

**Testimony from the Department of Public Instruction
To the Special Legislative Council Study Committee on School Safety
September 9, 2008**

Good Morning Chairman Lehman and members of the committee. On behalf of State Superintendent Burmaster and the staff at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, I am happy to be with you today, and to be able to provide you with additional information that may help you in your deliberations.

Following the first meeting of the Committee in July, we spoke with staff from the Legislative Council and gathered information that they felt would be of interest to the members. This information delves further into the data, resource availability, and potential strategies to be employed, that were touched upon earlier.

Specifically, we are prepared to share more information about the data collection methods and results from the Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey that provides much of the baseline information on youth violence, mental health, and substance abuse patterns of Wisconsin high school students since 1993. Further, we are prepared to share information about the expenditures of funds of Wisconsin public school districts from the federal Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities program, over the past 3 years. Finally, we will share the information we collected about the three most recently opened statewide school safety centers in the country, and how such an operation might be replicated here in Wisconsin.

At this time, we would like to share copies of the executive summary of the 2007 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey. In the testimony we provided on July 22nd, we repeatedly cited statistics from this study that provided a look at the patterns and perceptions of Wisconsin high school students in a variety of risk

areas. You will note from the overview on the first page, that this survey is part of a national effort to monitor health risk behaviors of the nation's high school age students. This is a cooperative venture with the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The survey has been conducted in the odd numbered years since 1993. With the exception of the 1995 study, we have had sufficient participation from our selected sample of schools to be able to "weight" the data, and be able to make reliable conclusions about the trends of Wisconsin high school age students as a whole. The prevalence of these behaviors has been able to be tracked as trends over the past 15 years. This provides an appropriate test of change over the period of time for which this data has consistently been collected. In the 2007 survey, 2,094 high school students from 56 public high schools completed surveys and contributed to the weighted findings you see in the executive summary document. A similar sample size participated in the previous studies that allow us to show the trends from 1993 on.

During our previous testimony, we shared that violence in the form of weapon carrying and fighting were both among behavioral trends that had fallen significantly over a period of time. We also shared that students voicing concern over bullying in their schools had grown. While these data may appear somewhat contradictory, they reflect that while overt violent acts, that we may tend to view as the greatest challenge in keeping schools and students safe, have declined and remained low, while the concern for personal safety remains high due to persistent bullying and harassment. The YRBS data also looks at mental health concerns including depression and suicidal ideation. We heard testimony from a number of individuals at the first meeting that untreated mental health issues contribute significantly to the disruptive behavior and fears of violence that constitute school safety concerns. The data collected through the YRBS illustrates that these issues

affect a significant number of youth. One out of 5 Wisconsin high school students felt sad or hopeless for a period lasting two or more weeks at a time last year. While the numbers considering and acting upon feelings of suicide since 1993, the numbers of such students is still unacceptably high.

Another piece of data from this survey that the Legislative Council staff asked us to provide has to do with Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA). We did not go into detail about these behaviors in our original testimony, but it is believed to be a behavior that is highly correlated with violence and mental health issues, and thus deserves the same level of consideration by this committee. Binge drinking, which is the act of consuming 5 or more drinks in a row, is more common among teens in Wisconsin than in any other state, and further, that about one in three high school students in our state binge drink in any given month. Additionally, Wisconsin teens combine alcohol and driving too frequently. Almost 1 in 3 (32%) reported riding in a car with someone who had been drinking in the past month, and 14% had consumed alcohol and then got behind the wheel of a car themselves during that same period of time. These behaviors have remained fairly consistent over the past 15 years of the study. We have seen a rather significant increase in Marijuana use since the study began in 1993. Wisconsin trends mirror those of the nation on this behavior. The percentage of Wisconsin teens using marijuana over their lifetime, as well as in the previous month, has almost doubled from the baseline rates of 1993. The department administers the federal government's Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities grant program. We also award approximately \$5 million annually in AODA prevention and early intervention grants made available through state appropriations. These funds are used to support programs in over 100 Wisconsin communities.

Taken together, alcohol and other drug use, untreated mental health concerns, and bullying and harassment combine to put our youth in a number of unsafe situations both in schools and in the community. Our call for legislation to create a mental health and substance abuse parity bill that requires adequate insurance benefits for those in need of such treatment is repeated here.

In response to the follow-up questions from staff about the availability of resources that can assist schools in creating or maintaining school safety, we were able to extrapolate expenditures from the budgets of the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Community grants awarded to each Wisconsin public school district annually. We examined information from our electronic data base on funds specifically dedicated to “Security Personnel” (school resource officer contracts) and “school Security Equipment” (surveillance cameras and communications systems). Recall that we shared that this federal formula grant is the only dedicated resource available to schools for school safety purposes. This grant program has a much wider purview and is also used for other drug and violence prevention program activities. Therefore, expenditures for cops and cameras is allowed, but not required. To that end, our review revealed that in the 2005-06 school year, 38 school districts opted to use a portion of their funds for one or both of these purposes and budgeted a total of \$357,249 statewide. In the 2006-07 school year, 74 school districts allocated \$345,343 for such purposes. In the most recent year, 71 districts budgeted just \$106,558 for security equipment and personnel. While not all plans have been submitted to date, just 47 districts are planning to utilize a portion of their funds for such security activities, budgeting a mere \$70,145. It should be noted that the amount of funding that can be dedicated to such safety pursuits is capped by the law at 20% of the grant for equipment, and 40% of the grant for personnel and equipment combined. Further, the amount of funds

allocated to schools by congress has steadily diminished over the past few years. Approximately \$4 million annually is divided by our state's schools from this program. With less than 10% being dedicated to safety/security expenditures, it may be a reflection on the vast number of issues these funds have to be spread to address. Our call for a dedicated, categorical grant program to expand the scope of what the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities program is designed to address, is repeated here.

We reported in July that 20 states had launched and maintain statewide school safety centers. Three states have created such centers in the past 2 years. In Texas, Colorado, and Minnesota, these centers have annual operating budgets ranging from \$400,000 (Colorado) to \$1.5 million (Texas). The most recently launched, by our neighbors in Minnesota has an annual operating budget of \$550,000. Some grant funds have been secured to assist with some aspects of their operations, but all three of these centers receive some level of annual state funding to maintain their activities. Nationally, of the 20 centers, approximately 1/3 are housed in state departments of education, 1/3 are housed in state public safety/justice agencies, and 1/3 are housed in Universities. The three recent additions to the list have a broad array of activities and legislative mandates to carry out. These include training and technical assistance on crisis planning and recovery procedures, conducting threat assessments, conducting research on best practices in prevention and crisis response, and provision of model safety plans and procedures to name a few. Additional consideration might be given to further exploration of the creation of such a center in Wisconsin, as we testified to in July.

In summary, we hope the committee finds this additional information helpful and that further consideration can be given to the recommendations our department

staff made in July and again here today. Thanks again for this opportunity. I will be happy to answer questions at this time.