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Giving Students the Skills to Succeed

Thank you to all of the school board members and administrators who joined us in January for the 97th Annual State Education Convention. Held in partnership with the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators and the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials, the convention featured dozens of top-quality breakout sessions presented by Wisconsin school districts, education researchers, business partners and other stakeholders.

This special, expanded issue of *Wisconsin School News* looks back at some of the speakers, sessions and special events from the convention. In particular, I want to call your attention to one of our keynote speakers, renowned education thought-leader Dr. Bill Daggett — founder and chairman of the International Center for Leadership in Education.

Dr. Daggett called on school leaders to rethink our schools in terms of how rapidly our world is evolving. He challenged the audience to continually assess how we develop and support learners who will thrive in our ever-changing world.

Dr. Daggett walked through what he called the "winds of change" and described how we are entering the fourth Industrial Revolution which will be defined by the convergence of nanotechnology, biotechnology and digital technology. The depth and breadth of changes are likely to disrupt labor markets and governance systems at a rate of change unprecedented in history. As Dr. Daggett explained, many jobs we rely on today may soon cease to exist. "If you can write an algorithm for a task, the job is gone."

What does this mean for school boards? In the past, we knew the world would look a little different for our kindergarteners when they graduated than it does for our current senior class, but it wouldn't be fundamentally altered. So, our programs and curriculum could gradually improve and evolve. We no longer have that luxury.

Today's 4-year-old kindergartners will graduate from high school (assuming we retain the same K-12 structure) in 2031. How can we prepare them for a world we're only beginning to understand?

Dr. Daggett listed the top 10 skills our future workforce will need, identifying the top three as complex problem solving, critical thinking and creativity. We need to build an entrepreneurial generation that can be adaptive, innovative and responsive to real-world, unpredictable situations. And schools can't do it alone. We need the support and input from our communities, the private sector, and state and federal policymakers to shift the educational focus away from standards and tests to building a culture of learning that places as much emphasis on non-cognitive skills (our attitudes and behaviors) as it does on academic skills.

There are some great examples from schools across the state that are already beginning this work. The Brillion School District, in partnership with local business partners including the Ariens Company, recently opened a STEM Exploration Station in its elementary school. An underutilized gymnasium is now a flexible, open space designed for students to explore STEM concepts with an emphasis on collaborative learning.

The Kettle Moraine School District launched the High School of Health Sciences a few years ago. In partnership with Aurora Medical Center, the Medical College of Wisconsin and ProHealth Care, students get a comprehensive and in-depth academic education paired with real-world experience in various health care areas while still in high school. In addition, numerous schools have been implementing Fab Labs to create greater opportunities for students to apply critical thinking skills to real-world problems. These are just a few examples, but they are just the start in the transformation our K-12 system will need to undergo to ensure that our students will have what it takes to be competitive on a world-wide scale.

As always, thank you for the work that you do in leading our schools. Together, we can prepare students to be successful in our ever-changing world. ■

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