communities absolutely inspire me. Today I’m sending you home with Teddy’s vision of leadership and with a challenge:

- Let’s never stop talking about the good work of the teachers in our communities, and the ways they lead day in and day out;
- Let’s help people understand how we fund our schools, how investing in our kids is the best job creation strategy on the books;
- Let’s remember that when times get tough, that we are always stronger together;
- Let’s keep sacred the places where we can agree and build upon them; and
- Let’s never stop discovering the places where we can get it done — for kids.

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Tony Evers is Wisconsin’s elected state superintendent of public instruction. The full State of Education address can be found online at https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2017_79.pdf.