



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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PRESS RELEASE

HEBL, LASSA AND BURMASTER INTRODUCE WORLD LANGUAGE ELEMENTARY EDUCATION BILL

MADISON - State Representative Gary Hebl (D-Sun Prairie), State Senator Julie Lassa (D-Stevens Point) and State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster introduced legislation Thursday which would establish a world language elementary instruction pilot program.

The bill, which is being circulated for co-sponsors in the State Legislature, would establish a grant program for school districts to pay for a portion of the compensation of up to two teachers and to phase in world languages instruction in grades one to six.

"The State of Wisconsin should use every tool possible to make sure that our students can compete in a global economy," Hebl said. "To meet the challenges of ever-increasing global connections and to be a front-runner in the global economy, students in Wisconsin must be able to communicate with people from around the world. The time to act is now. Keeping Wisconsin's education system strong requires that we provide our students with the tools they need to communicate and work with their peers overseas and here at home."

If signed into law, the program would cost \$500,000 and would be allocated from GPR funds. Under current law, individuals, businesses and corporations are also allowed to donate to programs at the Department of Public Instruction. These donations can be used to replace GPR funds or expand the grants provided to districts to implement world languages instruction.

"With our location in the center of North America, our high quality educational system, and our strong work ethic, Wisconsin is an important location for international investment," Lassa said. "Our state has businesses that are thriving due to their ability to compete in the world marketplace. As the global market becomes even more important to our state's economic viability, we must prepare our students to be able to work effectively with foreign employees and business partners. Our firms increasingly need employees with knowledge of foreign languages and cultures."

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Hebl and Lassa unveiled the legislation at a press conference at Netherwood Knoll Elementary School in Oregon, where a similar program is in the process of being launched. The press conference was attended by Oregon students, teachers, administrators and school board officials.

“This bill recognizes our responsibility to prepare today’s students for citizenship, cross-cultural relationships, lifelong learning and employment opportunities in the 21st century,” Burmaster said. “Education today must reflect the diverse linguistic and cultural landscape of our schools, our neighborhoods, our nation and our world.”

In her role as the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Burmaster said global competitors like China are pushing policies that mandate students to be fluent in several languages by the time they graduate, while students in the United States and here in Wisconsin are running the risk of falling behind.

“Legislative support for elementary world language programs is an investment in the future of our children,” said Burmaster, who has long been a champion of the issue of early-age world language instruction. “A world class education today includes an early start to an extended sequence of effective language learning.”

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