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Secretary Gassman: Governor's Youth Apprenticeship Proposal Helps Ensure Skilled Health Care Workforce

But Assembly Budget Thwarts Progress By Eliminating Governor Doyle's Proposal to Double Funding for Successful School-to-Work Program

NEW BERLIN – Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman said today Governor Jim Doyle's proposal to double Youth Apprenticeship funding will help ensure a skilled health care workforce and quality care in Waukesha County and throughout Wisconsin.

But Secretary Gassman said the Assembly's extreme budget would thwart progress and miss a real opportunity to build on the success of the Waukesha Academy of Health Professions, a charter school launched four years ago to set more students, particularly the Waukesha School District's growing number of Hispanic students, on a pathway to rewarding careers in health care.

"Governor Doyle's Youth Apprenticeship proposal would add substantially to the synergy occurring in Waukesha County and help us maintain a superior quality of care with a skilled health care workforce for years to come," Secretary Gassman said. "Yet the Assembly's extreme budget would deny apprenticeship opportunities to roughly 2,000 more high school students here and across the state – students who are interested in health care, skilled trades, and many other areas in demand."

Earlier this year, Governor Doyle offered a fiscally responsible, opportunity budget for working families that reflects Wisconsin's values. Among a number of proposals building on the success of his first term, the Governor's budget doubles funding for Youth Apprenticeship, from \$1.1 million to \$2.2 million a year. The new funding would allow as many as 4,000 juniors and seniors statewide to participate in the school-to-work program that has created strong partnerships between local schools and businesses.

"Health services is the number one school-to-career track in Youth Apprenticeship, an extremely successful and popular program with both students and employers since it began 15 years ago with bipartisan support from the Legislature," Secretary Gassman said. "Every year, between 550 and 600 high school students become apprentices in health services. Many of them decide to pursue careers in health care, and we need them, especially nurses."

Secretary Gassman made the comments while visiting the LindenGrove-New Berlin Nursing and Rehabilitative Care Center. She met with high school students who are completing training as certified nursing assistants, a preliminary step to entering the Youth Apprenticeship health services track. This fall, the students will begin their junior year at Waukesha's three high schools. The students included five who are enrolled in a charter school at Waukesha South High School, the Waukesha Academy of Health Professions. Linda Farina, academy director and apprenticeship coordinator for the school district, joined the Secretary.

In collaboration with parents, teachers, GE Medical, Aurora Health Care, ProHealth Care, WCTC, Carroll College, and other organizations, the academy was formed in 2003. It now has approximately 120 students, who are required to pursue a rigorous health sciences curriculum and maintain a B average. Farina said the academy's first class of 15 graduates included five Hispanic students, and many are going on to technical college, some with Youth Apprenticeship experience to their credit.

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"It's a wonderful program," Farina said of the two-year health services apprenticeship. "Students get the experience of working with patients. They form relationships with older adults and their mentors. They often work two different jobs. They job shadow. This isn't just a program where students work and put in hours. This is highly specific, as far as competencies students must achieve in their first and second years. Students who graduate from high school, having done this, are way ahead of the curve. It just opens so many doors for them."

Farina also applauded the Governor's proposal to double Youth Apprenticeship funding, saying the program provides opportunities to all students, whether they are college bound or plan to go directly into the workforce after graduation. She said it is exciting to see students become the first ones in their family to go on to college.

Also joining Secretary Gassman was Mariann White, apprenticeship and school-to-career director at Waukesha County Technical College, which received a Youth Apprenticeship grant of nearly \$57,000 for the 2006-07 school year. The Waukesha County consortium has been involved since the Youth Apprenticeship program began, and this past year had 123 students and 66 participating employers.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the Youth Apprenticeship program. Since it began, more than 10,000 youth apprentices have graduated from the program. Many are now mentors to a new generation of apprentices. Nearly nine out of 10 Youth Apprenticeship graduates receive permanent job offers from their employers when they graduate from high school. Apprenticeship graduates who go on to college or technical school generally do better than their peers. The program is also very popular with employers; virtually every one of them highly recommends the program.

Besides apprenticeship funding, Governor Doyle provided the University of Wisconsin System and the Wisconsin Technical College System with additional funding to meet the demand for well-educated and trained workers. The Assembly budget cuts over \$162 million from UW campuses and financial aid for thousands of students, and cuts \$13 million in direct aid to the state's technical colleges.