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Secretary Gassman: Education Best Workforce Investment

Highlights Governor's Education Agenda at School Superintendents Conference

GREEN BAY – In an address today to school officials from across the state, Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman said the education package in Governor Doyle's budget is the best investment Wisconsin can make in preparing students to succeed in a highly competitive global economy.

"Governor Doyle's budget not only helps maintain our excellent schools, but takes additional steps to further ensure our students are well prepared and our workforce remains first rate," Secretary Gassman said. "His agenda is one of smaller classes, higher standards, good nutrition, a strong start in life, and a ticket to a college or technical school education for every student willing to work hard. His is an agenda of opportunity for all children."

Secretary Gassman addressed more than 200 school officials attending the Annual Educational Conference of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators in Green Bay. During her remarks, she provided school superintendents the latest data on Wisconsin's changing demographics and labor market projections. As the baby boomer generation retires in growing numbers, she said Wisconsin will need more nurses, teachers, and engineers, and well-trained workers for rewarding careers in the skilled trades.

"We can avoid shortages and ensure continued economic growth and job creation by following the Governor's lead in educating the workers of tomorrow," Secretary Gassman said. "Our K-12 schools are the envy of many states, and the consistently high scores of our students on college entrance exams attest to the excellence of our schools. Governor Doyle's budget builds on that success and moves us forward."

In particular, Secretary Gassman cited proposals involving DWD. One is the Governor's Quality Care for Quality Kids proposal, which is at the core of his *KidsFirst* initiative. The 5-star rating system will help parents choose quality care. The budget item also includes \$2.8 million to help providers improve quality, and increases scholarship and stipends for child care worker training by \$1.2 million a year.

Another proposal would double funding for the Youth Apprenticeship program administered by DWD. Recently, the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee voted 11-5 along bipartisan lines to approve the Governor's proposal to double the program's funding to \$2.2 million, which would allow 4,000 students school-to-work opportunities to explore career options while learning a skill and gaining valuable experience.

Secretary Gassman noted other items on Governor Doyle's education agenda, including:

- Two-thirds funding of local schools;
- \$54 million increase in special education funding;
- \$3 million more to help districts offer 4-year-old kindergarten;
- Nearly \$3.3 million to triple funding for the school breakfast program;
- More than \$10 million a year to fully fund the SAGE program to lower class sizes in the early grades;
- Wisconsin Covenant, pledging college financial aid to high school seniors who fulfill an eighth grade promise to take college prep courses, maintain a B average, participate in their community, and graduate.