

Building a Better Future

State Superintendent **Tony Evers** touts the benefits of social and emotional learning

During his address at the State Education Convention, State Superintendent Tony Evers laid out some of the challenges facing Wisconsin: workforce shortage, school funding issues, and a gridlock of partisan politics. Evers offered a possible solution for schools: social and emotional learning (SEL).

Evers described visiting and hearing from numerous districts focusing on SEL from Milwaukee Public Schools to the Menominee Indian School District.

“These districts, along with many others...are teaching their students the skills necessary to set and achieve positive goals, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions,” he said.

Evers recounted a presentation from the Menominee Indian School

District at a meeting of the state superintendent’s Equity Council. He said the presentation showed that SEL doesn’t hinder academics, it improves them.

“[Menominee Indian’s] approach to dealing with the social and emotional needs of their students through strategies like daily meditation, self-advocacy, self-awareness, and reflection, does not take the place of academics — in fact, it only serves to enhance their academic performance,” he said.

It’s not just academics that stands to benefit. Evers cited a study from Columbia University that found SEL returns \$11 in societal benefits for every dollar spent. In addition, SEL focuses on developing the social and critical-thinking skills that employers value.

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compete for the jobs of the future,” Evers said. “In fact, 59 percent of managers surveyed say they look for these skills — skills like communication, decision making, and problem solving.”

Evers said he acknowledges that “there is no panacea, no instant success, and no guarantee for future prosperity,” but added that he believes Wisconsin’s best workforce development strategy needs to come from within — “back home in our schools and communities.”

In addition to touting his support of SEL, Evers mentioned two positive developments in the state’s school funding plan — the governor and legislative leaders’ support of increasing sparsity aid and indexing the low-revenue ceiling. Still, Evers’ message was mostly focused on the good work taking place in Wisconsin school districts. Evers reminded school leaders that the work of building a better Wisconsin begins in our public schools.

“I’m very hopeful that future generations will be better prepared to tackle complex issues and work together to find solutions, due in part to some exciting work going on today in our schools.” ■

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